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Address for correspondence:

Editorial Board, International Journal of Punjab Studies  
C/O Shinder S. Thandi  
Coventry Business School,  
Coventry University,  
Priory Street,  
Coventry, CV1 5FB  
United Kingdom

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## Articles

## Contents

<b>Ian Copland</b>	The Political Geography of Religious Conflict: Towards an explanation of the Relative Infrequency of Communal Riots in the Indian Princely States	1
<b>John Zavos</b>	Patterns of Organisation in Turn of the Century Hinduism: an examination with reference to Punjab	29
<b>Anne Murphy</b>	Allegories of difference and identity: The rhetoric of religious boundaries and 'popular' religion	53
<b>Sucha S Gill</b>	Agrarian Change and Struggle for Rural Labour in Indian Punjab	73
<b>Anne Vaugier-Chatterjee</b>	Strains on Punjab Governance: An Assessment of the Badal Government (1997-1999)	93
<b>Ranji Devadason</b>	Dowry Abuse in Britain: a culture-specific form of domestic violence	111
<b>Sissel Østberg</b>	Punjabi, Pakistani, Muslim and Norwegian? Self-perceptions and Social Boundaries among Pakistani Children in Oslo	133
<b><u>Conference Report</u></b>	Sikh Studies Conference	159
<b><u>Book Reviews</u></b>		163

## **INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PUNJAB STUDIES**

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## **The Political Geography of Religious Conflict: Towards an Explanation of the Relative Infrequency of Communal Riots in the Indian Princely States**

**Ian Copland**  
*Monash University*

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By the early twentieth century, Hindu-Muslim communalism had become endemic in British India; however in princely India the incidence of communal violence appears to have been considerably less, perhaps as much as five times less in terms of casualties. So far this anomaly has been little studied, but it certainly merits attention. Taking its cue from the extensive work which has been done on communalism in the provinces during the colonial period and on 'ethno-nationalist' violence in post-independence South Asia this paper canvasses several possible explanations for the statistical divergence between the 'two Indias': but concentrates on what is arguably the most interesting line of inquiry in this respect, the differences in their polities. It argues that the monarchical system of governance in the princely states, and the absence of judicial and other checks on *darb ri* authority, encouraged and permitted a pro-active approach to religious matters which was at once pluralistic (in its support for the rights of minorities to worship freely in accordance with their traditions) and intolerant (in its rigorous policing of public rituals such as processions). While in some ways it condemned minorities to a second-class status, princely 'managed pluralism' guaranteed them a secure place in the body politic, and most seem to have regarded this as an acceptable trade-off.

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1

By the early twentieth century structured rivalry between groups designated by their religious affiliation - a tendency generally referred to in the South Asian context as 'communalism' - had become the baleful norm over much of 'British' India. However as the mounting casualty figures from riots between Hindus and Muslims were filed and plotted by the Home Department bureaucrats, it became increasingly apparent that the violence was not distributed evenly across the subcontinent. Not only were riots more common, and more severe, in urban areas than in rural, but they appeared to be more widespread in the British-administered provinces than in the parts of the subcontinent under indigenous monarchical rule - the so-called princely states. Needless to say, the latter

discrepancy was avidly seized on by spokesmen for the princely *darb\_ars* as evidence of the beneficence of their rule. 'As in this State, so in the States generally', opined Bikaner's Maharaja Ganga Singh in a New Year address in 1932, 'the communal question does not really exist'.<sup>1</sup> Yet other, less partisan, voices sang much the the same tune. 'Before the flow of outsiders to Patiala State', Congressite journalist R.S. Azad told Gandhi, 'there existed no communalism. The Hindus, the Sikhs, the Muslims and the Christians all used to live as one happy family'.<sup>2</sup> Asked by a friend in the Kapurthala government to confirm reports that Muslims in Begowal were being harassed by Sikhs, Chaudhury Abdul Aziz replied: 'There is no bitterness in this ilaqa. Our relations with the Sikhs are [as those] of bretheren'.<sup>3</sup> What is more, such hard statistics as I have been able to uncover from parliamentary reports, official files and newspapers suggests that this roseate perception was broadly correct. Although I now suspect that my earlier estimates of casualties in princely India did not allow sufficiently for the relative lack of reportage of communal incidents in the states compared to British India, the divergence revealed by my figures was far too great to be simply a product of statistical error. Even if the actual discrepancy in communal incidents and riot-casualties between the provinces and the states were not, as I once thought, of the order of fifteen to one, and only ten to one or even five to one, it would still constitute a remarkable anomaly, crying out for explanation.<sup>4</sup>

Studies of the rise of Hindu-Muslim communalism in British India tend to emphasise, singly or in combination, four elements. The first is religious ritual and practice. In many ways Hinduism and Islam stand at opposite poles of the religious spectrum. One faith is polytheistic and idolatrous, the other rigidly monotheistic and iconoclastic; one reveres the cow, the other sanctions its sacrifice; one freely employs pageant and music in its rituals, the other requires quiet as an aid to personal prayer. The cultural chemistry, this interpretation runs, was primed for conflict. The second element is government policy. According to one view the growth of communal antagonism was cultivated by the British Raj (for instance, through the device of separate electorates for Muslim voters) as a way of dividing, weakening and de-legitimizing the nationalist opposition. According to another, more sophisticated variant, communalism emerged as an unintended consequence of British attempts (for example, by means of the census) to comprehend and organise India for imperial purposes and was strengthened after 1919 by promises of an eventual devolution of power. The third element is ideology. As Benedict Anderson has argued convincingly, the founding of a nation requires not only an exercise of will by political leaders but an act of imagining - the mental moulding of the boundaries and constituents of the nation-to-be out of the raw clay of ethnicity (race, language, territory, religion).<sup>5</sup> The national imaginings of Indian Muslim leaders gravitated naturally towards religion as the common denominator, but the 'secularist' Congress also found it convenient from time to time to fall into the language of Hindu scripture as a way of making the idea of an independent national India intelligible to the peasant masses. (Later, of course, the Hindu Mahasabha was to make this message much more explicit.)

Fourthly, the standard accounts of communalism dwell on the central role played by modernisation, both economic and political. New technologies (the printing press, railways) made it easier for leaders to mobilise followers and for news of communal 'outrages' to spread. The coming of commercial capitalism widened the gap between rich and poor and some regions widened economic disparities between Hindu and Muslim. Urbanisation created concentrated pools of diverse, uprooted, mobile people susceptible to mobilisation and prone to collective violence.<sup>6</sup> Above all, perhaps, political modernisation brought elections, which, though limited in scope until the 1930s, fuelled the process of communalisation by raising the political stakes and encouraging rabid appeals to popular prejudice about the religious Other.

What light do these theories shed on the disparity we have identified between communalism in British and 'Indian' India? Two points immediately come to mind. One, the more obvious, is that down to the 1940s there were virtually no elections in the states of any consequence. Even in states like Travancore and Baroda, which were (rightly in some ways) considered 'progressive', legislatures had little real power and there was nothing equivalent of the provision in British India under the 'dyarchy' constitution of 1919 for elected members to serve on the executive. Moreover when the body of the states, in the 1940s, did finally embrace the idea of representative government, they tended to reject the option of separate electorates for minorities.<sup>7</sup> The other is that the states, by and large, lagged well behind the provinces in most areas of economic development. For example, the states overall had a lower percentage of urban dwellers, a smaller proportion of people in industrial occupations, and fewer miles of railway and telegraph lines *per capita* than British India.<sup>8</sup> On the face of it the relative absence of these agents of politicisation in the states would seem to go a long way to explaining why communalism was less virulent there.

In fact there are pitfalls with this macro-approach. While some princely capitals remained free from riots throughout the period - indeed, right down to 1947, other major urban centres in princely India - Gulbarga, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Indore, Jaipur, Ajmer and Srinagar - all recorded multiple riots between 1920 and 1940 - the first as early as 1924. (See map over page.) Many of these same towns, significantly, continued to be plagued by communal violence after the integration of the states in 1948.<sup>9</sup> Urbanism may contribute to the occurrence of communal violence, but clearly it does not, by itself, guarantee it. Why Bangalore and not Mysore? Why Jaipur and not Udaipur or Jaisalmer? Again, it can be seen from the map that communal affrays in the 1920-40 period were far more common-place in princely Punjab and eastern Rajputana than in western Rajputana, central India, or the Bombay Deccan. Evidently, some regions in princely India were more prone to conflict than others. But what logic underlay this maldistribution? Not urbanism alone (Saurashtra is considerably more urbanised than Rajasthan), nor even modernisation alone, if the case of Baroda (not a single major riot until 1939) is anything to go by.

Again, the notion of two fundamentally oppositional cultures does not

get us all very far. Certainly there was no lack in the states of opportunities for religious disputation. Although Muslims were relatively thinner on the ground in the states than in the provinces, they were quite numerous enough in the larger princely towns (where they comprised from a quarter to a third of the population) to make their presence felt, or indeed to look for trouble if they were minded to do so. Likewise if Hindus in princely India needed a Muslim Other to confront, he was there to be found. Whether religion was a cause or a symptom of communal antagonism, it played exactly the same role on both sides of the border.

In the states, however, Hindus and Muslims generally made light of these differences and exercised restraint in the face of provocation. For instance, knowing that 'Mussalmans need absolute silence when they offer their prayers',<sup>10</sup> Hindus in princely India were usually willing to route their processions so that they did not pass by mosques at least during prayer times. And if this could not be arranged, they were usually willing to maintain silence while in earshot of mosques. At Bawal, Nabha, in July 1928, two marriage parties of Hindus with accompanying bands passed a mosque. Inside the Muslims had just finished their *wazu* (ablutions) before commencing their prayers. They went out and asked the marriage parties to stop the music. 'The parties quietly consented to their request... This satisfied the Mo[ammedan]s'. To make certain, the local officials consulted with the leading Muslims of the town 'and they assured us that was there was nothing to fear and that there was not the least chance of any fracas'.<sup>11</sup> Moreover when communal incidents did occur, the tendency, as the following two cases from Kapurthala demonstrate, was to play them down and to look for the face-saving compromise which would help to repair the peace. In the first case, which occurred in 1923, four Muslims threw a handful of animal bones into a Hindu temple at Phagwara. The culprits were tracked down, arrested and charged; but before they could be brought to court, the Hindus of the town, in an effort to 'avoid [further] communal bickerings', successfully petitioned the government to pardon the under-trials.<sup>12</sup> In the second incident, which occurred in Sultanpur Lodi in 1932, someone set fire to the door of the village mosque. It was assumed the perpetrator was a Sikh. Far from condoning this act of communal vandalism, the elders of the Sikh community in Sultanpur publicly apologised and collected money to make good the damage.<sup>13</sup>

I am not proposing that this behaviour was peculiar to the states: all the evidence I have seen suggests that Hindu-Muslim communal co-existence was, and is, much more typical than its obverse. It does, however, appear to have been more commonplace in the states - which begs the question: 'why?'

This brings us back belatedly to the role of government and public policy. In what ways, if any, did the fact of living under princely rule make a difference to the way Hindus and Muslims ordered their communal lives? The discussion that follows examines this question by exploring the nature of princely authority, in particular the princes' role as putative religious leaders. Given the interests of the readers of this journal, I have framed the discussion mainly in the context of the major states of the Punjab (Patiala, Nabha, Kapurthala, Jind,



Faridkot, Loharu and Maler Kotla), but the conclusions I draw are not specific to them. Hindu princes in Rajputana and Central India were no less charismatic figures than their Sikh counterparts in the Punjab, and appear to have pursued similar religious policies.

## II

As is well known, the Indian states were an integral part of Britain's imperial system. The larger states were linked to the Crown by treaty, and all 600 of them were connected with the Government of India through a network of residents and political agents. Nevertheless, by the early twentieth century, British paramountcy over the princely states did not normally equate with close political control. Princes were still occasionally removed from their *gaddis* for 'gross misrule', but short of this, the *darb\_rs* were left to manage their internal affairs pretty much as they liked. 'Ecclesiastical' matters were, if anything, even less subject to British interference than other areas of administration.

However, to say that the states were effectively autonomous of Delhi in the management of their internal affairs is to convey only part of the picture. The *darb\_rs* were not simply independent of the British Raj, they were governments of very different *order*. The colonial state was in essence a foreign bureaucratic state based on the rule of law; the states in essence were autocratic dynastic monarchies ruled by Indians in consonance with received notions of traditional kingship. This monarchical polity intruded into cultural life, interpenetrated society, in a way the bureaucratic polity of the provinces did not and could not. What is more, it observed no distinction between 'state' and 'church'. Yet, paradoxically, this unsecular mode of governance proved remarkably effective in keeping the lid on communal violence.

In order to understand why this was so, we need initially to say something about the nature of princely power. Strictly speaking, the states were something less than pure autocracies. As we shall see shortly, there were a number of *de facto* social checks on the arbitrary exercise of princely power. Still, these constraints were as nothing compared to those imposed on British officialdom across the border. In British India governments had to answer to the courts, and ultimately to the secretary of state and Parliament. After 1921 they were partially responsible to a volatile electorate. They had also to contend with the mass-based power of the Indian National Congress. In the states, these checks were weak or absent. Maharaj-rana Udaibhan Singh ruled Dholpur for nearly forty years (1912-48). He did so, by his own admission, 'in a real Hindu cultural way of absolute fatherly despotism'. Asked to account for his habit of withdrawing large amounts from the state treasury for his own use, he replied: 'How I chose to draw and spend that ancestral inheritance concerns no one except me. I have never had the semblance of a constitutional position'.<sup>14</sup> Another prominent autocrat, Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner, was a firm believer in the adage 'spare the rod and spoil the child'. In fact he took this aphorism quite literally, sometimes slapping state

officers who defied him or whom he suspected of being lazy.<sup>15</sup> To be sure, these were extreme cases; yet if other rulers were more reticent in talking about their sovereign power and more wary about flaunting it, none doubted that it was there to be exercised. Rulers had a sense of obligation to their subject/children, but like parents they expected to be obeyed. Moreover, this expectation was to a large extent reciprocal: most subjects took royal authority for granted. 'Not only did I not question the ruler's right to rule', a Patiala man told me, 'I did not imagine that it could be questionable'.<sup>16</sup>

Even in the heyday of the British Raj in the nineteenth century, subjects of the Crown did not conceive of the authority exercised over them in quite these absolute terms. Many Indians approved of what the British stood for, and many more accepted the Raj as a fact of life, but always this acceptance was qualified by the knowledge that the British were foreigners, intruders, not genuinely Indian. Perhaps a better government, the Raj lacked the charisma of moral legitimacy that so naturally, and often seemingly in defiance of administrative realities, attached to the dynastic monarchies. What was the nature of this moral authority and where did it come from?

An important part of the cachet of kingship in twentieth century India was that it had very deep roots. References to kings abound in Sanskrit literature dating from the early centuries of the Christian era. What is more, these references suggest that monarchy had been an honoured institution in India for at least the better part of the previous millenium. Indian princes could claim to be part of a hallowed tradition 'stretching back... through unbroken centuries to the dawn of history'.<sup>17</sup> Admittedly, the epithet 'ancient' hardly applies to most of the monarchical dynasties that ruled in India in the 20th century. Far from harking back to Vedic or even Puranic times, none of the modern Indian states pre-dated the eleventh century. On the contrary, the majority were created in the late medieval period, while some of the largest states, including the 'Phulkian' states of the Punjab, did not come into existence until the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. Still, even if some of the Indian principalities were not very ancient, others, such as the Rajput states, could point to a continuous history of many centuries which at least made them very much older than the British Raj.

Recognition from outside, by way of a *sanad* or grant from a feudal overlord (the Mughal Empire or the British Crown), was another means of dynastic legitimation,<sup>18</sup> as were imperial gifts and honours. Princely families gained prestige and lustre from their ownership of powerful totemic objects, such as sacred images and relics associated with legendary teachers and saints. Part of the 'symbolic capital' of the Nabha house, for instance, included items bequeathed to the dynasty's founder by the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, notably his *kirpan*, or dagger, and his *saropa*, or cloak.<sup>19</sup>

However the most important prop of royal authority was religion. Kingship had religious sanction. Both in Brahminical scriptures and in the writings of Islamic commentators, monarchy is portrayed as a righteous and necessary institution - necessary for the proper ordering of society, for the endowment and

protection of places of worship, and for the propagation of the faith. 'Whatever a king does is right, that is a settled rule; because the protection of the world is entrusted to him', opines the sage Naranda.<sup>20</sup> 'If royalty did not exist', writes Akbar's biographer Abu'l Fazl, 'the world would not escape the devastating storm of strife, nor would selfishness and self-indulgence be rooted out from the world... [had] there... been no kings among men, mankind would have lost its grandeur and the whole earth... would have become a barren waste'.<sup>21</sup> In the Indian political tradition, strong and even arbitrary rule was considered preferable to anarchy.<sup>22</sup>

Royal power was bolstered, too, by religious ritual. An Indian king seated on the *gaddi*, holding court, was not just the head of the government, but the centrepiece in a web of ritual interactions and exchanges between men and gods. Indeed, there is a body of Hindu tradition which holds that kingship was not merely elevated by ritual, but constituted by it. At accession, Hindu kings were subjected to an elaborate sequence of ceremonies including worship of various deities, worship of the state emblems, sacrifices, the feeding of brahmins, circumnabulation, the marking of the forehead of the ruler with a *r\_ja tilak*, effusion (the *abisheka*) and, last but not least, enthronement.<sup>23</sup> These rites were designed to prepare them for the onerous task that lay ahead by connecting them to the 'power' of the goddess (*shakti*) that resided in the throne. The underlying theory here is that rulers are made, rather than born,<sup>24</sup> and this is implicit, too, in other kinds of royal ritual and display, such as the dressing-rituals studied by Joanne Waghorne in the context of the south Indian state of Pudukottai.<sup>25</sup> As one latter-day prince put it, when 'I ascend the *gaddi* I am [a] ruler, otherwise I am... just nobody'.<sup>26</sup> All this supported the idea that kingship had supernatural sanction. To some it suggested that they were actual manifestations of the divine.

Princely authority was not absolute. Among the ancient Brahmin commentators on *r\_jadhama* (kingly duty), Naranda is very much in the minority when he contends that kings can do no wrong; most Sanskrit sources assume rulers to be fallible, and some go so far as to imply that a moral contract existed between ruler and subject.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the lack of the constitutional checks on authority in the twentieth century princely states did not prevent the subject-public from making its opinion felt: for instance, by means of agitations, *hartals* and passive disobedience - what one ex-ruler described to me as 'sulking' - by the heads of castes. For instance when the Sirohi government attempted in 1936 to introduce an amendment to the state financial code which would have made it easier for people to borrow money and harder for creditors to recover debts, the Jain community refused to heed summonses, withheld taxes, stopped making new loans to farmers and began moving their capital out of the state. Much alarmed, the *darb\_r* backed down.<sup>28</sup>

Yet for most of their subjects the princes were deserving of respect, obedience, and, especially in religious matters, emulation. What is more they had control over very considerable amounts of money, a large part of which was channelled towards religious endowments. During the reign of Maharaja Hira Singh, a *katcha* building at Jaito in Nabha was converted by the *darb\_r* into a

*pukka* Sikh gurudwara, and 35 acres of land gifted by the state for its maintainance. As well, the gurudwara was allocated a monthly grant of Rs.35 to cover the cost of the *langar*.<sup>29</sup> Hundreds more bequests like this were made over the years. Bharatpur in 1928-9 spent Rs.16,354 on the upkeep of temples, Rs.11,432 on festivals, and Rs.1000 on *gaushalas*.<sup>30</sup> In 1945-6 Patiala state dispersed Rs.34,000 in grants to 348 charitable recipients.<sup>31</sup>

Charismatic authority and financial patronage gave the princes a lot of leverage with the religious establishment, and they used it to regulate public religious life to an extent far beyond what was considered the province of the state in British India. No religious building, even a humble *chabutra*, or platform, could be constructed without *darb\_ri* approval;<sup>32</sup> and the same was true of religious processions. Processionists had to follow assigned routes and keep to a pre-agreed timetable, and there were controls, too, over religious emblems and artifacts (such as the *tazias* which Muslims carried at Mohurram). Although licenses were normally issued as a matter of course, they could be revoked if the procession departed from its assigned route, or played music when it was not supposed to, or if the processional floats exceeded the permitted size.<sup>33</sup>

And while the daily running of mosques, gurudwaras and temples was generally left to committees of management elected by their congregations,<sup>34</sup> *darb\_ri* sanction was required for all appointments to clerical or priestly office. In 1940 the Patiala Deohri Mualla (the government department responsible for religious institutions) received a letter from the management committee of one of the city's temples. The letter complained that their president, one Baraqies, had sacked the *mohamin* (head priest) of the temple, Gopal Dass, with whom they had no complaint, and replaced him with his son, Mohinder Dass. The department sent the local *tehsildar* to inquire. He found that Gopal Dass had in fact asked to be relieved of his appointment on the grounds that it had become too arduous for him, and duly confirmed Mohinder Dass as the new *mohamin*. Nevertheless the *darb\_r* took a dim view of the president's action in sacking Gopal Dass without their consent.<sup>35</sup>

Likewise, places of worship were closely scrutinised by officials for evidence of neglect or corruption. A year after the aforementioned incident, the Patiala government received a complaint that the *pujari* of a temple at Bagichi Market in the city had been putting donations from worshippers into his own pocket, to the detriment of the upkeep of the place. The *tahsildar* was ordered to pay a 'surprise visit' to check on the allegations. Finding the temple 'in a dirty condition', he ordered the *pujari* to 'make cleanliness at once' on pain of dismissal from his post.<sup>36</sup> Less fortunate was another Patiala temple functionary, Hans Raj, a *pujari* of the Badri Narain temple near Bahadurgarh, who was summarily sacked by the government for having an affair with the wife of the temple *mahant*.<sup>37</sup>

Heirs to a tradition of divine kingship, personally pious, the princes had about them an unshakeable aura of religiosity. In keeping with this image, their governments intervened aggressively in the organization and management of public ritual space. Likewise, the princely courts enjoyed a close and

complementary relationship with temple ritual practitioners.<sup>38</sup> To be sure, none of this necessarily had communal implications. Nevertheless conspicuous piety is a signifier of preference. It says: 'I value these truths above all others'. How did the princes reconcile their personal (but very high-profile) identity as Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims with their public role as rulers? How (and why) did the *darb\_rs* throw their considerable weight behind the cause of communal harmony?

### III

Very few *darbars* by the early 20th century governed literally in accordance with shastric principles, which required, amongst other things, that brahmins be exempted from capital punishment. But most still looked to the scriptures for guidance and inspiration. 'I believe that the administration of Indian States', wrote the maharaja of Panna, 'should continue to be... based upon our customs, tradition and culture and above all upon the teachings of our ancient Dharma-Shastras'.<sup>39</sup>

Yet the assimilation of tradition by the princes, their pride in being true *dharma r\_jas*, did not, as one might expect, make them intolerant of Muslims or lock them into following narrowly sectarian policies. In part this was due to the ambiguity of the language of the scriptures, which allowed plenty of latitude for interpretation. When the Sanskrit texts speak of the desirability of kings acting 'righteously', in accordance with *dharma*, they appear to have in mind, for the most part, conduct which we would regard as falling within the province of the 'religious' or 'sacred'. For instance, rulers were expected to protect the realm, honour the gods with sacrifices (*yajna*) and worship (*puja*), preside over public rituals, make gifts to Brahmins and destitute widows, endow temples, and patronise artists and scholars.<sup>40</sup> As Bhishma tells Yudhishtira, the king 'should protect the people... There is no higher duty for him than the suppression of robbers. Gifts, study and sacrifices bring prosperity to kings'.<sup>41</sup> Kings were supposed to be pious and charitable and to support the moral order, but they were not expected to conduct witchhunts against heretics. Indeed, Hinduism has generally been tolerant of divergent theologies, and during the medieval period this pluralist tradition was strengthened by the *bhakti* (devotional) movement, which sought to give the illiterate masses, who could not access scripture and didn't understand abstruse philosophy, a realistic chance of achieving *moksha* (salvation). Being something of a reaction against Brahminical forms, *bhakti* put less emphasis on canonical scripture and more on the teachings of itinerant holy men. These *gurus* taught that God was all-embracing and made no distinctions between people based on birth, an idea drawn perhaps from Islam. In attacking boundaries, the *bhakti* movement discouraged the formation of communal identities based on religion; in stressing equality among believers, it lent support to the notion that rulers should accord all their subjects, regardless of their sectarian affiliation, the same degree of protection.

As for the Muslim interregnum, far from driving the Hindu princes into

an insular defence of everything non-Islamic, it provided, thanks to Sufism's leanings toward syncretism and the Mughal empire's strategic need for Rajput military support, a model for communal cooperation.<sup>42</sup> Again, it was a model that many Hindu rulers felt comfortable about reciprocating, not least because of the political advantages that accrued from having powerful Muslim friends.<sup>43</sup> By the eighteenth century Rajput and other states were broadly espousing policies of accommodation towards local minorities. Two centuries on, the tradition continued. Within the early twentieth century princely order, religion, if not an irrelevancy, was a far less divisive factor than, say, caste; and some of the closest royal alliances of that era - for example between Hamidullah Khan of Bhopal and Yeshwant Rao Holkar of Indore - were cross-communal. Similarly, Maharaja Jey Singh's fetishistic orthodoxy did not prevent him from having friendly personal relationships with eminent Muslims such as Muhammad and Shaukat Ali and the Aga Khan.<sup>44</sup>

Neither Hindu nor Muslim princes, therefore, were bound by tradition to pursue sectarian or communal policies; on the contrary, there was much in the tradition that valorised tolerance and pluralism, especially if, as Sayaji Rao Gaekwar remarked at the World Conference on Religions at Chicago in 1936, one was not 'bound by the letter' and sought the 'spirit' of the great Hindu texts.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, non-sectarian policies carried much less political risk. Pushed too far, they were likely to cause trouble between the communities and civil strife - communal violence - was trouble for the state. At the very least, riots drained police and other governmental resources; at worst, they invited political department intervention, which could have dire consequences for the ruler. Communal bi-partisanship was not only morally righteous, and in consonance with ancient tradition: it was also sound politics.

How, then, did the princes promote this objective? First and foremost, they used the forums and machinery of government to propagate the message of inter-communal tolerance widely among their subject-constituents. In an address to the Bhopal legislative council in 1930, Nawab Hamidullah Khan urged his Muslim co-religionists 'to be extra-magnanimous, large-hearted, tolerant, and sympathetic towards those of their fellow subjects who may belong to... other communities'.<sup>46</sup> And when, in 1932, the nazim of Narnaul in Patiala was approached by a group of Muslims who had heard a rumour that some grave-stones were going to be demolished by the police, he 'assured them that the policy of His Highness' Government was one of strict neutrality and legitimate freedom [in respect] of all religious matters'.<sup>47</sup>

Secondly, the rulers used symbolic action to demonstrate the sincerity of their personal commitment to the principle of bi-partisanship. The ruling families of Junagadh and Mangrol underlined their identification with 'the culture and royal traditions of Kathiawar' by designating their sons and daughters *kumar shri* and *kumari shri* - Hindu titles - and by offering public worship at a renown local shrine to the goddess.<sup>48</sup> The Kotah *darb\_r* every year acknowledged the *urs* of the Muslim saint Mathe Mahabali by presenting a *chadar* (sheet) to the trustees of the

saint's tomb at Gajron.<sup>49</sup> At Gwalior the maharaja and his Hindu *sardars* not only attended Mohurrum but contributed *tazias* to the procession; while at Orchha it was the custom for the ruler to preside at the 'Idgah during the 'Id festival.<sup>50</sup>

Thirdly, many rulers used patronage to make syncretic points. Every year the nawab of Baoni spent in excess of Rs.20,000 on *Ram Lilas*.<sup>51</sup> In 1936 the Gaekwar endowed at Baroda a 'Kirti Mandir' to serve as a 'meeting place for all religions and creeds'.<sup>52</sup> Bhupinder Singh of Patiala, a Sikh ruler, financed the building of the Mata Kali Devi temple, the city's largest, and personally oversaw the installation there, in 1936, of an image of the goddess from Calcutta,<sup>53</sup> while his son, Yadavindra Singh, in 1942 gave Rs.10,000 out of his privy purse for repairs to the 'Idgah'.<sup>54</sup> Similarly the Sikh Maharaja of Kapurthala not only 'contributed handsomely' towards the cost of the city's jama masjid, but engaged an architect to produce a design that could compete with the finest 'mosques in Algeria or Morocco'.<sup>55</sup>

Last but not least, a number of *darb\_rs* committed themselves formally to a policy of equal treatment for minorities. Bikaner in 1929 became the first jurisdiction anywhere in South Asia to enshrine the principle of religious tolerance in legislation when it enacted a Freedom of Religion Bill. Similar injunctions were embedded in circulars to officials, who, in Patiala and Nabha, at least, risked censure, transfer or even dismissal if they sided too openly with one community over the other.

Hegemonical religious brokers, the princes shaped social thinking in a way that the British could not, and did not try, to emulate. People took heed of what they said. Members of minorities felt reassured by their promises of protection and fair-dealing. More importantly, perhaps, the personal example set by the Hindu princes made it easier for the majority community to accept Muslims (or for that matter Sikhs and Christians) as social equals and as full partners in the body politic. Taking the argument one step further, one might suggest that *darb\_ri* polity generated in the states a *climate of tolerance*. If correct, this reading would go some of the way to explaining why the princely states were less affected by communal violence.<sup>56</sup>

But the princely *darb\_rs* didn't stop at persuasion; coercion, too, was employed to keep the lid on communal conflict. In this respect, the states enjoyed a number of advantages over the British-administered provinces.

#### IV

As we have seen, the *darb\_rs* of the Indian princely states remained firmly wedded to the pluralistic traditions that had taken root in the princely courts during the pre-modern period. Nevertheless, they drew a very sharp distinction between individual freedom of worship and freedom for religious communities to worship publicly. The *darb\_rs* made it clear, for example, that public expressions of religious belief which harmed the interests or sentiments of others would not be permitted.<sup>57</sup> In theory absolute, in practice religious liberty in the states was

hedged about with restrictions. It was a regime, we could say, of *managed pluralism*.

Some of these restrictions had to do, as noted above, with the timing and routes of religious processions. But the restrictions on processions (which had their counterparts in the provinces) were relatively innocuous compared to the legislative and executive curbs on other areas of communal life. In 'Muslim' states like Bhopal, Rampur and Mangrol, Hindu religious expression was curtailed by executive orders banning the playing of music in the vicinity of mosques. On the other hand, Muslims' rights were infringed in Hindu- and Sikh-ruled states by restrictions on the slaughter of domestic animals. Meat markets in such states were few, even on a per capita reckoning,<sup>58</sup> and situated in 'not easily accessible' places well away from the main *bazars*. And even there, animals could be slaughtered only at set times (generally very early in the morning) and on payment of a heavy fee.<sup>59</sup> But the really contentious issue was cow-slaughter. Muslims are obliged on the occasion of Bak'r 'Id to provide live animals for ritual sacrifice, and generally prefer to sacrifice cows (although goats or camels are acceptable substitutes).<sup>60</sup> In Rampur, Bhopal and some other Muslim states kine-killing was permitted on a very liberal scale - even, to some extent, encouraged by the authorities. But in almost all the 'Hindu' and 'Sikh' states, cow-killing for any reason was totally prohibited. In Patiala it had always been an offence, and in 1919 penalties of up to seven years rigorous imprisonment and a heavy fine were imposed under section 34 of the state penal code.<sup>61</sup> In Nabha, convicted offenders served six years jail, after which they were expelled from the state. Even in Tonk (a Muslim state but surrounded by Rajput kingdoms) the sacrifice at Bak'r 'Id was limited to goats and camels.<sup>62</sup> It bears emphasising that nothing like these sanctions applied anywhere in British India.<sup>63</sup>

The really interesting thing for our purposes, though, is how these institutionalised limitations on religious expression were received. As one would expect, the communities adversely affected were not pleased - and occasionally made their displeasure known to the authorities by way of petitions and deputations. But at least in the 1920s and 1930s there was very little public acrimony over the bans and certainly no organised communal agitation to have them overturned. The main reason, one suspects, was that the aggrieved parties knew that such a campaign, even if it were tolerated, had almost no chance of success. In the autocratic milieu of the states, there was generally no formal mechanism for the ventilation of grievances and open dissent was not encouraged. Lacking the means to change things for the better, people became gradually accepting of the status quo. As the Islamic theologian Sir Muhammad Iqbal glumly opined to Lord Willingdon's private secretary, 'Muslims can never enjoy freedom of religion... in Hindu states'.<sup>64</sup>

But the autocratic states also had an advantage over the provinces when it came to preventing and containing communal violence. British Indian officials were hampered in this matter by having to account for their actions to the courts, which then often compounded the problem by reversing each other's decisions.<sup>65</sup>



but in the vast majority of the states the judiciary was skeletal and pliable. To all intents and purposes the *darb\_rs* were answerable only to themselves. Consequently, when trouble threatened in the states, officials there did not think twice about using the big stick against those adjudged by the police to be likely 'troublemakers'.<sup>66</sup> Sometimes this involved merely the administration of warnings; but when warnings did not suffice, sterner measures were employed. When communal trouble threatened in Phagwara, Kapurthala, the district magistrate decreed:

Contraventions of orders must be severely dealt with. Religious processions which are the bone of contention might be banned for a period of one year which would be extended if conditions did not become satisfactory. Vernacular papers that published false and inciting news should not be allowed into the State... [and] their local correspondents... ought to be run in for disturbing the peace.<sup>67</sup>

Bans on processions, though, were rare. More commonly, offenders were simply run out of town. In the 1930s a Sikh senior officer of the Patiala *darb\_r* converted to Islam, perhaps as a way of spiting his enemies. This, in itself, was not a problem; but it became one when the man's family took away his young son lest he be raised as a Muslim. The officer made himself a bed in the Patiala mosque and went on a hunger-strike. The local Muslims became excited, and out-of-town Urdu newspapers started to take an interest. Suddenly the state had a communal issue on its hands. But before it could spill on to the streets, maharaja Bhupinder Singh acted. He ordered the boy to be restored to his father, but then sent both of them into permanent exile, exporting the problem as it were to British India.<sup>68</sup>

'In the Hindu States...', wrote nationalist M.L.A. C.S. Ranga Iyer in 1928, 'the Maharaja sees to it that no [communal] riot takes place'.<sup>69</sup> The system of managed pluralism did not operate quite so simply or effectively as that - but it did help to keep the lid on things in a way that the more liberal provincial system did not. People in the states knew precisely what was permitted and not permitted in terms of freedom of worship; and they understood what would happen to them if they crossed the officially prescribed boundaries. These were significant disincentives to communal assertion.

## V

So far we have looked at the question of communal relations in the princely states mainly from the perspective of the rulers and their governments. But this is of course a limited perspective. In the last resort the determining factor in communal relationships was what community leaders thought and felt about each other, and how they chose to interpret the message of peaceful co-existence propagated by their *darb\_rs*. Here the evidence is rather anecdotal; but the

impression one gets is that people at the grass-roots harboured rather different perceptions about the responsibilities of governments towards them as members of religious communities than those privately held by their rulers. For instance, while the princes repeatedly proclaimed that they had no favourites - that they cared for all their subjects equally - their co-religionists tended to view the ruler-subject relationship in a much more proprietorial manner. 'Your Highness is the protector of our religion', a petition from the Hindu *chaudhuries* of Ladnun, Jodhpur, began.<sup>70</sup> 'It is indeed the Rajadharma... revealed to Yudisthir in the Mahabharata which should be Your Highness's guide as a true Hindu', a well-wisher advised Maharaja Manabendra Shah of Tehri-Garhwal on his investiture in 1946.<sup>71</sup>

Further, princely subjects and others were inclined to judge the performance of the *darb\_rs* by how well they looked after their needs as members of particular religious communities. Akali Sikhs for example were critical of the allegedly loose habits of the Phulkian maharajas, who were said to smoke cigarettes 'against the order of the Guru'.<sup>72</sup> For a while, Patiala was the main target, but in the 1940s the Akalis' shifted their attention to Kapurthala. As Punjab M.L.A. Giani Kartar Singh explained, the intention was to bring about 'the re-establishment of the Sikh character of the State.... In Kapurthala things have come to such a pass that some people have publicly begun to claim it as a Hindu State'.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Jats in Bharatpur were angered by the ruler's appointment of non-Jats to senior positions. 'Jats have no voice in their own State', one of them lamented.<sup>74</sup> And Hindus were critical, too, of the maharajas of Karauli and Sirohi. Both princes kept Muslim mistresses, and the widespread impression was that these ladies acted as a conduit for covert 'Muhammadan' influence at court. Again, some Hindus found the institutionalised pluralism of Bikaner discomfoting. As one put it in a letter to the Hindu Mahasabha's B.S. Moonje, 'the Hindoo population in this Hindoo State is not so much respected as one ought to expect'.<sup>75</sup> Public opinion - both local and all-Indian - put a lot of pressure on the *darb\_rs* to privilege the dominant communal group among their subjects and to restrict the rights of minorities.

At first sight there is little in the public policies of the princely states to suggest that they paid much heed to this popular clamour. For example, numbers of Hindu- and Sikh-ruled states had Muslim *dewans* at various times. As the Household Minister at Kapurthala told Tara Singh: 'His Highness always appoints his Chief Minister regardless of his religion, choosing the best man he can find whether he be an English-man, Sikh, Muslim or Hindu'.<sup>76</sup> When we look more deeply, however, a rather different picture of the governing culture in the states emerges. While the *darb\_rs* may have been quite non-discriminatory in making appointments to senior bureaucratic positions, the policy in respect of other levels of public service recruitment does not appear to have been so even-handed. When the government of India took over the administration of Junagadh in 1947 they found that Muslims, who numbered less than a fifth of the population, occupied half of the posts in the state public service. Conversely in Alwar Muslims in 1933 held only 9.26 percent of public service positions, far less than their proportion of

the population. Princely spending, too, appears to have favoured people in the ruler's community. Out of the four *lakhs* distributed each year in religious patronage by the Bhopal *darb\_r*, a mere Rs7,400 was allocated to Hindu charities.<sup>77</sup>

Again, a closer analysis of government regulations in the princely states shows that, contrary to *darb\_ri* rhetoric, institutionalised discrimination was rampant there. In Bhopal, Hindi, the language of 89 percent of the population, formed no part of the curriculum let alone the medium of instruction. As well, many of the textbooks used in Bhopal's schools displayed religious bias.<sup>78</sup> In both Alwar and Bharatpur, where there was a large Muslim rural population, Islamic religious education was discouraged and for a period in the late 1920s and early 1930s, totally forbidden by order of the *darb\_rs*. This left Muslims no alternative but to send their children to state schools which were few in the districts where most Muslims lived, and in which instruction was delivered in Hindi rather than Urdu or Mewati.<sup>79</sup> In Kashmir gun-licenses were compulsory for people in the Valley region, where most Muslims lived, but not for people in predominantly Hindu Jammu. In Bahawalpur, Sikh men faced arrest if they were caught carrying *kirpans*, which they were required to do by their faith.<sup>80</sup>

What is more, many of these discriminatory measures appear to have been enacted in response to popular pressure or out of a reluctance to offend the dominant community. In Nabha, Shi'a Muslims were repeatedly refused permission to take out a separate *tazia* procession during Mohurrum because they refused to 'perform the ceremony according to the way the Sunni Musalmans do it, that is without beating their breasts'. The Nabha government itself was indifferent, but, conscious that the Sunnis were a large community and the Shi'as a very small one (numbering barely 15,000 in Nabha City), they were not inclined to act without Sunni approval.<sup>81</sup>

## VI

In a dispatch of December 1893, which embodied the Calcutta government's final reflections on the spate of communal riots that had erupted across north India during that year, the viceroy Lord Lansdowne observed:

Religious disturbances in India are no novelty. They have occurred from time to time in many places and on many different occasions, both before and after the establishment of British rule. It is a mistake to suppose that under a native régime such occurrences were or are unknown. The ordinary course of things in a Native State is that one or the other religion is dominant in the administration, and that the party professing the creed which is not that of the ruling party has to submit to the loss of the privileges which it would enjoy if it were in the ascendant or free to carry out its rights as it pleased. This was the case in the

Punjab before annexation, and it is still the case in most Native States, whether Hindu or Mohamedan. The condition of inferiority thus imposed on the partisans of one religion by those of the other, though acquiesced in by the bulk of the population, is always liable [however] to be resisted by zealots of either creed, and on several occasions [this] had led to bloody outbursts of fanaticism.<sup>82</sup>

For all its self-serving complacency on the score of 'fanaticism', this is a fairly acute summary of the major differences between the states and the provinces in respect of how their approach to the communal problem. Heirs to a pluralistic culture of governance, the princes were generally fine exemplars of tolerance; likewise, their *darb\_rs* were in the main strongly committed to the promotion of civic harmony and the elimination of religious discord. But the civil society of the princely states was not one in which all communities were of equal standing. Almost everywhere in princely India the community of the ruler was privileged - privileged in its access to education and the public service, privileged in the distribution of government patronage, privileged in legislation that decreed what was permissible social behaviour, privileged in respect of the right to take out religious processions. Hyderabad was demographically a Hindu state; but when E.M. Forster went there in 1921 from Dewas Senior he felt that he had 'passed abruptly from Hinduism to Islam'.<sup>83</sup> Clearly the institutionalised discrimination that Lansdowne's advisers had discerned in the 'native' states in 1893 was still in force there a half century later. So too was the 'condition of inferiority' among religious minorities. As a Rampuri Hindu Congress worker lamented in 1948: 'every Muslim in the State still today regards himself as the ruler while every Hindu thinks [that] it [is] his fate to be suppressed'.<sup>84</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s the princely states experienced, per head of population, far fewer communal Hindu-Muslim riots than the provinces of British India. One reason for this was the nature of the governments of the states and the kinds of religious policies they espoused. Princely rule was theocratic both in the sense that the princes were important religious figureheads - 'icons' in Waghornes's term - and in the sense that, in contrast to British rule, it was not at all neutral about religion. The *darb\_rs* intervened directly and routinely in the management of temples and shrines (even to the point of hiring and firing priests and clerics), and in the organisation of public rituals such as festivals; they enforced religious taboos, such as those attached to animal-slaughter; and they spent lavishly on religious patronage.

The moral authority enjoyed by the princely regimes - along with their very large investment in religious charity - gave them significant leverage with religious practitioners and communal leaders. This influence was exerted to create a climate of tolerance for the communal Other, and to reassure vulnerable minorities that their interests would be protected by the state. But where this failed, the *darb\_rs* did not hesitate to use their executive authority to stamp on 'troublemakers'. In this respect, the relatively autocratic states had an advantage

over the bureaucratic provinces. But while the states championed policies of toleration and co-existence, they did not treat all communities equally. Almost everywhere in princely India the co-religionists of the ruler enjoyed a higher status and had access to greater privileges than members of other communities. The interesting thing here is not that such a hierarchy existed, but that it was, to a large extent, accepted and even condoned by the subordinate party. When I reflect on this paradox, I am reminded of M.N. Srinivas' notion of *Sanskritisation*. Lower castes emulate the upper castes, and thereby prop up the system. In the communal arena, the tradeoff is that the minorities sacrifice some rights in order to safeguard others adjudged more important - core rights. By keeping their heads down, as it were, Muslims in Hindu- and Sikh-ruled states and Hindus and Sikhs in Muslim-ruled states bought themselves the freedom to live and work and worship in their local neighbourhoods free from harassment and violence.

### Notes

1. Speech at Lallgarh Palace, 1 Jan. 1932, I(ndia) O(ffice) R(ecords) L/P&S/13/603.

2. R.S. Azad to Gandhi 25 Sept. 1938, AICC, file G-35 (3) of 1938.

3. Chaudhury Abdul Aziz to Sardar Bishen Singh, 3 July 1936, P(unjab) S(tate) A(rchives), Kapurthala, Sadar Office, M/3-38-36. See also interview between George Wingate, Dep. Pol. Sec. Govt. of India, and Subedar Major Sardar Mohammad Khan, Presdt. of the Meo Indian Officers Conf., Nuh, 12 Jan. 1933, on the communal situation in Alwar. IOR R/1/1/2325.

4. I have already discussed at some length elsewhere the problems of acquiring hard data about Indian communal riots, especially for the pre-Independence period. The same article summarises my interim findings based on a survey of published reports, newspaper articles and official files in the National Archives of India (NAI), the Punjab State Archives, Patiala (PSA), and the Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner (RSA). See 'The Further Shores of Partition: Ethnic Cleansing In Rajasthan, 1947', in *Past and Present*, 160 (Aug. 1998), esp. 212-14.

5. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections On the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983).

6. Today, about ninety percent of communal riots in India occur in cities. Ashis Nandy, et. al., *Creating Nationality: the Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear Of Self* (Delhi, 1995), p.9. The urban-rural dichotomy is commented on in M.S. Gill and Gajanot Deol, 'Patterns Of Riots In India', in *Asian Profile*, 23, 1 (Feb. 1995), 59-66. Recent work on riot psychology by people like Sudhir Kakar and Stanley

Tambiah also lays stress on the *anomie* of the urban proletarian condition. See Sudhir Kakar, *The Colors Of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion and Conflict* (Chicago, 1996); and Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence In South Asia* (Berkeley, 1996).

7. Recently Dick Kooiman has offered some interesting insights in this regard. Comparing Travancore with Baroda, he notes that while neither state had separate electorates for minorities, Travancore had a much higher incidence of communal conflict. He suggests that a key factor in this was the 'demand for a redistribution of political privilege' which was successfully managed in Baroda but in Travancore was left to the whim of market competition - which forced rival communities to mobilise and agitate. Kooiman, 'Communalism and Indian Princely States', *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXXI, 34, (Aug. 1995), 2123-2133.

8. Edward Haynes compared Alwar state with the neighbouring British district of Gurgaon. He found that in 1921, in Alwar, 119.07 of every thousand workers worked in industry, 5.70 in transport and 48.71 in trade; whereas in Gurgaon the figures were 151.90, 19.25 and 54.20 respectively. Haynes, 'Comparative Industrial Development', 30. Earlier John Hurd used 1931 census figures for the 28 largest states to build a (somewhat tenuous) case that indirect rule in India retarded economic development. See John Hurd II, 'The Economic Consequences Of British Rule In India', in the *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 12 (1975), 169-82; and 'The Influence Of British Policy On Industrial Development In the Princely States of India, 1890-1933', in the *Economic and Social History Review*, 12 (1975), 409-24. William Richter questions the notion that the states were less developed than British India, but his conclusions are based on 1951 and 1961 census data, by which time the former princely districts had to some extent caught up. Even so, there were still discrepancies in 1951. Dividing MP into ex-princely districts, mixed districts and ex-British districts, he comes up with indices for urbanization of 14.1, 14.7 and 16.2 respectively, for manufacturing of 5.5, 5.7 and 6.7 respectively, and for literacy of 14.1, 17.1 and 19.0 respectively. William Richter, 'Electoral Patterns In Post-Princely India', in Jagdish N. Bhagwati et. al. (eds.), *Electoral Politics In the Indian States: Three Disadvantaged Sectors* (Delhi, 1975), 7-8 and 7n.

9. Gopal Krishna, 'Communal Violence In India: A Study Of Communal Disturbances In Delhi - I', *EPW*, XX, 2, 12 Jan. 1985, 66-8.

10. Petition from the [Muslim] Beldars of Jodhpur dated 7 Bov. 1938, R[ajasthan] S[tate] A[rchives] B[ikaner], Jodhpur, Social, C 2/21 of 1939-45.

11. Gurdial Singh to J.W. Johnston, Administrator Nabha, 17 July 1928, PSA, Nabha, PMs Office, 2349/2503E.

12. Chhajjmal Bhabra, President, Phagwara Municipality, to Chief Minister Kapurthala, 28 June 1923, and Chief Minister to Bhabra, 29 June 1923, PSA, Kapurthala, Sadar Office, M/3-27-23.

13. Chief Minister Kapurthala to the Sec. to the Agent-to-the-Gov.-Gen., Punjab States, 9 Mar. 1932, PSA, Kapurthala, Sadar Office, E/5-1-32. A review of the administration of Bharatpur during the period 1928-1939 makes the claim that while there had been 'occasional disputes regarding the performance of religious ceremonies', 'in no instance did these local disputes result in an outbreak of violence; practically all of them have been settled by agreement'. 'Review of the Minority Administration In Bharatpur State 1928-1939', 37, IOR R/1/1/3409.

14. Dholpur to M.K. Vellodi, Sec., Ministry of States, 16 Mar. 1949, and Dholpur to N.M. Buch, Jt. Sec., Ministry of States, 20 Feb. 1949, NAI, M[inistry] O[f] S[tates], 5(1)-P/49.

15. Interview with Brigadier Bag Singh, former state Army Commander, Bikaner, 13 Mar. 1998; and Brigadier Singh to Dr. Viz, 16 Sept. 1996 (in the possession of Brigadier Singh).

16. Interview with Teja Singh Tiwana, Patiala, 30 Jan. 1998.

17. Address by the Maharaja of Bikaner to the Carlton Club, 29 May 1935, *Asiatic Review*, XXXI (Jan.-Oct.1935), 447.

18. The first ruler of Alwar, for example, sought and received in 1778 a *sanad* from the emperor Shah Alam II. This gave him, Raja Pratap Singh, the right to hold the territory he had carved out for himself in *jagir* from the empire, which implied that he could look to Delhi for protection. Haynes, 'Patronage of the Arts', 267.

19. The guru bequested a number of items to the Phul family living in the Jungly Ilaqa district of the Punjab as a reward for their sheltering him from the soldiers of the Mughal viceroy. When subsequently the family split, they were shared between its three branches. The Patiala branch obtained custody of the *hukumnama* which spelt out the guru's debt to the Phul house. The Nabha branch got the *saropa* and the guru's *kirpan* or dagger, 'the origin[al] of all kirpans' that Sikhs are enjoined to carry. Afterwards they also acquired Gobind Singh's comb, with some strand of his hair attached to it. So valued were these items by the Nabha rulers that

they were kept locked in a private room of the Nabha fort to which only members of the Phul family had admittance. Note encl. in Administrator, Nabha, to Agent-to-the-Gov.-Gen., Punjab States, 8 Sept. 1923, NAI, Home (Pol.), 401 of 1924.

20. Naranda quoted in Thomas R. Trautmann, 'Traditions Of Statecraft In Ancient India', in R.J. Moore (ed.), *Tradition and Politics In South Asia* (New Delhi, 1979), 95.

21. Quoted in Trautmann, 'Traditions Of Statecraft', 137.

22. This was Manu's justification for kingship. Kingship could on occasions be an evil; but it was a necessary evil. Anything was better than the anarchic 'rule of the fish'. Louis Dumont, 'The Conception Of Kingship In Ancient India', in *Religion/Politics and History In India* (Paris, 1970), 77. While agreeing that kings could punish, scholars are divided about how much force they were entitled to use in exercising their mandate. The debate turns largely on the interpretation of the Sanskrit word *danda*, literally 'stick', which is usually translated as 'force' or 'coercion', but could mean something closer to moral suasion. I.W. Mabbett, *Truth, Myth and Politics In Ancient India* (Delhi, 1972), 76-82.

23. Adrian Mayer in an interesting article compares two early twentieth century royal installations - of Pratapsinhrao of Baroda in 1939, and of Sadul Singh of Bikaner in 1943. The Maratha ceremony was much the more elaborate than the Rajput one. This, Mayer thinks, reflected the difference in their social status. As a true blue *kshatriya*, the Rajput prince had much less need to impress. 'Rulership and Divinity: the Case Of the Modern Hindu Prince and Beyond', in *Modern Asian Studies*, 25, (1991), 767-70.

24. Ronald Inden, 'Ritual, Authority and Cyclic Time In Hindu Kingship', in J.F. Richards (ed.), *Kingship and Authority In South Asia* (2nd ed., Madison, 1981), 37-8.

25. Joanne P. Waghorne, *The Raja's Magic Clothes: Re-Visioning Kingship and Divinity In England's India* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1994), p.232.

26. Adrian Mayer, 'The King's Two Thrones', *Man*, n.s., 20, (1985), 209.

27. U.N. Ghoshal, *A History Of Indian Political Ideas: the Ancient Period and the Period of Transition to the Middle Ages* (repr., Madras, 1966), 536-39; and Charles Drekmeier, *Kingship and Community In Early India* (Stanford, 1962), 245-55.

28. Denis Vidal, *Violence and Truth: A Rajasthani Kingdom Confronts Colonial*



*Authority*, (Delhi, 1997), 201-5. For some examples of the power wielded by the *mahajans* in nineteenth century Kathiawar, see Howard Spodek, 'Rulers, Merchants and Other Groups In the City States Of Saurashtra, India, Around 1800', in *Comparative Studies In Society and History*, 16, (1974), 463.

29. J. Wilson-Johnston, Administrator, Nabha, to AGG Punjab States, 1 Oct 1923, NAI Home (Pol.), 401 of 1924.

30. Encl. in K.P.S. Menon, P.M. Bharatpur, to Major A.A. Russell, Pol. Agent E. Rajputana, 15 Aug. 1941, IOR R/1/3731.

31. 'List of Rasdats, Dharam Chithies and Annual Holders', dated 21 Sept. 1946, PSA, Patiala, Dharam Arth, 150/39.

32. Note by D.M. Field, Chief Minister, Jodhpur, dated 28 Aug. 1940 on the *chabutra* constructed by Muslims at Nagaur railway station, RSAB, Jodhpur, Social, C 2/21 of 1939-45; and Deohri Mualla office note on application by Munshi Ram of village Ujana, Patiala, for permission to build a *gaushala*, dated 21 Feb. 1938, PSA, Patiala, Dharam Arth, 855/26. Unauthorised constructions were liable to be demolished by the police. See D.M. note dated 10 Oct. 1938, on petition by Deja Singh and Man Singh, residents of Bardal Garh village, Patiala, protesting at the construction of a new mosque, Patiala, Dharam Arth, 863/26.

33. Note by S. Santosh Singh, Supt. Police, Kapurthala, dated 16 June 1928, on arrangements for the policing of the *alam* of 6th Mohurrum, and the *tazia* procession of 19th Mohurrum, in Kapurthala City, Sultanpur, Pagwara, Bholath and Dhilwara. PSA, Kapurthala, Sadar Office, M/3-25-28. And see also note dated 21 Oct. 1937 on report from the Bawal police regarding their refusal of permission to one Mool Chand to take out a *Ram Lila* procession on the grounds that the *Dasehra* festival had finished, PSA, Nabha, P.M.'s Office, 9571/9401E. On the music aspect, a warning was issued every year in Jodhpur before *Holi*, that anyone caught singing offensive songs would be fined or imprisoned. The playing of *chings* (drums) was also specifically prohibited in 'public thoroughfares'. Notice dated 5 March 1937, RSAB, Jodhpur, Social C 1/5 of 1936-47.

34. Although sometimes government officials were nominated to the managing committees of important institutions, as in the case of the Anjuman-i-Islam, Bharatpur. 'Note On the History Of the Anjuman-e-Islam, Bharatpur', encl. in Cyril Hancock, Administrator, Bharatpur, to Pol. Agent, E. Rajputana, 31 Dec. 1933, and G. Ogilvie, Agent-to-the-Gov.-Gen., Rajputana, to Bertrand Glancy, Pol. Sec. Govt. of India, 16 Feb. 1934, IOR R/1/2553.

35. Deohri Mualla Dept. note dated 25 July 1940, PSA, Patiala, Dharam Arth, 265/9.
36. A return visit some months later established that the warning had had effect. A new *pushak* had been prepared for the *must* of the temple and *sewa dhoop deep* was being performed regularly. Deohri Mualla office notes dated 24 May and 25 June 1940, and 6 Feb 1941, reports from City Tehsildar dated 11 Aug. 1941 and 27 Dec. 1941, PSA, Patiala, Dharam Arth, 265/9.
37. Note, Deohri Mualla Dept., dated 18 Jan. 1944, PSA, Patiala, Dharam Arth, 42/2. For a retrospective summary of the situation in the Punjab states see note, Home Dept., PEPSU, dated 22 Sept. 1951, PSA, Patiala, Dharam Arth, 415/74.
38. Pamela Price, *Kingship and Political Practice In Colonial India* (Cambridge, 1996), 190.
39. Panna to Patiala, 28 Mar. 1927, B(hopal) R(ecord) O(ffice), Bhopal, Chamber Section, 11, 46/1 (1927).
40. J.D.M. Derrett, 'Rajadharmā', in *The Journal Of Asian Studies*, 35 (1976), 606; Edward S. Haynes, 'Patronage Of the Arts and the Rise Of the Alwar State', in Karine Schomer, Joan L. Erdman, Deryck O. Lodrick and Lloyd I Rudolph (eds.), *The Idea Of Rajasthan: Explorations In Regional Identity* (Delhi, 1994), 1, 283; Inden, 'Ritual, Authority and Cyclic Time', 35-6, 55; and John W. Spellman, *Political Theory Of Ancient India: A Study Of Kingship From the earliest Times to circa A.D. 300* (Oxford, 1964), 219-22.
41. *Santi Parva*, 50. Pratap Chandra Roy (Trans.), *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa* (repr., Calcutta, 1963), VIII, Part I, 135.
42. One example of this is the Basant festival, a Hindu spring rite which the Chishti Sufi order made into a multicultural event by encouraging Muslims to exchange gifts of yellow rice and mustard seed with Hindu friends. Even today Muslims at Basant take mustard flowers to the graves of their saints. Syncretism also came easily to Muslims ruling over largely Hindu populations, as in the case of Mysore under Haider and Tipu. For an illuminating recent account in this vein see, Kate Brittlebank, *Tipu Sultan's Search For Legitimacy: Islam and Kingship In A Hindu Domain* (Delhi, 1997).
43. Reciprocity was not, however, confined to the political domain. Philip Lutgendorf shows, through his analysis of Tulsid's *R\_mcharit\_nas*, that the 'imagined community' of Hindu scholars in the pre-modern period was not

exclusive, and made room for Muslims as well as Hindus - indeed defined its constituency not in communal but in moral terms, as between 'good' people and 'bad'. 'Yavanas' (Muslims), notes Lutgendorf, are said specifically in the text to have been saved by the power of R\_m's name. Lutgendorf, 'Interpreting R\_mr\_j: Reflections On the R\_may\_n, Bhakti and Hindu Nationalism', in David N. Lorenzen (ed.) *Bhakti Religion In North India; Community, Identity and Political Action* (Albany, 1995), 280. On the broad issue of medieval acculturation see N.K. Wagle, 'Hindu-Muslim Interactions In Medieval Maharashtra', in Gunther D. Sontheimer and Herman Kulke (eds.), *Hinduism Reconsidered* (Delhi, 1991), esp. 52-62. For other examples of 18th century courtly syncretism, see C.A. Bayly, 'The Pre-History Of "Communalism"? Religious Conflict In India, 1700-1860', in *Modern Asian Studies*, 19, (1985), 180-83.

44. To say nothing of his tennis partners (who may also have served, off-duty as it were, as sexual partners). Memo. by Jey Singh dated 25 July 1934, IOR R/1/1/2624. An autographed photograph of Muhammad Ali is still to be seen on the wall of Alwar's hunting lodge at Seriska. It is significant that Shaukat Ali thought enough of the maharaja to accompany him on the first stage of his journey into exile in 1933, a very public gesture of solidarity. See Ali's statement in the *Times Of India* (Bombay), 25 May 1933.

45. Speech of Dec. 1935, quoted in the *Times Of India*, 1 Jan. 1936.

46. Speech of [?] Sept. 1930, *Indian Annual Register*, (1930), II, 472.

47. Nazim Narnaul to Sarishtedar Ijlas-i-Khas, Aug. 1932, PSA, Patiala, Ijlas-i-Khas, 353.

48. Note encl. in K.S. Sheikh Mohammad Zahid of Mangrol to H.H. of Dhrangadhra, 21 Nov. 1996. (I am indebted to H.H. of Dhrangadhra for letting me see this correspondence).

49. Interview with Jaswant Singh, Kotah, 17 Feb. 1998.

50. W.E. Jardine, Resdt. Gwalior, to Pol. Sec. Govt. of India, 12 Oct. 1923, NAI, F&P, 1923, 1305-H.

51. Sir Saiyyid Reza Ali Khan, Nawab of Rampur to [Major] Saloway 18 Sept. 1941, IOR R/1/1/3822.

52. The *Times Of India*, 26 Feb. 1936.

53. Interview with Ajmer Singh Siddhu, Patiala, 1 Feb. 1998.
54. Note by Home Minister, Patiala, dated 30 Jan. 1942, PSA, Patiala, Ijlas-i-Khas, 695.
55. Nawab Sir Zulfiqar Ali Khan to Mian [illegible], Delhi, 18 Mar 1923, PSA, Kapurthala, Sadar Office, M/3-21-26. The final design evoked the Qutbia mosque at Marrakesh. The completed building cost £30,000, a vast sum in those days. *The Times*, 30 Apr. 1930.
56. Some British observers made the same connection. For example W.E. Jardine, the resident at Gwalior, was impressed by the wholesome effect of Scindia's participation in Mohurrum. He wrote: "It is precisely where Indian Rulers show an interest in... both Hindu and Muhammadan festivals that there is no bad feeling between those communities... we have no Hindu-Muhammadan riots here". Jardine to the Pol. Sec. Govt. of India, 12 Oct. 1923, NAI, F&P, 1923, 1305-H.
57. Notification by P.M. Bikaner dated 14 Apr. 1932, RSAB, Bikaner, Home Dept., 67/1932.
58. The census records Alwar as having in 1921 less than 300 butchers, which translates as just one for every 300 Muslims. Edward S. Haynes, 'Comparative Industrial Development In 19th and 20th Century India: Alwar State and Gurgaon District', in *South Asia*, n.s., III, (1980), 31.
59. Note by Gurdial Singh, Home Member, Nabha, dated 22 Feb. 1929, PSA, Nabha, P.M.'s Office, 4133/4224E; and Bye Laws For the Control and Regulation of the Slaughter-House, Nabha, issued on 14 Aug. 1926, PSA, Nabha, P.M.'s Office, 5703/5768E. In Jodhpur too there were complex regulations about what animals could be taken where. She-goats for example could be taken through the Sireh Bazar in Jodhpur City only along two designated roads, during which time it was lawful for Hindu residents to 'rescue' goats they suspected of being taken for slaughter. Notification by maharaja dated 29 Apr. 1929, RSAB, Jodhpur, Social, C 2/6A of 1929-41.
60. The issue of cow-sacrifice v. cow protection in British India is broadly canvassed in Anthony Parel, 'The Political Symbolism Of the Cow In India', in *Journal Of Commonwealth Political Studies*, 7, (1969), 179-203.
61. A serious riot broke out in Srinagar in August 1937 after the Kashmir high court reduced the sentence meted out to three Muslims convicted of cow-killing from seven years R.I. to one year S.I. on the grounds that the accused had not

intended to wound Hindu susceptibilities. *The Times*, 17 Aug. 1937.

62. Note by Shankar Prasad, Chief Commr., Delhi, dated 23 Feb. 1950, MOS, 9(8)-P/50. There was nonetheless a kind of double standard about the Hindu states' position on cow-slaughter. Although slaughter was banned inside the territories of the rulers, there was in many states no restriction on the export of milch-cows to British India. Patiala closed off this loophole in 1925. Gen. Sec., Cow Preservation League, Calcutta, to Chief Sec. Nabha, 18 Feb. 1926; and *Patiala Government Gazette*, 9 Dec. 1925, PSA, Nabha, PMs Office, 2726/2893E.

63. As Thursby shows, elaborate rules governed the slaughter of animals in the provinces too. But there was no equivalent to the bans which applied in the states. In the provinces, the guiding principle with the authorities was what was customary. Thursby, *Hindu-Muslim Relations In British India*, pp.89, 106. Freitag suggests that the tendency in the early 20th century was for the colonial state to become more closely entangled in the regulation of communal social life, but that this tendency was reversed after 1930. Sandria B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence Of Communalism In North India* (Berkeley, 1989), p.81.

64. Iqbal to E. Mievill 4 Mar. 1933, IOR R/1/1/2325.

65. The classic study is R. Suntharalingam, 'The Salem Riots, 1882: Judiciary Versus Executive In the Mediation Of A Communal Dispute', in *Modern Asian Studies*, 3 (1969), 193-208.

66. To facilitate preemptive action, the police kept lists of such persons which were regularly updated. See 'List of Persons Residing In Bikaner Considered Likely to Excite People to Take Part In a Riot Or Foment Trouble From Behind the Scenes', submitted to L.-G. Police, Bikaner, 23 July 1946, RSAB, Bikaner, Home Dept., 35/1946.

67. Amar Singh, Magistrate Phagwara to Chief Minister Kapurthala, 17 July 1935, PSA, Kapurthala, Sadar Office, M/3-29-35.

68. Interview with R.G. Verma, Patiala, 1 Feb. 1998.

69. Ranga Iyer, *India In the Crucible* (London, 1928), 296.

70. 'Petition to Maharaja From the Chaudhuries of the Hindu Communities of Ladnun', forwarded by the Sec., Shri Oswal Hitkarini Sabha, dated 17 Apr. 1937, RSAB, Jodhpur, Social, C 2/21 of 1928-46.

71. T.R. Bhatt to the Maharaja of Tehri-Garhwal 3 Oct. 1946, AISPC, Part I, file 165 of 1946.
72. Satirical attack on maharaja of Patiala in the *Kirpan Bahadur ji Sangat* of Amritsar, 19 Sept. 1929, quoted in L.F. Rushbrook-Williams, For. Minister; Patiala, to AGG Punjab States, 21 Nov. 1927, PSA, Patiala, Hist. Section, file H-89B. Sikh historian and man of letters Kushwant Singh recalled recently how shocked he was to see Bhupinder Singh of Patiala smoking outside the Chamber of Princes building in Delhi. Review by Khushwant Singh of K. Natwar Singh, 'Magnificent Maharaja', *Outlook*, 6 Apr. 1998, 79.
73. Giani Kartar Singh to Chief Sec., Kapurthala, 9 Feb. 1943, PSA, Kapurthala, Sadar Office, P/3-3-43.
74. Sardar Hukum Singh to Major Hancock, Admin. Bharatpur, 28 Aug. 1935, IOR R/1/1/2681.
75. Beneshiam Wahie to Moonje 28 May 1933, Moonje Papers, Subject File 33.
76. Household Minister Kapurthala to Master Tara Singh 5 Dec. 1942, PSA, Kapurthala, Sadar Office, P/3-3-43.
77. Fort. report from R.C., Western India, for period ending 31 Dec. 1947, RCO, Rajasthan, 18-P/48-D; 'Resumé Of the Grievances Of the Alwar Muslims', app. to note by G. Wingate, Dep. Pol. Sec., Govt. of India, dated 3 Mar. 1933, IOR R/1/1/2325; Pol. Dept. note dated 14 Feb. 1932, IOR R/1/1/2255; MOS office notes dated 7 May, 14 and 18 Sept. 1950; and Chief Commr. Bhopal to V.P. Menon 2 Sept. 1950, MOS, 9 (16)-P/50.
78. Memo by the All-India Riyasti Hindu Hitarshi Mandal, New Delhi, dated Apr. 1932, IOR R/1/1/2234.
79. In Alwar religious schools remained closed between 1925 and 1932, in Bharatpur for a shorter period around 1933. 'Resumé Of the Grievances of Alwar Muslims', *op. cit.*; and G.Ogilvie, A.G.G. Rajputana to Pol. Sec. Govt. of India 11 Jan. 1936, IOR R/1/1/2828.
80. *The Times*, 28 Nov. 1928.
81. Note on report from S.P. Sadar dated 29 Aug. 1925; S. Maqbul Husain, Sec. Shi'a Association, Nabha, *et. al.*, to Administrator, Nabha, 7 June 1926; note by Home Member Gurdial Singh dated 19 June 1926; and note by Addur Rahman,

City Kotwal, n.d.; PSA, Nabha, P.M.'s Office, 2261/2429E.

82. Home (Public) dispatch to the Sec. State no.84 of 27 Dec. 1893, NAI, For. Dept., Intl. A, Dec. 1894, 113-55.

83. E.M. Forster, *The Hill of Devi* (Harmondsworth, 1965), 98.

84. Krishanasavan Arya, member CWC Rampur, to Rajendra Prasad, 26 Sept. 1948, Rajendra Prasad Papers, 8-P/48.

## **Patterns of Organisation in Turn of the Century Hinduism: an examination with reference to Punjab**

**John Zavos**  
*University of Manchester*

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This paper will examine the way in which middle class Hindus conceptualised their religion in late nineteenth century Punjab. It will note recent scholarly developments which have emphasised the confluence of ideas between reformist and non-reformist organisations within the colonial milieu. This confluence of ideas problematises the status of reform during this period. The idea of implacable opposition, for example, between Arya Samajis and Sanatana Dharmis in the Punjab needs to be re-examined. In this paper, I will examine the relationship between these two, and suggest a model as a means through which to understand the point of divergence between reforming and non-reforming bodies. I will argue that despite a good deal of agreement between Aryas and Sanatani Hindus, the two were increasingly split in their approach to the organisation of the religion itself, and how it should respond to the pressures of the modern world. This split, I suggest, underpinned the development of critical disputes in emerging Hindu politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

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### **I. Introduction**

In recent years the well-wrought model of a clear-cut opposition between reformers and non-reformers in nineteenth century Hinduism has been considerably problematised. Vasudha Dalmia is one of several historians who have questioned the model, noting that 'many of the positions occupied by the votaries of sanatana dharma were commonly shared with the leaders of the reform movements'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Susan Bayly has noted that reformers and non-reformers 'continually borrowed from and interacted with one another, all sharing in the same broad 'discursive field' of Hindu religious thought and practice'.<sup>2</sup> As new evidence from private papers, vernacular newspapers and religious tracts is uncovered, then, a much broader band of consensus has begun to blur established ideas about how reformers and non-reformers aligned themselves against one another.

This is a particularly pertinent development for Punjab studies. During the nineteen seventies and early eighties, some influential studies of the process of reform had focused on late nineteenth century Punjab, especially the



emerging Arya Samaj. These studies implicitly accept the idea of non-reforming Sanatanis as representative of a kind of monolithic, institutionalised opposition to the Samaj. J.T.F. Jordens, for example, narrates that when Dayananda arrived in Lahore in 1877, the 'conservative Hindus' established a Sanatana Dharma Sabha in order to combat his influence.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Kenneth Jones projects the emergence of *sanatana dharma* as a direct oppositional response to the success of reformism, with the Sanatani Shraddha Ram pursuing Dayananda from district to district in an attempt to 'strengthen the beleaguered forces of orthodoxy'.<sup>4</sup> This conflict, Jones continues, represents 'the most basic of all struggles'; a struggle which Bayly has appositely characterised as that between a 'Catholic-style' Hindu establishment and a modernising, 'Protestant-style' reformation.<sup>5</sup>

In some ways, this model of opposition in Punjab has provided a template for understandings of the relationship between late nineteenth century reform movements and the wider world of Hinduism. The Arya Samaj has been perceived as a paradigm: a dynamic, purifying and rather zealous force in a religion which has otherwise been distinctly undynamic, if not, classically, stagnating. The model, I believe, is still influential. Several commentators have, for example, made a direct link between the Arya Samaj and the development of Hindu nationalist politics in the twentieth century (Jaffrelot, Gold), precisely on the basis of its status as a dynamic force of this kind.<sup>6</sup> Blurring the division between reformers and non-reformers, then, has a particular significance in Punjabi Hinduism, as it questions the validity of this template and its attendant associations with emerging Hindu politics.

The whole idea of a broader discursive field of religious thought in fact lends itself particularly well to late nineteenth century Punjab, because of the extent of dynamic religious activity in the region at this time. Not only Hinduism, but also Sikhism and Islam were characterised by an extraordinary diversity of movements and actions. Indeed, it was partly because of the growing recognition of the significance of competition between these religious communities that this dynamic activity was sustained. In this paper, I want to examine the relationship between reforming and non-reforming bodies on the basis of a recognition of this dynamic activity. I want to suggest a means of reconstructing the difference between the two, which specifically acknowledges the idea of a broad band of consensus, as developed in recent scholarship. My argument will be that substantive difference was established not on issues such as the revitalisation of Sanskrit, the worship of images, or even the idea that something had to be done to alleviate the position of women, low castes and untouchables. Rather, it was the comparative approach of reformers and non-reformers to the organisation of Hinduism itself, as a religion, which constituted substantive difference. Divergent approaches to this issue emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century amongst Arya Samajis and Sanatana Dharmis which were particularly influential in the development of Hindu politics, and ultimately, I would suggest, in the development of the concept of the Hindu 'community' as a nation.

## II. Recognising the proximity of reformers and non-reformers

In order to reconstruct difference, we need initially to recognise what binds reformers and non-reformers together. The first point to make here is that these two groups were bound by a conviction that some form of fresh approach to their religion was necessary. The idea, then, that issues related to changing practice in Hinduism - what is sometimes called social reform - could be used as a marker of substantive difference is difficult to uphold. As early as 1976, Jones noted that it is often difficult to trace the development of the 'competing' networks of Arya and Sanatana Dharma organisations in Punjab, because of the tendency to use the same terminology and the confluence of objectives among these organisations.<sup>7</sup> More recently, it has been clearly recognised that issues of social reform 'were common to all the movements. The difference lay only in selection and the degree of emphasis.'<sup>8</sup>

Perversely, then, we might almost point to reform as an area which brought reformers and non-reformers together. This might lead us quite naturally to consider whether we are using the right terminology in this debate. It is an issue considered by Dalmia, who makes a distinction between reformers and 'traditionalists', on the basis that the latter emphasised the constancy of tradition within the context of modernity. I am not entirely convinced that an organisation like the Arya Samaj, with its belief in the ultimate value of the Vedas, would not fit into this category. But more than this, in the present context I find it valuable to retain the idea of a distinction between reformers and non-reformers, if the notion of reform is widened to signify not particular practices associated with religion (the position of women, spending on weddings, worshipping images, and so on), but rather the whole idea of the religion itself, how it can be conceptualised, defined and 'measured' against other religions in a more globalised context. It is on this level that I want to try to establish distinctive approaches to Hinduism between the two groups.

Of course, distinctiveness on this level can only be established if there is a common acknowledgement of a 'globalised' context. Indeed, I think that this is a key binding element between reformers and non-reformers during this period. They can be identified as a group by their common acceptance of the idea that Hinduism was a recognisable religion which was clearly comparable with other global religions such as Islam and Christianity. This was an acceptance which was fashioned very much within the colonial milieu. As Romila Thapar has commented, 'Hinduism of the pre-modern period was...not a uniform monolithic religion, but a juxtaposition of flexible religious sects'.<sup>9</sup> During the nineteenth century, however, movements towards the articulation of Hinduism as a single religious tradition are clearly evident.<sup>10</sup> In terms of their perception of Hinduism, these movements can be related epistemologically to the assumptions of Orientalist scholarship which accompanied the development of colonial rule. A discourse of tradition was constructed, in which ancient

scripture was perceived as embodying authentic Hinduism, the 'true form' of a once great religious system.

This is not to say that the recognition of scripture as tradition was not a feature of pre-colonial Hinduism. Sheldon Pollock has argued convincingly against this.<sup>11</sup> But a key disjuncture is evident in the colonial discourse of tradition, based on the linear conception of a Hindu history. Classically, Orientalist scholarship constructed the notion of a 'Golden Age' of Hinduism, to be located in the period of Aryan civilisation, when important ancient texts were apparently produced. This Golden Age construct reflected the preoccupation of early Orientalists like William Jones with classical civilisation in Europe - the Golden Age of Greece and Rome.<sup>12</sup> The work of Jones is replete with allusions to the latter, and by linking Sanskrit to European languages he began to construct a common history for Indian and European civilisation. The most critical point in the present context, however, is not the linking of Indian to European civilisation (although this was indeed to become an enduring and influential image in nineteenth century Hinduism) but rather the *de-linking* of the former from the actual practices of contemporary Hinduism. The glorification of Aryan civilisation as the repository of a true or normative form of Hinduism necessitated the projection of its contemporary legacy as a degenerate, debased form, permeated with superstition and idolatry. On this basis, religious degeneration became the defining historical process at the heart of indigenous society.

Two distinct levels of Hinduism, then, are constructed, which configure much of the thinking on indigenous religion during the nineteenth century. Monier-Williams, for example, refers to contemporary Hinduism in 1891 as 'Brahminism run to seed and spread out into a confused tangle of divine personalities and incarnations. The one system is the rank and luxuriant outcome of the other.' Again, Alfred Lyall comments in 1884 that popular Hinduism was 'a whole vegetation of cognate beliefs sprouting up in every stage of growth beneath the shadow of the great orthodox traditions and allegories of Brahminism'.<sup>13</sup> Such images of disorganisation both reinforced and legitimised the ascendancy of British rule. State-sanctioned textual Hinduism, which had emerged from the late eighteenth century onwards as a key feature of the British 'rule of law', was projected precisely as the antithesis of contemporary degenerate Hinduism; it was an organised conception of what had, in the past, constituted authentic Hinduism.<sup>14</sup> In terms of the structure of analyses of Hinduism, this dual image of organisation and disorganisation was enormously influential in the development of both reformist and non-reformist ideas during the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1897, for example, when famine and plague were reverberating across the subcontinent, this structure is evident in both Arya and Sanatani responses to these disasters. Jai Chand, the Secretary of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, notes that 'India has sunk to the lowest depths of degradation. ...When the natives commit so many sins against the commandments contained in the Vedas, it is only natural that their country should come to grief.' The *Sanatan Dharm Gazette*, edited by the

Secretary of the Lahore Sanatana Dharma Sabha, Pandit Gopi Nath, also refers to the degradation of religiosity as the fundamental cause of current disasters. 'The two great principles which form the basis of the Hindu religion,' he says, 'are the preservation of the cow and the protection of the learned Brahmins. And as both of these principles have of late been disregarded, it is not to be wondered at that the country has been visited by such calamities as the plague and earthquakes.'<sup>15</sup> The reference to contemporary disorder, then, in contrast to a previous 'natural' religious order, is clear in both responses.

One further, related factor binds reformist and non-reformist approaches to Hinduism during this period. This is the fact that these approaches were propagated primarily by middle class Hindus. Middle class, that is, in the sense identified by B.B. Misra: not a class emerging out of technological or industrial development, as it had, for example, in Britain, but a predominantly professional class, emerging out of 'educational, judicial and administrative development under colonial rule'.<sup>16</sup> Misra notes that although 'intermediate' classes emerged in industrial and landed sectors in the first century of British rule, it was 'lawyers, and public servants, doctors and teachers, writers, scholars and members of other recognised professions' who developed a 'common interest and outlook, a common language and behaviour pattern'.<sup>17</sup> In short, this heterogeneous group became a self-conscious middle class, consolidating itself particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century, through a variety of channels, including the development of religious organisations.

The character of these religious organisations was critical. They were self-consciously modern, in the sense that they were governed by constitutions and aims and objectives, they had secretaries, executive boards and membership lists, and they employed techniques such as subscription campaigns, public meetings and petitions to authority. They were, then, organisations with a particular presence within the colonial milieu, and they aptly reflected the key position of their members within this milieu. In Punjab, after annexation in 1849, and the institution of English-education as the language of government in 1856, it was the powerful trading castes - Aroras, Baniyas and Khattris - who emerged as the archetypal colonial middle class. They formed the basis of the rapidly emerging English-educated elite, fulfilling the demands of government bureaucracy, the legal system and the education system in the province. They also emerged as the key factor in the development of both reforming and non-reforming religious organisations - particularly the Arya Samaj and the Sanatana Dharma Sabhas - towards the end of the century.

This common class base allowed for dialogue to be established within a particular discursive terrain. The press constituted a critical element of this terrain, often providing the framework for the articulation of debates over various issues. The idea of Hinduism and its contemporary degeneracy was influential in both the selection of issues and approaches to debates. In some crucial ways, then, reformers and non-reformers shared a common trajectory in relation to their religion and its presence within a modern world. The point of

divergence was nevertheless to become increasingly evident as pressures were exerted to articulate the precise extent and nature of this religion called Hinduism.

### III. Pressures on the Margins of Hinduism

Certain pressures can be identified as focusing the attention of emerging religious organisations during this period on the margins of the religion, and on how its boundaries could be identified and delineated in relation to other religions. In this section I want to emphasise three pressures as particularly pertinent: the Government Census; Christian missionary activity; and Hindu reform movements.

(i) *Government Census*: The decennial All India Census was instituted in 1871. From the beginning, it was clear that the whole idea of Hinduism as a viable category in the framework of colonial ethnography was problematic. Quantifying Hinduism, defining its limits, emerged as consistently perplexing. Attempts to gain a full picture of religious affiliation for the census of 1881, for example, were seriously hampered by confusion over what constituted inclusion in the Hindu religion. The 1881 Report states that 'there were instances where the column in the enumerator's schedule, in which religion should have been entered, was filled up, not with any designation of any known religion, but with either the name of a caste or the title of a sect'.<sup>18</sup> This emerging confusion called for some judicious interventions by western minds, schooled in the perception of order. As the Punjab Superintendent for the 1891 Census, E.D. Maclagan, put it, 'no native official, however much he had the required information, would have been able to class the returns from the point of view which a European would adopt.' Consequently, he felt constrained to deal 'with each return in person'.<sup>19</sup> Maclagan's intervention ensured that large numbers of low caste Punjabis were 'forcibly classed as Hindus'. In making this decision, he records, he had considered the idea of listing (creating?) a separate 'scavenger religion' associated with the Chuhra caste. Having explored this idea, however, he rejects it, because of the implied uncertainty about where the boundaries of Hinduism would then lie. '...In excluding the Chuhra from the list of Hindus,' he asks, 'should we also exclude the Chamar? And if the Chamar, why not the Sansi? And should the Gogra, the Megh and Khatik follow? And in fact, where is the line to be drawn?' This vision of endless plurality is, not surprisingly, rejected by Maclagan, who concludes that although 'we should be complying with Hindu feeling in excluding the Chuhra...it will be best to adhere to the present system of including all as Hindus'.<sup>20</sup>

Practical uncertainty over the boundaries of Hinduism was, due to the assumptions and presumptions of officials like Maclagan, placed firmly in the public domain. As a result high caste, middle class elites, who had primary access to this domain, were forced to confront the question of the limits of their religious community. If Hinduism was to be perceived objectively, as a world

religion or a great religious tradition, where precisely did this tradition end and the morass of 'primitive' animism and superstition begin?

In the present context, two dilemmas for middle class Hindus emerged which are particularly interesting. First, the census highlighted the dilemma of how to project a positive image of Hinduism in a global religious context if its margins were perceived as broad fuzzy areas occupied by groups actively shunned by many of its adherents. The second dilemma was far more directly a political dilemma. By quantifying caste and religious communities, the census inevitably placed the emphasis on numerical size as a means of assessing political importance. Limiting the size of Hinduism by rejecting the 'Hinduness' of low caste and untouchable groups, or indeed by questioning the practical validity of Hinduism as a category of religion altogether, was hence a threat to the political influence of high caste Hindus. As we shall see, these were dilemmas which several organisations in Punjab set out to address.

*(ii) Missionary activity:* the urgency with which these issues were addressed was greatly exacerbated by the developing pattern of missionary activity in the later decades of the nineteenth century. Whereas earlier periods of missionary activity had concentrated upon the conversion of high caste individuals, from the 1860s onwards missions in various parts of India began to convert low caste groups. Indeed, these groups were often converted as a caste bloc, following the decision of caste elders to take the step.<sup>21</sup> This trend has been termed 'mass movement'. Census figures confirm rapid increases in the Christian population between 1871 and 1901, and most reports record the predominance of low caste converts as a feature of this increase. The 1891 Census, for example, recorded a dramatic 410% increase in the indigenous Christian population of Punjab. The Census Report noted that this increase was largely effected through concentrated efforts amongst lower caste Hindus and untouchables.<sup>22</sup> Whatever the motivations behind low caste conversion during this period, the significance of mass movements in the present context is that they presented a picture of Hinduism as a religion being squeezed, as it were, from its margins inwards. In addition, low caste conversion again begged the question of the status of those in the margins: were low castes and untouchables Hindus, or were they in any case a separate religious group, 'followers,' as Maclagan suggested in 1891, 'of a form of religion which is in many ways entirely distinct from Hinduism proper'?'<sup>23</sup>

The dilemmas noted in relation to the Census, then, are reiterated by the success of mass movements towards Christianity. First, the vulnerability of Hinduism underlined the oppression, if not exclusion, of low caste groups. Secondly, the question was again posed of how to locate the shape of Hinduism, how it articulated its margins and maintained its own identity in an increasingly competitive context. As if to drive the confluence of these issues home, it was the Census which provided the key source of confirmation of the success of missionary efforts. This ensured that these issues were a source of increasing debate in the press.

(iii) *Reform movements*: Although I have so far emphasised the commonality of interests between reformers and non-reformers in the late nineteenth century, it would be historically unviable not to acknowledge a good deal of tension between organisations like the Arya Samaj and the Sanatana Dharma Sabhas. As Dalmia has acknowledged,<sup>24</sup> the Samaj was generally more radical in its approach, and advocated more sweeping reforms. Disputes between Aryas and Sanatanis, carried out in newspapers and religious tracts, are well documented.<sup>25</sup> These disputes revolved around, on the one hand, Arya criticisms of such practices as image worship and brahman corruption, and on the other, Sanatani criticisms of some of Dayananda's more exotic philosophies, such as his advocacy of the practice of *niyog* for virgin widows and childless wives.<sup>26</sup> What is significant about these issues in our context, is that they consistently referred to what was, theoretically, a quite comprehensive critique of the whole structure of authority in the Hindu system. Dayananda's *Satyarth Prakash* articulated an idea of Hinduism based resolutely on the absolute authority of the Vedas, rejecting 'non-Vedic' texts as unauthoritative.<sup>27</sup> In effect, this insistence in Dayananda's work amounted to the presentation of a 'fixed' or 'closed' canon of scripture, in a religious system characterised by a uniquely flexible approach to the idea of scriptural legitimation.<sup>28</sup> Dayananda's fixed canon was presented as the objective embodiment of religious truth, which was accessible to any Hindu educated in Sanskrit, the 'truth-language' of Hindu revelation.

This objectification of religious truth, with its implicit emphasis on the value of education, underpinned Dayananda's rejection of the contemporary caste system (*jati*) in favour of an idealised vision of society structured in accordance with the Yajur Veda's four *varnas*: Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Critically, Dayananda's interpretation of the *varna* system cited merit, not birth, as the determining factor in the system.<sup>29</sup> In effect, this system upheld the notion of an elite socio-religious group - the Brahmans remained the mediators of religious truth - but it was an elite defined not by the 'closed' signifier of birth, but rather by the more accessible notion of an appropriate education.

These ideas would form the justificatory framework for some quite radical assaults on the structure of Hindu authority in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. My point here, however, is that they provided the basis for reformist criticisms of the contemporary caste structure, which focused on the rationale and legitimation of that structure. In a similar manner to Christian mass movements and the Census, then, Dayananda's approach created pressure on the structure of Hinduism, questioning the sense Hindus had of the boundaries of their religion. And again, the status of low castes and untouchables - those who occupied the margins - emerged as the key issue. All the pressures highlighted in this section, then, indicated a focus on this issue. Significantly, eventhough the Arya Samaj developed initially as a very caste conscious organisation, it maintained the theoretical potential to reconstitute low castes as 'twice-born' (*dvija*) Hindus, through the idea of merit-based

*varna*. This potential was to develop into a quite distinct approach to the organisation of Hinduism.

#### IV. Developing Approaches to the Organisation of Hinduism

Before elaborating this distinctive approach, it might be useful to reiterate the idea of commonality in the context of the above pressures. Generally, we can see some common ground emerging amongst middle class Hindus in terms of perceived threats and rationale for action. Christian missionary activity was clearly a tangible threat to both reformers and non-reformers. Dayananda's attacks on Christianity are evidence of this, as are the early implementation by the Punjabi Arya Samaj of *shuddhi* as a strategy to reclaim Hindus who had converted to Christianity.<sup>30</sup> Shradha Ram, the key early advocate of Sanatani organisation in Punjab in the 1870s and 80s, was also most active in his condemnation of Christianity.<sup>31</sup> He was also, of course, critical of reforming organisations, beginning with his bitter denunciation of the reformer Kanahayala Alakhdhari in Ludhiana in 1873.<sup>32</sup> But such denunciations were carried through against the backdrop of a common concern about the missionary threat.

As well as the common ground over the issue of Christianity, agreement is also apparent in terms of diagnosis of the problem. Agreement here was prompted partly by the trajectory of the pressures outlined here, and partly by the influence of ideas about the state of contemporary Hinduism. For both reformers and non-reformers, threats to Hinduism were perceived as potentially successful ultimately because of the degeneration of the religion in the modern world. This degeneration was manifested as disorganisation - the inability of Hindus to act together in response to Christian incursions; and also as corruption - both of Hindu practice, and of the caste system, with brahman castes perceived as either losing authority over or alienating marginal groups such as low castes, so rendering them susceptible to missionary claims about the egalitarian nature of Christianity.

(i) *the Arya Response*: As I have indicated, Dayananda's insistence on a fixed Vedic canon, and his concomitant exposition of merit-based *varna*, provided theoretical legitimation for the Arya Samaj's response to these problems. The Samaj itself was well structured to allow the development of this response. From the time it was first established in Punjab it was a flexible organisation, based on a cellular structure in which individual units had a great deal of freedom to develop particular projects. Each local Samaj was structured around a Samaj Mandir, a basic institutional unit where all of the regular activities of local Samaj members were held. These activities ranged from weekly services to marriage ceremonies, committee meetings to language classes. A whole host of activities, then, associated with the socio-religious experience of being an Arya. In effect, these functions of the Samaj Mandir may be said potentially to supersede some of the critical socio-religious functions of caste. To a certain



extent, then, the basic organisational unit of the Arya Samaj provided an institutional space for the elaboration of Dayananda's critique of religious authority, particularly in relation to the status and structure of caste.

This aspect of the Samaj is exemplified by the development of the *shuddhi* movement in the late nineteenth century. *Shuddhi* is best described as a process of purification; a ceremony through which outcasted individuals or groups could be 'returned' to their caste status, thus enabling them to perform their *dharma*. This ceremony was initially adopted by the Arya Samaj as a means of countering the aggressive proselytising of Christian missionaries. *Shuddhi* during this period (1877 to the late 1880s) was targeted aggressively at 'reclaiming' individual converts to Christianity or Islam. It was a strategy which had particular resonance within the highly competitive context of Punjab, where Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were seen increasingly as separate constituencies within a narrowly defined corridor of politics in which numbers - majorities and minorities - were perceived as indicators of dominance. Even within this context, *shuddhi* as conversion was controversial amongst middle class Hindus, because it focused attention on the status of caste as an indicator of Hindu identity. What, after all, defined a believer in Hinduism, other than their caste status? How could a convert be perceived as a Hindu, if he or she had no caste?

In terms of Dayananda's creed, these questions could be answered with a degree of surety. *Shuddhi* fits easily into the logic of merit-based *varna*, in that converted individuals would be assigned to their appropriate *varna* on the basis of their knowledge and practice of 'pure' Hinduism. This was of course only a theoretical position in the late 1870s and 1880s. What the Arya Samaj could provide, however, was the Samaj Mandir, an institutional focus which was not defined by caste. It constituted the material representation of the converts' new religious community, as well as a place to worship and to study.

From the early 1890s, Arya-led *shuddhi* ceremonies incorporated significant new characteristics. First, the practice of individual ceremonies was gradually superseded by multiple or mass purifications. Secondly, the subjects of *shuddhi* ceremonies were increasingly low-caste Hindus or untouchables, as opposed to Christians or Muslims.<sup>33</sup> The emphasis moves away from the notion of converting those 'lost' to other religions, and towards the notion of improving the predicament of groups nominally associated with Hinduism, by investing them with twice-born caste status.

The shift in emphasis towards the mass purification of low caste communities was a significant move towards the idea of reform as addressing the concept of Hinduism itself in a globalised context. It enabled Samajis to point to the practical application of the Swami's vision of a reorganised, streamlined religion, with purified low caste communities being assigned twice-born status in accordance with the idea of merit-based *varna*. For some (radical) Aryas, this was both a reversion to the original themes of Dayananda's creed, and a preventative measure in the battle against proselytising religions, in that the status of low caste groups in the margins of Hindu society was

identified as a major cause of their 'defection' through mass conversions to Christianity. In broader terms, it was to become a major issue in the development of Hindu politics in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

(ii) *the Sanatani Response*: the development of a Sanatani response to perceived threats to the integrity of their religion is much less easy to trace. This is partly because of a lack of coherence in this response, as well as a lack of source material on the movement's early development. Daimia has produced some excellent work on the development of self-conscious doctrinal notions of orthodoxy in Banaras during this period. In Punjab, doctrinal considerations were less significant than the practical development of organisations; these bodies rather vaguely proclaimed themselves in defence of Hindu or *sanatana dharma* against both non-Hindus and reformers. In the Punjab Census Report for 1891, Maclagan notes the tendency of 'orthodox Hindus...to record themselves as orthodox by sect.' Whilst specifying numbers returned as brahmachari (592), smartak (123) and karm kandi (838), he then goes on to comment that

a still larger number were entered as Sanathan-dharmi, but I have not thought it worthwhile to record their numbers: the term merely implies that they belong to the 'old school', and it is generally used in contradistinction to the followers of the Arya Samaj. In Lahore City I found at the commencement of the preliminary enumeration that almost everybody who was not an Arya was being recorded as a Sanathan-dharmi, which was a view of the meaning of our 'sect-column' that would have deprived it of its main interest. The term is generally used now-a-days in contradistinction to the Aryas, and there are numerous societies and clubs which under this title do what they can to maintain the orthodox faith.<sup>34</sup>

'Not being an Arya', then, is identified in the Census Report as the common characteristic of 'sanathan-dharmis'; it is also noted that 'numerous societies and clubs...maintain(ed) the orthodox faith'. Maclagan outlines an idea manifested in modern organisational forms, which acquired meaning particularly through its articulation in opposition to the reformism of the Arya Samaj. But as has already been noted, the simple image of a reactive, conservative force is somewhat misleading. Shradha Ram, for example, was by no means a conventional campaigner. He had performed *shuddhi* ceremonies to reclaim converted Hindus, and he was certainly critical of elements of contemporary practice. He was, however, a resolute defender of contemporary caste, and made little attempt to take the predicament of low castes into account. In fact Jones suggests that he may have attempted to define Hinduism in terms of the upper three *varnas* only, perceiving lower castes and untouchables as specifically outside the boundaries of the religion.<sup>35</sup>

This was an increasingly untenable position in the early twentieth century, when numbers-based politics became more prominent in the colonial

polity. Shradha Ram's ideas are nevertheless indicative of the way in which the Sanatani position was attempting to articulate a broad notion of what it meant to be a Hindu, without confronting the diverse compulsions of this pluriform religious system. It is a position which was developed in the wider organisational context of the Bharat Dharma Mahamandal, which by the late 1880s had emerged as a central umbrella organisation for the network of Sanatana Dharma Sabhas that were by this time well established in Punjab and North Western Provinces. The programme of the Mahamandal included the preservation of Sanskrit manuscripts by placing them in 'the libraries of the Dharma Sabhas'; improving 'old indigenous Sanskrit schools' and opening new ones; appointing 'learned Brahmins...to lecture on orthodox Hindu religion'; and generally making efforts to 'refute the new propaganda of the modern Hindu sects'.<sup>36</sup> These concerns were reiterated in a report prepared for the Mahamandal during 1889 under Pandit Din Dayal Sharma's supervision. Criticising the 'ignorance' of reformers, the report advocated religious and linguistic (Sanskrit) education, the translation of some 'doctrinal books' into vernaculars, and the protection of *varna dharma*. The spirit of Hinduism was to be preserved by the 'transmission of proper custom and the prevention of bad custom'.<sup>37</sup>

By 1902, the Mahamandal claimed as its constituency 'the whole of the orthodox classes of the Hindus in India'.<sup>38</sup> Subjects of discussion at the 1900 session of the Mahamandal, held at Delhi, give a further indication of the issues that defined this orthodoxy: the worship of images; use of 'Devanagri language'; obedience due to *Pandits* and Brahmins; the lack of *Shastric* authority for widow remarriage; the need for a Sanskrit College 'in which the old Hindu laws and c. were to be taught'.<sup>39</sup> These, then, were rather broad notions of what it meant to be a sanatani or orthodox Hindu. Most significantly, there is no indication of specific doctrinal authority which would indicate a particular structure of authority in the religion. The idea of sanatani consolidation, then, was characterised by a judicious lack of focus.

## V. Defining Approaches to the Organisation of Hinduism

The way in which the variant approaches of reformists and non-reformists to the organisation of Hinduism was articulated is exemplified by the publication of a pamphlet entitled 'An Old Hindu's Hope' in Calcutta in 1889. This pamphlet complains of the disorganised nature of Hindu society, fuelled by caste and doctrinal antagonisms. As a remedy, it advocates unity 'under the banner inscribed with the words *Iswara o Matribhum*', God and Motherland. Unity should be given a material form through the organisation of a Maha Hindu Samiti, in which 'no sectarian religious discussion will be allowed. Only subjects relating to the religious rights and privileges of Hindus in general will be deemed legitimate subjects...'. The pamphlet then goes on to list some such subjects: the promotion of Hindi and Devanagri, the protection of cows, the promotion of swadeshi and the establishment of a Sanskrit University.

Discussion of social questions, on the other hand, would be 'totally avoided', apart from those 'relating to sanitation, temperance, and education'.<sup>40</sup> The Maha Hindu Samiti, then, is presented as a means of binding together Hindus under a common banner. Consensual issues would form the basis of the Samiti's work, and neither 'sectarian religious interests' nor 'social questions' would be allowed to disrupt this work.

The Lahore-based *Tribune* reported on the pamphlet on 18 May 1889. The paper interprets the proposition to avoid 'sectarian religious discussion' and exclude social issues not as a means of promoting unity, but rather as rendering the Maha Samiti 'altogether objectless':

We should have seen some meaning in Old Hindu's proposals if he instead of practically excluding all religious questions and formally excluding all social questions, had made them the principal questions to be dealt with by his Maha Samiti. Such questions the National Congress cannot discuss, nor can Hindus, Mahomedans and Christians discuss such questions together. Such objects could only give a Hindu National Congress a *raison d'etre*; and we doubt not by discussing religious and social issues we could gradually introduce reform in the Hindu religious and social practices.

The *Tribune* does see a role for a pan-Hindu organisation, which it articulates in the style of the Indian National Congress. The objective of this organisation, however, should be precisely to address the issues which are excluded in the objectives of the Maha Hindu Samiti. Here, then, is a divergent view of the perceived route to the organisation of Hinduism expressed in the language of reform.

The difference in approach here is crucial to an understanding of the dynamics of Hindu politics as it developed in the twentieth century. The *Tribune's* approach, which we may relate to that of the Arya Samaj, meant working towards a *vertical* restructuring of society. Hinduism would be unified by means of an overhaul which would see the gradual diminution of the oppressive elements of the structure, bringing it progressively into line with a specific doctrinal vision of Hindu identity - as we have seen, *shuddhi* was to develop into a practical means of achieving this overhaul. 'Old Hindu's' approach, which we may relate to that developing in Sanatana Dharma Sabhas and especially the Bharat Dharma Mahamandal, had no doctrinal source. Indeed, its success depended on the *relegation* of doctrine to a position of secondary importance, as doctrinal difference was precisely what the idea of a pan-Hindu orthodoxy could not confront. Instead, it focused on a kind of *horizontal* binding together of the existing structure, driven by the notion that contemporary Hindu society constituted a kind of natural or organic order. Increasingly, this approach demanded some form of recognition for low castes, untouchables and women as integral features of this society. As the position developed in the twentieth century, this recognition was accompanied by a

commitment to an improvement of their conditions, but not a change of their status in relation to the rest of Hindu society.

The different approaches can be schematised as on the following page:

*Threat perceived as:*

Reformist (Arya) - A

Christian missionary activity, esp. amongst low castes (S; also reformist attacks on caste, ritual etc)

*Rationale:*

Missionaries (S; and reformers) were successful because

- (i) disorganisation: Hinduism was unable to produce a collective response because of the proliferation of subcastes (A)/ erosion of brahman authority (S).
- (ii) oppression: corrupt power of brahman castes (A)/lack of respect for brahman authority (S) alienated marginal groups, rendering them susceptible to Christian claims re. equality before God etc.

Both these factors underpinned by a subtext of the degeneration of Hinduism in the modern world.

Non-reformist (Sanatani) - S

*Response:*

The proposition of a vertical restructuring of Hindu society: oppressive elements of the caste system would be gradually eradicated through the re-introduction of merit-based varna.

The proposition of a horizontal 'binding together' of Hindu society: all groups should recognise the value of their own position, and respect the position of other groups, in the overall whole of Hinduism.

*Theoretical legitimization:*

Based on Dayananda's interpretation of *varnashtanamadharm* and the objective accessibility of a Vedic 'canon'.

No doctrinal source; approach predicated on the idea of Hinduism as an organic whole

*Practical application:*

Reforming activities in general (e.g. education, expansion of Arya Samaj), the process of shuddhi, or purification/reclamation of outcasts, low castes, untouchables.

reforming/consolidating activities in general. Increasingly, respect for low castes, untouchables, women accompanied by commitment to improvement of conditions, but no change of status in relation to Hindu society. Realisation of the organic whole sought through creation of representative bodies as the 'voice of Hinduism'.

Despite the divergence evident in the 'Old Hindu's Hope' example, there is a point of commonality which needs to be noted. This is that in both cases, the putative Samiti was cast as representing the interests of Hindus as a homogeneous group, recognisable within the framework of the colonial state. In political terms, we might project this group as a kind of latent Hindu constituency. In the early twentieth century, the whole area of representation was to become the site of struggle between the two approaches, horizontal and vertical, as both sought to define the constituency of Hindus in consonance with the differing ideas of organisation.

#### **VI. The Hindu Sabha Movement and the First Hindu Conference**

The Hindu Conference in Lahore in October 1909 represents the culmination of the first phase of what might be termed pan-Hindu politics in the colonial milieu. The conference was conceived as a public demonstration of the unity of Hindus in Punjab, and it built on the development of a network of Hindu Sabhas across the region from 1906 onwards. These Sabhas consisted of 'the cream of the Arya, Brahmo, Theosophist, Sikh, Sanatanist Societies...'.<sup>41</sup> Their principal aim was to 'protect the interests of the Hindus by stimulating in them the feelings of self-respect, self-help and mutual co-operation so that by a combined effort there would be some chance of promoting the moral, intellectual, social and material welfare of the individuals of which the nation is composed.' The first significant Sabha was established in Lahore, at a meeting held on 4 August 1906. This meeting framed a series of objectives:

1. To promote brotherly feelings amongst the various sections of the Hindu community;
2. To help destitute and disabled Hindus;
3. To act as Trustees for charitable, religious, educational and other purposes of such properties as may be entrusted to the Sabha;
4. To improve the moral, intellectual and material condition of the Hindus;
5. Generally to protect, promote and represent the interests of the Hindu community.<sup>42</sup>

Shortly afterwards, these were supplemented by a sixth objective: 'To help the establishment of similar Sabhas in other important towns of India'.<sup>43</sup> I have quoted all six objectives of the Lahore Sabha because I believe they indicate remarkably well the somewhat unfocused trajectory of the Sabha movement. Beyond the desire to expand, it is difficult to extrapolate any definite programme of action from them. Despite the fact that the Arya Samaj was influential in setting up the Sabha, then, the Lahore objectives appear to indicate a preoccupation with the idea of horizontal organisation: the need to bind together, to 'protect, promote and represent', whilst avoiding any action disruptive of established social practice.

The Lahore Sabha was followed by similar organisations established at Multan, Sialkot, Gujranwala and Lyallpur.<sup>44</sup> The common theme was collaboration: inaugural meetings were attended by the 'heads of all sections' coming together to 'work with co-operation on a single platform'.<sup>45</sup> The idea, then, was to create a conglomeration of organisations which together would form a spectrum of religious affiliation. As long as the spectrum presented a coherent image, it could claim to 'represent the interests of the Hindu community.' The constituency of Hindus was created by binding together in one organisation a series of existing organisations which purported to represent the various components of this larger constituency. One direct result of this formula was that *sanatana dharma* emerged as central to the coherence of the Sabha movement. Projecting a spectrum of Hinduism meant providing a strategically central position to orthodoxy, with its implication of the largest constituency of Hindus. *Sanatana dharma* had by the turn of the century become entrenched as a signifier of this orthodoxy, represented by the Sanatana Dharma Sabhas and the Bharat Dharma Mahamandal (note the BDM's 1902 claim to 'represent the whole of the orthodox classes of the Hindus in India'). Consequently these organisations were powerful movers in the character of unified Hinduism projected by the Sabha movement; it was not a straightforward Arya initiative, as has sometimes been suggested.<sup>46</sup>

The implicit tensions over approaches towards the organisation of Hinduism this combined involvement implied were brought to the surface in the months leading up to the 1909 Conference. Perhaps not surprisingly given its strategic significance in this tension, the issue at stake was *shuddhi*. In the district town of Hoshiarpur, the local Arya Samaj performed a *shuddhi* ceremony during April 1909 to purify a group of Chamars. This purification of a particularly untouchable group provoked a vicious backlash orchestrated by the local Sanatana Dharma Sabha, which led to extensive comment in the Punjabi press. The Lahore-based *Akhbar-i-Am* published a letter from Bawa Narain Singh of Hoshiarpur, which announced the outcasting of local Samaj members with the ominous statement: 'Aryas should begin by sinking their own wells or they will die from thirst.'<sup>47</sup> The Hoshiarpur-based *Tilak* reported that a group of Aryas who had gone to fetch water were 'given a severe beating by about 40 Sanatanists', and also that a secret society called the Sudhar Sabha had been established 'to parade the streets in groups of from five to ten persons and...belabour with lathis solitary Samajists they may meet'.<sup>48</sup> This hostility towards the Samaj was also expressed on a more general level, and collaboration in the Sabha movement was called into question. The *Hindu Sanatan Dharam Gazette*, for example, launched a bitter invective against the Samaj, concluding that 'Sanatanists should have nothing to do with Hindu Sabhas, the Punjabi organisers of which consist mostly of Aryas,' and that 'these bodies (i.e. the Sabhas) will prove extremely injurious to the interests of Hindus.'<sup>49</sup>



The response of the Arya Samaj is an interesting reflection of the dilemma it faced in its relationship with Sanatanis during this period. The Hoshiarpur Samaj immediately appealed to the powerful Lahore Samaj for help in its predicament. The Lahore Samaj then attempted to use the new Hindu Sabha machinery to effect a rapprochement.<sup>50</sup> This is indicative of the Aryas' commitment to the idea of wider organisation, and to the Sabha movement as a means of diffusing tension. But it was not the only form of response. Two or three weeks after the Hoshiarpur incident, Lajpat Rai wrote an article in the *Arya Gazette* which was far more openly confrontational. Rai attacked caste as 'one of the chief causes of the national and social ruin which has overtaken Hindus,' qualifying this by noting that 'in olden times the (*varna*) system was not characterised by its present rigidity,' thus demonstrating his adhesion to Dayananda's creed. He then appealed to his fellow Aryas to continue their *shuddhi* work, 'bearing in mind that the seed which they are sowing is being sown by order of God,' and predicted that in time 'the Sanatanists, who thirst for the blood of the Aryas, will...offer prayers for the latter.'<sup>51</sup> This then presents an alternative view of the development of Hindu unity, in which the reformist principles of the Arya Samaj are ascendent, and in particular the transformation of Hindu society constitutes the basis for future unity. It is clear from these reactions to Hoshiarpur that *shuddhi* was an issue at the heart of the debate over the nature of Hindu unity, Hindu organisation. Against this vibrant, sometimes violent backdrop of ideological confrontation, then, the first Hindu Conference was held in October.

Although the Conference was not held until the 21st and 22nd of October, from early in that month the press began setting the tone. In particular, the Arya daily the *Punjabee* began collecting comments from the national press which indicated that the Sabha movement 'has made its infant existence, albeit devoid of any achievements, felt'.<sup>52</sup> For example, it quoted admiringly from the *Reis and Rayyat*, a Calcutta English language weekly, which had suggested a (somewhat vague) definition of the parameters of Hindu unity in anticipation of the Conference: 'the Hindus scattered all over the Indian peninsula are divided into various forms. But there is the bedrock of uniformity in the belief in the Vedas and some other essential dogmas'.<sup>53</sup> A few days later, an approving article in the *Bengalee* was extensively quoted. This article compares the unity of the Sabha movement to the fractious recent history of Congress nationalism: 'While the echoes of the Congress controversy continue to reach our ears, the great Hindu community of the Punjab are silently maturing their plans and are slowly but steadily moving forward towards the formation of a great Hindu federation.' The *Bengalee* also had a suggestion for the defining principle of unification in this federation: 'Race, and not religion, ought to be the guiding principle of the organisation. For the Hindu is the most tolerant of human beings and the Hindu faith the most comprehensive that one can think of, embracing within its fold the believers in cults and creeds of the widest divergence'.<sup>54</sup> Although it may not have rung true in Hoshiarpur, this idea of tolerant 'unity in diversity', based on a range of unifying principles, was

the overriding theme of pre-Conference comment. A confirmation of this unity, it appeared, was the most significant, the most sought after objective that the Conference could aspire to. As the *Punjabee's* Special Conference issue commented, 'This is the first time, we believe, in the history of modern India, that the Hindus as a body have sought to give expression to their communal consciousness, as distinguished from the detached movement of sects and castes'.<sup>55</sup>

The importance of *sanatana dharma* to the efficacy of this unity is indicated by the allocation of posts at the 1909 Conference. Although the prominent Arya and key ideologue of the Sabha movement Lal Chand was Chair of the Reception Committee, the Presidency was offered to Sir C.P. Chatterjee, 'a patron of the Sanatana Dharma Sabha'.<sup>56</sup> As well as his association with orthodoxy, the non-Punjabi Chatterjee signified the importance of communal identity over regional identity; he was 'a Hindu first and a Bengali afterwards'.<sup>57</sup>

The Conference was attended by some 3000 persons on each day. Although it was a provincial Conference, delegates were also drawn from the North West Frontier Province, with 'some visitors from UP and other parts of the country'. The importance of Sanatani sensibilities is again signified by the careful segregation of participants in the *pandal* according to caste.<sup>58</sup> The 'unity' of Hinduism was not to be threatened by delegates' anxieties over potential pollution through the proximity of other delegates.

Lal Chand's address to the Conference indicates again the significance of unity to the legitimacy of the movement.. He began by noting that 'numbers carry great weight in this age...and help materially in deciding the fate of any struggle. The progress of a community is now as much measured by its numerical strength as by its moral and economic achievements'.<sup>59</sup> Significantly, he then went on to urge that for Hindus defining this community was simply a question of articulating it on the level of colonial politics. Although he did refer to the 'needless corrosive differences' of sub-caste in his critique of contemporary Hindu society, as any good Arya of the time would, his solution was based firmly in the realm of political representation. 'All that is needed', he says, 'is to advocate the interests of the community at large and the moment we realise this germinal idea, this sacred obligation, ...all self-imposed differences and schisms will vanish away like chaff.' As soon as Hinduism is presented as united politically, then, social divisiveness will disappear. The image of a politically-organised Hinduism assumes the status of principal objective in Chand's vision of the Sabha movement.

Significantly, the nature of this image of organised Hinduism is unequivocally horizontal. Commenting on the predicament of low castes and untouchables, Lal Chand states:

It is not pressed that the feet be given the status of the head, but it is certainly enjoined that their position as essential parts of the 'sacred' living body be duly recognised, that they be not neglected and do receive

their proper share of nourishment, education and enlightenment, to enable them to perform their own function to the best advantage of the community and the body politic.<sup>60</sup>

No change in status for low castes and untouchables, then, but an entitlement to respect for their position and role in society. This is a key indicator of the horizontal approach to the organisation of Hinduism.

Given this keynote address, it is not surprising that in the Conference resolutions, consensual issues were prominent: the promotion of Sanskrit and Hindi, support for cow protection and *ayurvedic* medicine, the promotion of 'brotherly feelings' among Hindus and a commitment 'to consolidate and strengthen the sense of common nationality'. Several resolutions, however, were not put before the Conference, ostensibly through lack of time. These included Arya issues such as support for widows, low caste advancement and, most particularly, the removal of sub-caste distinctions. The idea that these resolutions were dropped not due to lack of time but due to 'strife apprehended over them between the orthodox and the unorthodox' was denied at length after the Conference, but undoubtedly the need for consensus was a prominent factor, and the *Punjabee* rounded off its denial of the above with a reminder that the main objective was 'union as opposed to division'.<sup>61</sup>

The course of the first Hindu Conference, then, indicates the development of debates over the pattern of organisation in turn of the century Hinduism. As they became more associated with the idea of a Hindu constituency and its representation, ideas about the organisation of Hinduism became increasingly constrained by the need to present a united front. This situation naturally favoured the development of horizontal organisation as the key indicator of the Hindu community, despite the active participation of Arya Samajis, and the latent presence of tensions related to the issues of caste and other reforms.

## VII. Conclusion

The 1909 Hindu Conference by no means marked the end of tensions over the way Hinduism was articulated and defined within the Sabha and later Mahasabha movement. In the nineteen twenties particularly, Hindu politics in the Mahasabha was marked by key debates in which Aryas like Swami Shradhanand looked to install a more vertical restructuring of Hindu society as Mahasabha policy. This debate was linked intimately to the development of the *sangathan*, or organisation, movement across the spectrum of Hindu politics.<sup>62</sup> In many ways, however, the 1909 Conference set the parameters for these debates, with confrontational positions being consistently subject to compromise on the basis of the need for unity. What I have described as a position of horizontal organisation emerged as a key signifier of the Hindu community, and this position is clearly evident, for example, in the ideology of *Hindutva* developed by V.D. Savarkar.<sup>63</sup> In this work, the knotty problem of

how to accommodate the aspirations of lower castes within Hinduism is overridden by a grand vision of all sects and castes as part of a common and continuous lineage. Whilst reformist ideas were certainly influential in the development of this kind of approach - particularly in the extension of the idea of amelioration of the position of low castes and untouchables in society - there was ultimately a significant disjuncture apparent in the way the community of Hindus was conceptualised.

The disjuncture is that between horizontal and vertical organisation. I have demonstrated that certain key elements of Dayananda's creed, and its extension in practice by the Arya Samaj, meant that this organisation had the potential to effect a vertical restructuring of Hindu society, by transforming the nature of caste and its relationship to religiosity. In contrast, Sanatana Dharmis sought a horizontal 'binding together' of Hindu society, which implicitly accepted the established position of caste within it. These patterns of organisation within turn of the century Punjabi Hinduism, I would suggest, provided a significant model for the development of ideas about Hinduism and politics within a particular section of Indian society; ideas which still have a high degree of relevance in the articulation of Hindu politics today.

### Notes

1. V. Dalmia, *Nationalisation of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth Century Benaras* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5.
2. S. Bayly, 'Hindu modernisers and the public arena: indigenous critiques of caste in colonial India' in W. Radice (ed.), *Swami Vivekananda and the modernisation of Hinduism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 135.
3. J.T.F. Jordens, *Dayananda Saraswati: His Life and Ideas* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978), 166.
4. K. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th Century Punjab* (Delhi: Manohar, 1976), p. 36.
5. Jones, *Arya Dharm*, 37; Bayly, 'Hindu modernisers and the public arena', 135.
6. See, for example, D. Gold, 'Organised Hinduisms: From Vedic Truth to Hindu Nation', in M. Marty and R. Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 531-593; and C. Jaffrelot, 'The Genesis and Development of Hindu Nationalism in the Punjab: from the Arya Samaj to the Hindu Sabha 1875-1910', *Indo-British Review*, 21, 1 [1993], 3-39.
7. Jones, *Arya Dharm*, 111.
8. Dalmia, *Nationalisation of Hindu Traditions*, 7.
9. R. Thapar, 'Syndicated Moksha?' in *Seminar* 313 [1985], 14-22, 22.
10. Plurality should be emphasised here; there was no single movement towards the expression of Hinduism as a given entity. This is a point which has recently been drawn out by Vasudha Dalmia: 'there were, in fact, many points of departure for the variant representations of Hinduism, as it was being

- articulated in the second half of the nineteenth century, each of which claimed equal validity.' See Dalmia, 'The Only Real Religion of the Hindus: Vaisnava Self-representation in the Late Nineteenth Century', in V. Dalmia and H. von Stietencron (eds.), *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity* (New Delhi: Sage, 1995, 176-210, 176. For further accounts of the development of the term 'Hinduism' into a meaningful signifier of a particular religious tradition, see R. Frykenberg 'Constructions of Hinduism at the Nexus of History and Religion' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, 3 (1993), 523-550; von Stietencron, 'Religious Configurations in Pre-Muslim India and the Modern Concept of Hinduism' in Dalmia and von Stietencron (eds.), *Representing Hinduism*, 51 – 81; and Sontheimer and Kulke (eds.), *Hinduism Reconsidered* (Delhi: Manohar, 1989).
11. See his 'Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power beyond the Raj', in P. van der Veer & C. Breckenridge, *Orientalism and Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) 76 - 133.
  12. See D. Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 38-9.
  13. Both quoted in T. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 136
  14. See J. Zavos, *Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 30-4
  15. Jai Chand's statement is quoted in *Sat Dharm Pracharak* 8 October 1897. Gopi Nath's comment comes in the July 1897 issue of the *Sanatan Dharm Gazette*. Both are quoted in *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers published in Punjab 1897* (India Office Collection, London)
  16. B.B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 307.
  17. *ibid.*, 106
  18. *Census of India 1881 Vol. I*, 17.
  19. *Census of India 1891 Vol. XIX Part I*, 102.
  20. *ibid.*, 89-90
  21. D.B. Forrester, *Caste and Christianity: Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India* (London: Curzon Press, 1979), 69.
  22. *Census of India 1891 Vol. XIX Part I*, 97.
  23. *ibid.*, 89
  24. Dalmia, *Nationalisation of Hindu Traditions*, 7.
  25. See Jones, *Arya Dharm*; Jordens, *Dayananda Saraswati*.
  26. See Dayananda (Ed. by C. Bharadwaja), *Light of Truth, or and English Translation of the Satyarth Prakash*. (New Delhi: Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, 1975), 130-8.
  27. Dayananda, *Light of Truth*, 725-6, 733.

28. On this flexible Hindu canon, see A. Eschmann, 'Religion, Reaction and Change: the Role of Sects in Hinduism' in Sontheimer and Kulke (eds.) *Hinduism Reconsidered*, 108-120, 114.
29. Dayananda, *Light of Truth*, 103
30. R.K. Ghai, *The Shuddhi Movement in India* (New Delhi: Commonwealth, 1990]), 45-6.
31. See K. Jones, 'Two Sanatan Dharma Leaders and Swami Vivekananda', in Radice (ed.) *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, 224-243, 226.
32. *Ibid*, 228-9.
33. Jordens, 'Reconversion to Hinduism, The Shuddhi of the Arya Samaj', in G. Oddie (ed.), *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern Times* (London: Curzon Press, 1977), 145-162, 150; see also Ghai, *The Shuddhi Movement in India*, 56.
34. *Census of India 1891 Vol. XIX Part I*, 171-2
35. 'Two Sanatan Dharma Leaders and Swami Vivekananda', 231.
37. *Bharat Bandhu* (Aligarh) 28 December 1888; quoted in *Selections from Vernacular Newspapers: North Western Provinces, Oudh, Central Provinces, Central India and Rajputana*, 1889.
37. See Jones, 'Two Sanatan Dharma Leaders and Swami Vivekananda', 235-7.
38. Letter from Rai Baroda K. Lahiri, Secretary, Bharat Dharma Mahamandal, Aligarh, to Chief Secretary to the United Provinces Government, 31 March 1902; Home Department, Public, A Progs, May 1902, no. 260 (NAI).
39. Extract from CSB Abstract No.35, dated 5 December 1900, quoted in Foreign Department, Internal, B Progs, June 1902, Nos 112-114 (NAI)
40. Quoted in *Native Opinion* 16 May 1889
41. *Tribune*, 24 August 1906
42. *ibid*.
43. *Tribune* 25 August 1906
44. See accounts in *Tribune* throughout September 1906; many of these Sabhas were established in the wake of a provincial tour by Pandit Ram Bhaj Datta and his wife Sarala Devi. Datta was an Arya of the 'College faction', who in 1907 was to become the first President of the Punjab-based Bharat Shuddhi Sabha, established to 'devote itself exclusively to (shuddhi) work' and claiming to represent 'the various Hindu societies' and so have the sympathy of 'the entire Hindu population'. Passages are from a speech delivered by Datta in Allahabad in 1911, quoted in Ghai, *The Shuddhi Movement in India*, 80.
45. *Tribune* 8 September, 2 September 1906
46. See, for example, Jaffrelot, 'The Genesis and Development of Hindu Nationalism in the Punjab'.
47. *Akhbar-i-Am*, 5 May 1909; see *Punjab Native Newspaper Reports* (PNNR) No.19 of 1909.
48. *Tilak* 6 May 1909; see PNNR No. 21 of 1909.

49. *Hindu Sanatana Dharam Gazette*, 28 April 1909; see PNNR No. 19 of 1909; Aryas are described as 'the killers of kine', and 'the character of their women is open to objection'; the *Satyarth Prakash* is described as 'a sinful and filthy book'.
50. See *ibid*: '...the Lahore Samaj intends bringing pressure to bear on the Sanatan Dharam Sabha, Hoshiarpur, through the Hindu Sabha'.
51. *Arya Gazette* 20 May 1909, quoted in PNNR No. 21 of 1909.
52. *Punjabee*, 7 October 1909.
53. *Punjabee* 5 October 1909.
54. *Punjabee*, 9 October 1909
55. *Punjabee*, 23 October 1909.
56. *Punjabee*, 4 November 1909
57. *Punjabee*, 26 October 1909
58. *ibid*: 'Every incomer was taken to the place specially reserved for gentlemen of his class by an obliging and energetic volunteer'.
59. *Punjabee*, 23 October 1909
60. *ibid*.
61. *Punjabee*, 30 October 1909
62. See Zavos, *Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in Colonial India*, 169-77
63. See *ibid*., 177-83

## **Allegories of difference and identity: Reflections on religious boundaries and 'popular' religion**

**Anne Murphy**  
*Columbia University*

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This article examines the allegories and arguments within Harjot Oberoi's *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (1994), as a part of a larger effort to reexamine religious identities and boundaries in Sikh and related traditions. The article presents evidence that complicates a conflation of Hindu and Sikh textual history and identity issues, and examines aspects of popular religion that question the rhetorical positioning of 'religious boundaries', on one hand, and the 'hybrid' or 'syncretic', on the other. The author argues for the necessity of building on Oberoi's work in his inclusion of folk or popular practices in an examination of religious identity, with careful attention to the ways in which such identity is articulated in multiple ways through various means. 'Religious identity', as such, thus needs to be reexamined, as does a simple designation of the 'syncretic'. Through such a critical examination of the terms and allegories engaged, religious boundaries and religious subjectivities might be more fruitfully examined and theorized in future work.

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### **Introduction**

It is no longer revolutionary to argue that an academic text is a product of different and sometimes conflicting discourses, some quite far afield from its overt disciplinary and historiographical concerns. In 1986, the anthropologist James Clifford noted that ethnographic texts are 'inescapably allegorical' and that the act of ethnographic writing itself 'enacts a redemptive Western allegory'.<sup>1</sup> Along similar lines, Hayden White has argued that 'history' is fundamentally constructed and constituted according to the conventions and structure of narrative literary form.<sup>2</sup> Such attention to the ways in which literary genres and 'allegorical' commitments shape the academic text reflects empirical as well as theoretical concerns, because some of the allegorical meanings and narrative structures employed in the production of such texts can shape the way data is made



meaningful, at the most general level. This is a vital concern both for those concerned with theory and with 'facts'.

The text I will consider here is Harjot Oberoi's *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (1994).<sup>3</sup> This valuable work brings together a diverse set of materials, primarily categorizable as 'folk'/'popular' and 'elite'.<sup>4</sup> It is unique in its use of tract literature, newspaper accounts, and ethnographic literature to reconstruct a religious 'world view' in nineteenth-century Punjab that consists of a diversity of perspectives and practices. This task is of utmost importance for understanding not only popular traditions, but also the development of religious identities in Punjab. Oberoi was clearly aware of this when he wrote his book. Along these lines, the work is tied into a larger political argument regarding religious identity in North India – its provenance and meanings – and 'identity', in general. The text thus reflects a carefully constructed allegory about difference and identity in South Asia and beyond. This essay will point out some of the ways Oberoi constructs his allegory and argument, and the problems that arise in both. In this effort, I am following up on efforts by Arvind-raj Singh, in this journal, to examine the methodological concerns of Oberoi's text. I have returned to the work so many years after it was published in order to address additional evidence regarding both the Sikh tradition and popular religion, and to call attention to the ways in which Oberoi's significant contribution can be built upon to further explore popular religious beliefs and practices, and their relationship with the development of Sikh and other identities.<sup>6</sup>

### The argument

Oberoi states his goal as to question the ways in which a 'cohesive community of believers'<sup>7</sup> is formed – whether we call that community 'Muslim,' 'Hindu,' or 'Sikh'. Oberoi does this by focusing on the Singh Sabha movement and its role in the shaping of Sikh identity in the nineteenth century, and by attempting to reconstruct a pre-Tat Khalsa Sikh identity that challenges modern understandings of what 'Sikhism', as an autonomous tradition, is.

To state the argument briefly, Oberoi sees a major disjuncture between modern Sikhism and the Sikhism of the early nineteenth century. In characterizing pre-modern Sikhism, Oberoi draws on his interests in folk religion and practice and argues that those we would now call 'Sikhs' were undefined as a group:

In the absence of a centralized church and an attendant religious hierarchy, heterogeneity in religious beliefs, plurality of rituals, and diversity of lifestyles were freely acknowledged... Far from a single Sikh identity, most Sikhs moved in and out of multiple identities grounded in local,

regional, religious, and secular realities. Consequently, the boundaries between what could be seen as the 'Sikh' 'great' and 'little' tradition were highly blurred; several competing definitions of who constituted a Sikh were possible.<sup>8</sup>

With the formation and growth of the Singh Sabha (particularly that of Lahore) and the ascendancy of 'new elites' in the late nineteenth century, a great rupture or epistemic shift, took place: 'The older pluralist paradigm of Sikh faith was displaced forever and replaced by a highly uniform Sikh identity, the one we know today as modern Sikhism'.<sup>9</sup> This rupture, resulting in modern Sikhism, is the final of a series of ruptures which have characterized the development of what we call Sikhism over time.<sup>10</sup>

At the center of Oberoi's reconstruction of nineteenth century Sikh life are two elements: folk or popular religion and what he calls *sanatan* (eternal) Sikhism. According to Oberoi's description, the latter represents a rapprochement between the Khalsa and Sahajdhari Sikh identities articulated in the eighteenth centuries and was, he claims, the 'great code' of Sikhism before the modern period. Oberoi bases his usage of 'Sanatan' (a problematic term in this context) on its use by Sardar Gulab Singh in a public lecture in 1886.<sup>11</sup> He uses it to describe a set of beliefs and practices – indeed, a 'world view'<sup>12</sup> – which was inherently inclusive and diverse, and which did not locate itself within an exclusive 'Sikh' identity; this was dramatically different from the world view of the Tat Khalsa, which represented a dramatic epistemic shift in the language and experience of being 'Sikh'. In particular, Sanatan identity was not predicated on a separation from Hindu identity; adherents of this system of thought and practice often saw themselves as both 'Sikh' and 'Hindu'.

Oberoi also focuses on popular religion, drawing on mostly British administrative sources (e.g. District Gazetteers and works by Rose, Crooke, and Temple) to explicate the alternative religious worlds open to all in the Punjab, Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim alike. He argues that the religious boundaries assumed by current constructions of religious identity were not relevant in early nineteenth century Punjab and prior, in which Sanatan Sikhism and folk traditions held sway, and that it was only with the coming of Sikh reform in the end of the nineteenth century that a dramatic shift in ideology and practice occurred. Indeed, Oberoi argues: 'For over three hundred years the chequered history of the Sikh movement had not generated an all-embracing definition of a Sikh. The Tat Khalsa, through a series of innovations, purges and negations, supplied this definition in less than three decades'.<sup>13</sup> Most scholars accept that Sikhism was redefined and in many senses recreated in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries; what is unique to Oberoi's narrative is his characterization of a pre-modern Sikhism as an alternative to this modern construct.

Oberoi's work represents a sophisticated attempt to come to terms with the problem of identity and its formation, and is exemplary in its explication of the folk/popular as a part of his reexamination religious identity. His use of popular traditions and Sanatan Sikhism as the rhetorical 'Other' of the Khalsa is key to his argument, for it provides him with alternatives to what he sees as a dominant and exclusive Khalsa identity. Yet, this is also where major problems arise. In the remainder of this essay, I will (1) present some preliminary problems with aspects of Oberoi's data and its interpretation, and (2) question the effectiveness of his approach for understanding both folk traditions and the Sikhs. By pursuing this, I do not mean to dismiss Oberoi's substantial contribution to the study of religion in Punjab and the historiography of the nineteenth century. In particular, he has brought Sikh Studies to a wider audience than it knew before in the Western academy. The ways in which his theoretical and political allegories undermine his work, however, must be considered and may help us to see where future work can be done.

### Selected problems

Oberoi asks us to reconsider the construction of a category of 'Sikhism' or 'Sikh' by analogy with problems that have been identified by a variety of scholars in relation to the construction of the category of 'Hinduism'.<sup>14</sup> This is faulty, however, for two reasons. The first of these relates to the status and development of the *Adi Granth*. Oberoi begins his conflation of issues related to 'Hindu' (as a category or term) and 'Sikh' in his characterization of 'people of the book' (exemplified by Judaism and Islam) against Hinduism or 'Indic traditions'— the Sikhs, in his view, are fundamentally tied to the latter.<sup>15</sup> Yet, Sikh textual traditions do not simply reflect larger Indic trends, in two ways. First of all, there is evidence that the written text became central to the community early on. The conventional date of the formation of *Adi Granth* is 1603/4: the date of the *Kartarpur Pothis*. These *pothis* form the basis of the later canonized text of the *Adi Granth*. The work of G. S. Mann has focused on the 1570 precursor to the *Kartarpur Pothis*; this posits the formation of the Sikhs into a 'textual community' farther back in the history of the *panth* (community).<sup>16</sup> Mann has argued that the writing of the text may have actually begun during Guru Nanak's time, thus reflecting a similar orientation to the book as that of the Middle Eastern traditions of Judaism and Islam.<sup>17</sup> Whether or not there was such a text at the time of Nanak, it is clear that the written text took on a significance to the Sikh community as early as the late 16th century. This is quite different from otherwise largely parallel *sant* and *bhakti* (devotional) tradition(s) of the same period.

Secondly, Oberoi's analysis of the formation of the *Adi Granth* in relation to other medieval *pothis* is flawed: first, because medieval manuscript compilations often did reflect sectarian interests, and secondly, because the *Adi Granth* did this to a larger extent than others. Extant *pothis* like the *Adi Granth* are not common; when they do exist, in general, *pothis* and *granth*s in other contexts did reflect at least limited sectarian intervention. This is clearly shown, for example, in the formation of the Kabir canon. Three major collections of Kabir's corpus form the core of early material available in manuscript form: (1) one is integrated into the *Adi Granth*; (2) one is found in Rajasthan, among the textual traditions of the *Dadu Panth*, and was compiled in two main collections (the *Panchvani* and *Sarvangi*), in the early part of the seventeenth century; and (3) one is the *Bijak*, the manuscript tradition associated with the Kabir Panth, a major transmitter of the Kabir tradition in North India, which has been dated to late in the seventeenth century although no manuscripts from this early a time have been found.<sup>18</sup> According to scholars who have compared the three collections, each has a characteristic flavor, with the clearest distinctions between the *Bijak*, on one hand, and the other two collections, on the other.<sup>19</sup> The Kabir of the Rajasthani tradition is of a much more clearly Vaishnava nature than the *Bijak* tradition, while the *Adi Granth* collection, in turn, is in general more in keeping with Sikh doctrinal ideas in its use of bhakti terminology. The *Adi Granth* and Rajasthani collections share poems to a larger extent than either does with the *Bijak* tradition, and both feature a Kabir with many more positive descriptors of the ultimate than the *Bijak* tradition, which has significantly fewer 'traditional' bhakti terms and, according to Linda Hess, portrays a singularly independent and outspoken Kabir. What emerges through Hess' careful study of the three recensions is that there has been a distillation process which has created the Kabir found in each.

Thus, manuscript traditions in North India should not be viewed as completely lacking in sectarian interests. It is vital that we take seriously the normative categories that inform the collection of poetry and construction of manuscripts, both within the *Adi Granth* and in other textual traditions. Along these lines, J.S. Hawley has examined *saguna* (with qualities)/*nirguna* (without qualities) distinctions by looking briefly at hagiography and internal evidence in poems, and more significantly at anthologies. He concludes that in the classical bhakti period in North India (15th to 17th c), the tradition 'did see differences of theological slant, social perspective, and literary mood between nirgun and sagun poets' but that there were settings in which these distinctions were not operative.<sup>20</sup> This may seem like a minor point, but in fact it enables us to get at the meaningful categories engaged in the assessment and collection of poems. This is not to say that the distinctions we are currently familiar with have been unchanging or fixed. Hawley's earlier work has argued convincingly that the early work of the Vaishnava poet Surdas is not as

diametrically opposed to nirguna ideology as is now accepted, based on later additions to the *SurSagar*.<sup>21</sup> This can explain why Sur was included in medieval compilations focusing on nirguna poets. Yet, even as we question conventional divisions, they must be examined – and a critical examination of such sectarian interventions is all the more important in the formation of the Adi Granth. As Oberoi notes<sup>22</sup> the Adi Granth is highly edited with regard to content, and its structure makes distinctions between the creators of the hymns that reflect sectarian interests; this is not the case, to the same degree, in similarly dated manuscripts (such as the Fatehpur manuscript of 1582).<sup>23</sup> Thus, we cannot simply disregard theological and sectarian distinctions in the early bhakti period (which is relevant to early Sikhism), even as we take care not to impose them superficially.

A further problem with the conflation of issues related to the categories of 'Hindu' and 'Sikh' relates to a critique of the construction of 'Hinduism' as an overarching religious category, one that has gained an almost normative status in recent years among historians of the religions of India. Oberoi views the construction of 'Hinduism' as something imposed from the outside and argues that categories and definitions were not engaged prior to the modern period.<sup>24</sup> He extends this to the Sikh tradition as well, by analogy. Yet, most scholars who criticize 'Hinduism' as a category do not argue that there was no sense of categories in the period before the term 'Hinduism' came into common usage – namely, the nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> The argument in fact hinges on the fact that there *were* categories, but that 'Hinduism', as an over-arching umbrella, was not one of them. Thus, scholars (such as von Stietencron, Ludden, and others) have argued against the overarching concept of 'Hinduism' by arguing that the traditions now seen under the rubric of 'Hinduism', were actually a set of distinct traditions.<sup>26</sup> This view is, in fact, directly opposed to Oberoi's thesis – namely, that there were no categorical distinctions among communities in the pre-modern period. Thus, whether or not one accepts the evidence many scholars have presented that the Sikhs were a separate *panth* early on in the tradition,<sup>27</sup> it is logically possible that they were according to the argument against 'Hinduism' that Oberoi generally espouses.

Nonetheless, what is really new, and in some ways very exciting, about Oberoi's work is his attempt to describe the diverse religious worlds of early nineteenth century Punjab. Here, Oberoi brings in a wide variety of sources and questions conventional boundaries. Problems, however, arise in his tying of 'Sanatan Sikhism' and folk traditions in opposition to the Khalsa *episteme*. Oberoi describes both the Sanatan and the folk as alternative to the Khalsa, as a way of understanding Sikh tradition that allows for a kind of liberalism. Although laudable, the empirical basis for this is shaky.

Oberoi speaks of Sanatan Sikhism with unflinching praise: the tradition was so lacking in homogeneity that it left room for 'play'.<sup>28</sup> 'In brief, the ludic [of Sanatan

Sikhism] provided a rich resource of creativity, and as a result religion was not so much dreary and repetitive but rather lively and invigorating. It was able to constantly renew and change itself.<sup>29</sup> The Sanatanist approach, then, seems to be its own sort of proto-multiculturalism:

This pluralistic attitude, a sort of in-built tolerance, enabled the Sanatanists to face such phenomena as dissent, social inversions, and even the total abandonment of community norms via renunciation with great ease and grace... As a result of not belonging to a monolithic Panth, individual Sikhs enjoyed wide religious freedoms. More importantly, they had a vast terrain from which to choose their rites, rituals, and beliefs.<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately, Oberoi's own evidence calls this characterization into question. He argues that Sanatan Sikh rhetoric accepted the basic hierarchy specified by normative *varnashramadharmā*: 'for Sanatan Sikhs the caste system and its taboos had undoubtedly become an integral part of the Sikh faith, and they did all they could to enforce it.'<sup>31</sup> The 'ludic' and multi-cultural nature of this 'world view' is questionable, particularly when Tat Khalsa rhetoric (otherwise characterized as oppressive) did in fact challenge caste.<sup>32</sup> In seeming recognition of the fact that the Sanatan cannot thus stand alone in opposition to the Khalsa, Oberoi brings in folk or popular traditions, to rescue a place for the 'ludic' and for alterity in relation to the Sanatan. It is hard to accept this marriage of Sanatan and folk, given that the Sanatan tradition was 'primarily the religious universe of Sikh elites', was a 'priestly religion', and that the two (folk and Sanatan) do not share much.<sup>33</sup> The conflation of the two is necessary, however, in order to argue for an inclusive and progressive Other to the Khalsa *episteme*, regardless of the real differences between them.

It must be noted, in addition, that the use of the term 'Sanatan' in the first place is problematic. Oberoi and those who use the term after him do not adequately historicize and contextualize the term and its social and political implications. The current meaning of the term is very much a product of the late nineteenth century, when it came into common usage as part of 'Hindu' rhetoric, in opposition to the Arya Samaj.<sup>34</sup> Thus the term Sanatan was meaningful in explicitly 'Hindu' circles in the 1870s – during which time, we should note, the Singh Sabha was founded in Amritsar (1873) and Lahore (1879) – and was itself formed within the history of contestation and reform that characterizes nineteenth century religious discourse in North India. The use of the term 'Sanatan Sikhism', therefore, requires careful attention to the polemics of the nineteenth century. Without taking into account contemporary Hindu politics and polemics and their relations with Sikh counterparts, it is difficult to assess what the Sikhs of the period saw themselves as a part of – or not a part of.

I will end this discussion here, where the two major oppositions Oberoi holds up – between Hinduism and Sikhism, and between the Sanatan (with the folk added on) and the Khalsa – are, at the least, demonstrated to be problematic. These two examples are important pieces of the larger narrative Oberoi is attempting to create, focusing on hybridity and pluralism in opposition to a singular and dominating articulation of religious identity. The fact that the dichotomies he posits do not hold ground undermines this larger argument, even given the merits of bringing together popular religious practices and beliefs into a broad exploration of religious identity. The contradictions involved also have important theoretical implications.

### **Allegories and Representations of the ‘popular’**

There is much to commend in Oberoi’s attempt to bring popular traditions into a discussion of religious identity – all too often such practices are completely ignored, or seen as the irrelevant ‘corruption’ of something pure. For Oberoi, popular or folk religion offers a place to valorize hybrid and alternative identities, outside of the realm of mainstream traditions and authorities, where people can ‘voice dissent and articulate needs normally suppressed’.<sup>35</sup> Such a characterization of folk traditions as a locus for dissent is not new, and the opposition of the folk to articulated religious identities is a common trope in discussions about religious identity in South Asia. It can take many forms, both within the University setting (exemplified by Oberoi) and among the cultural elites who determine the form of the folk in mainstream culture.<sup>36</sup> The folk or popular, in these types of narrative, offers a way out: an opportunity to dismantle ‘hardened’ community definitions, and create an option for religion that does not get caught in communal divides and loyalties.

According to these uses of the popular/folk, exclusive religious identities have ‘messed up’ the idyllic syncretism of Punjabi village life, and popular traditions are represented as articulating an alternative hybrid identity that all can participate in. It seems academically problematic to talk of ‘folk’ or ‘popular’ religion – we have gone past a simple characterization of both folk and elite in most academic circles, and it is now well known that the folk has itself been constructed as ‘Other’ within colonial and elitist contexts to serve various social and political ends.<sup>37</sup> But even today, the folk and popular have retained a particularly interesting rhetorical presence in discussions about religious identity in South Asia, as an alternative to the notion of fixed identities among religious communities and as a part of broader interrogations of the development of religious/communal identity. Even more broadly, in Oberoi’s and others’ usage, this construction of the popular relates to the interrogations of identity that have been undertaken in the West in the early 1990s and since by cultural critics such as Judith Butler, Jonathan Rutherford, and Cornell

West, in which a contingent and flexible identity is asserted over and against unitary constructions.<sup>38</sup> Oberoi's orientation towards the history of the Sikhs reflects such concerns, as he uses folk traditions in order to create a hybrid and contested space.<sup>39</sup>

It is an allegory of hybridity that Oberoi espouses in his valorization of the 'hurdic' Sanatan Sikh world view, allied with the variety of discourses outlined above. Although I am committed to similar ethical and political values – namely pluralism, diversity, and the search for a theoretical position of action in relation to both – I have two allied concerns: (1) that there are problems with the evidence presented (as has been discussed previously and will be discussed further), and (2) that the larger goals of allegorical commitments like Oberoi's may actually be undermined when arguments are brought to their logical conclusions. First of all, given the empirical problems outlined in the previous section, it is clear that the materials available do not neatly divide into clear alternatives, one hybrid and inclusive, and one not. Secondly, it is imperative that we move beyond the idea of folk traditions as Other to those of the elite, by historicizing these traditions and examining the social processes that form them, in order to avoid simplistic dichotomies.<sup>40</sup> Partha Chatterjee, for example, although most commonly known for his interest in the construction of nationhood in colonial and post-colonial India, has turned to popular religious movements which question caste hegemony as expressive of a subaltern critique and 'a desire for democratization, where rights and the application of the norms of justice are open to a broader basis of consultation, disputation, and resolution'.<sup>41</sup> Such movements counter the notion of a unitary and hegemonic caste system, and are essential for an 'immanent' critique of this system. His goal is much like Oberoi's, in that he seeks to undermine the unitary dominance of an elite hierarchical tradition (which is how Oberoi characterizes the Tat Khalsa); yet, in Chatterjee the contrast between the low and high, folk and elite is not so stark and their relationships are more closely examined. He contends that new religions and movements (as well as religious boundaries themselves) are formed in the process of struggle between dominant and subordinate groups, and that any universalist religion bears the marks of *both* identity and difference.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the eclectic nature of Vaishnava sects in nineteenth century Bengal is a reflection of their contentious place within the universalizing rhetoric of the Vaishnava 'system'. These traditions thus provide 'evidence of an unstable layering in popular consciousness of material drawn from diverse dominant as well as subordinate traditions, the only principle of unity being the contradictory one of simultaneous acceptance and rejection of domination'.<sup>43</sup> Unable to be simply classified, popular religion in this context provides neither a simple 'Other' to elite religion, nor to subaltern insurgency, as elements of both are contained within it. Like Oberoi, Chatterjee turns to folk religion as a site of contestation and as a way to reexamine the religious communities around which 'communal' lines are drawn.



But he does not characterize folk religion simply, and recognizes that the adherent of popular religion bears many different marks and meanings.

If Chatterjee is correct, it is unwise to interpret popular religious elements as being indicative of a lack of or unspecified dominant tradition. Instead, they interact with dominant traditions in a variety of ways. In fact, I believe that this is clearly born out by the evidence in the materials Oberoi draws on. To suggest how this may be so, let us consider the case of Guga Pir, a recurrent theme in Oberoi's book. The texts related to Guga that I have examined<sup>44</sup> reflect diverse relationships with the 'great' tradition (as Robert Redfield put it, albeit problematically). On the one hand, in Suryamall Mishra's *Vams Bhaskar*, a history of the Bundi court begun in 1841, Guga is placed within the lineage of the Chauhan ancestors of the kings of Bundi. The work was styled to compete with the Mahabharat and Guga is an incarnation of Airavat, Indra's elephant. In oral versions, on the other hand, connections with pan-Indian and supra-local traditions are few and far between. The Guga tradition in Rajasthan, therefore, reflects a variety of relationships between the folk and elite, the center and periphery.

This is all the more important to note in the case of Guga in the Punjab. Oberoi's 1994 book mentions some recent fieldwork which attests to Guga's continued prominence in Malwa and this seems surprising to him.<sup>45</sup> But even today Guga is not hard to find. A large regional site for Guga continues to occupy a prominent place in Chappar, in Ludhiana. Political conferences are held there yearly on the occasion of Chappar's annual *mela* (fair), in association with the main Guga shrine, and involve top members of the Akali Dal.<sup>46</sup> Two Guga shrines exist within Chandigarh (a city built since Partition), one at a major intersection near Chandigarh's medical college and University. At the other, larger shrine, a family of Brahmins has taken over care of the site, and a related Pir's tomb is located near the explicitly Shaivite Guga shrine. Although mention of Guga Pir does make some Khalsa Sikhs (as well as Muslims) in the Punjab somewhat uncomfortable, he continues to occupy at least some place in the cultural landscape.<sup>47</sup> Sometimes he has been 'Hinduized'; sometimes not. More work is required to identify the limits and character of religious difference in relation to Guga, and to understand the full range of meanings engaged in the variety of settings in which his tradition is found. It is sufficient here to note the complexity of relationships among various actors and traditions that are involved.

It is of critical importance to reexamine religious boundaries in relation to folk and popular practices. I only question the strategy of placing an idealized popular tradition as the *rhetorical* 'Other' of articulated religious identity. It is not new to search for a realm of rapprochement across communal lines: the fifteenth century poet Kabir has often been held up as the great negotiator of Hindu/Muslim difference, and shared folk religious practice has often been held up as an answer to

the communal problem.<sup>48</sup> Peter van der Veer has noted this in the case of Islam in South Asia, but has found that shared folk practices among Hindus and Muslims do not in fact entail a blurring of articulated identities.<sup>49</sup> Thus, uncritical uses of this very real arena of shared tradition do not *simply* hold out one answer to the problem of religious subjectivity and conflict. The fact that boundaries blur (as important as this is) does not necessarily negate identity and community definition; instead, it is indicative of different levels of contestation and negotiation. To overlook this actually ends up erasing the processes of dissent and assent involved. Binary oppositions don't work, particularly when one must elide differences (between Sanatan and folk, for example) to make them.

I believe we must continue to do the kind of work Oberoi has done – looking critically at folk and popular practices and their relationships with supra-local and 'mainstream' traditions. We must, however, examine the varieties of fault lines that exist within and among local narratives, and cannot be content with lauding the 'syncretic' and vilifying that which is not. In fact, as scholars of syncretism assert, discourse over 'traditions' and 'syncretic practices' is always misplaced. All religious traditions are syncretic: all exhibit varying levels of adherence and dissent, originality and integration. Thus, religious identity as a homogeneous construct is a straw-man, created to serve a variety of political agendas, both conservative and liberal.<sup>50</sup> The 'Khalsa episteme' is also not unitary (and has played an important role *against* mainstream homogenization, as shown by recent court cases involving Sikhs in the U.S., Canada, and Britain).<sup>51</sup> There may not actually be a need for a lost past to find diversity, and the villains of the present may not be so clear. The voice of alterity takes many different forms: the Khalsa has its place, as does the 'folk'.

### Conclusions

I write this essay at a very different time than Oberoi wrote his book: we may have gained more room to consider and theorize *difference* in the Sikh tradition. In this possibly less-politically charged context, it may be time to recognize that nostalgia for a lost and idyllic past – whether it be 'syncretic' or 'pure' – can be a dangerous thing.<sup>52</sup> Oberoi's construction of the Khalsa's 'Other' often falls into a nostalgic and (as the noted scholar of communalism Gyanendra Pandey has described it) quasi-nationalist narrative. Here the motif of the folk functions as an alternative to the 'bad' development of Sikh identity, which must be explained away and understood as an aberration.<sup>53</sup> With this characterization of Sikh identity, we see the erasure of contestations which exist in relation to hegemonics of different sorts, related not only to religion, but also caste and class.

Syncretism and hybridity are, in many ways, given in the year 2000 – the world we live in is one in which, although there are boundaries between and among

communities and individuals, these boundaries are often unfixed and changing. This is true in Punjab, as elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> As cultural critics in the U.S. have made clear, the 'melting pot' of U.S. multi-cultural society has also been assimilationist, involving the encouraged and sometimes forced shedding of identity, community affiliation, and the like. As van der Veer notes, this same dynamic is a feature of valorization of the syncretic in India, as 'this tolerant and pluralistic spirit of India is essentially Hindu'.<sup>55</sup> This, unfortunately, is the other side of a happy tale of syncretism and 'hybridity': the denial of articulated Khalsa (and other) identities (with an emphasis on the *plural*), and an erasure of the cultural dynamics of *difference* (with all of their problems).<sup>56</sup> This is indeed a dangerous route to take.

In the end, what might be the most useful is to consider the folk at the same time that we consider its uses: how have different domains (folk, elite, and otherwise) of cultural meaning been constructed? How does the folk find relevance for contemporary artists and intellectuals today? Or, as Talal Asad argues, we might begin with an 'anthropology of the secular',<sup>57</sup> in order to investigate the ways in which secular space is constructed and experienced, and what exactly the 'secular' and 'plural' might have to do with shared popular religious space. If it is true that boundaries blur, at the same time that various defined subject-positions are formulated and maintained, we actually have something much more interesting in both the past and present: a place where unitary positions are situated within a broader field, alongside diffused positions that are contingent in their relationships. In explicating such positions and their relationships, we find a space for the 'critical Indology' called for by Sheldon Pollock:<sup>58</sup> within shifting experiences of identity and difference, and with a theoretical commitment to both, in the context of India as well as 'the West' (hence my earlier reference to C. West, J. Butler, et. al.). By thinking 'hybridity' on these different levels, we might avoid simple allegories and take both 'tradition' and the 'folk' to a new place.

## Notes

1. James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory', in James Clifford and George E. Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 99. Double quotes are used to indicate quotations from texts, and single quotes to indicate terms and categories that are under discussion or have contested meanings.
2. Hayden White, *Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore : John Hopkins University Press, 1987).

3. Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (hereafter *Construction*) (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994). See also by the same author: "From Punjab to 'Khalistan': Territoriality and Metacommentary" in *Pacific Affairs*, 60, 1 (1987), 26-41; 'From Ritual to Counter-Ritual: Rethinking the Hindu-Sikh Question' in Milton Israel, J.T. O'Connell, W. Oxtoby, W.H. McLeod, and J.S. Grewal (eds), *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto, Centre for Asian Studies, 1988); and 'Popular saints, goddesses, and village sacred sites: rereading Sikh experience in the nineteenth century', in *History of Religions*, v. 31 (1992), 363-84.
4. Oberoi himself utilizes these terms and ideas (Oberoi, *Construction*, 137, 138, and elsewhere). I will not continue to put them in quotes, but do not mean by this that the terms are not problematic.
5. Arvind-pal Singh, "Interpreting the 'Interpretive Process': The Ambivalence of Tradition in the Representation of Sikh Culture" in *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, v. 2 n. 2 (1995), 219-238. Singh rightfully calls attention to Oberoi's ambivalence towards "tradition" (*ibid.*, 218). The present essay is less sophisticated and theoretical than Singh's, and focuses on two types of evidence in relation to Oberoi's argument: (1) from the Sikh tradition (such as that related to the textual tradition), and (2) from 'popular' religion. Since one of the most compelling aspects of Oberoi's work is his inclusion of popular practices and beliefs in a greater narrative, it seems useful to examine the text once again in light of these concerns.
6. It is entirely possible that my reading of Oberoi's work is not relevant in any way to the work he is currently doing. The text still merits discussion, however, because it is prominent in the field – particularly outside of the confines of Sikh Studies.
7. Oberoi, *Construction*, 4.
8. *ibid.*, 24-5.
9. *ibid.*, 25.
10. *ibid.*, 47 ff.
11. *ibid.*, 102. See below.
12. *ibid.*, 421.
13. *ibid.*, 381.
14. *ibid.*, 16.
15. *ibid.*, 49.
16. *The Goindval Pothis: The Earliest Extant Source of the Sikh Canon* (Cambridge, MA: Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University and Harvard University Press, 1996).
17. *ibid.*, 35, 45-6, 49. Mann has gathered evidence to support a claim for a much earlier version of the text, which would date from the 1530s; the author viewed

photographs of this text with Dr. Mann in the summer of 1998 in Chandigarh, Union Territories. See also J.S. Grewal, *Historical Perspectives on Sikh Identity* (Patiala, Punjab: Punjabi University, 1997), 74 and elsewhere, for the argument that Sikh identity dates from the time of Nanak.

18. For more on the three collections, see Linda Hess, 'Three Kabir Collections: A Comparative Study' in Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod (eds.), *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India* (Berkeley: Berkeley Religious Studies Series and Motilal Banarsidass, 1987).
19. See Hess 1987; Karine Schomer, 'Kabir in the Guru Granth Sahib: An Exploratory Essay', in *Sikh Studies: Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Tradition* (Berkeley: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1979), and most recently J.S. Hawley ('Bhakti, Democracy, and the Study of Religion', in K. Satchidananda Murty (ed.), *The Perennial Tree: Select Papers of the International Symposium on India Studies* (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1996).
20. 'The *Nirgun/Sagun* Distinction in Early Manuscript Anthologies of Hindu Devotion' in David N. Lorenzen (ed), *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 175.
21. See these works by J.S. Hawley: *Sur Das: Poet, Singer, Saint* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984) and 'The Sant in Sur Das', in Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod (eds.), *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India* (Berkeley: Berkeley Religious Studies Series and Motilal Banarsidass, 1987).
22. Oberoi, *Construction*, 54.
23. See G.N. Bahura and K. Bryant (eds.), *The Padas of SurDas* (Jaipur: Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum Trust, 1982).
24. Oberoi, *Construction*, 5ff., 16-7. Oberoi accepts that Nanak had everything in common with 'Indic traditions' and that, even when there was such a thing as a "Nanak-panthi," this identity was not in opposition to another form of Panthi. Thus: "For much of its early history the Sikh movement, in line with indigenous religious thinking and practices - with the exception of an understandable emphasis on the soteriological teaching of Guru Nanak - had shown little enthusiasm for distinguishing its constituents from members of other religious communities, or for establishing a pan-Indian community" (ibid., 47-8).
25. Much has been written on the problem of 'Hinduism'. See Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron (eds.), *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity* (Thousand Oaks California and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995), David Ludden, ed., *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), particularly Ludden's Introduction, 1-17; and many others. The

critique of the concept of a set of unitary beliefs defined under the general rubric of 'Hinduism' is part of a larger project of understanding the genealogies of terms and concepts, were produced and normalized in the colonial period (as explicated by Bernard Cohn, Nicholas Dirks, Gyanendra Pandey, and others). See for example Cohn's famous essay, 'The Census, Social Structure, and Objectification in South Asia' in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).

26. This is argued quite successfully, for instance, by Heinrich von Stietencron ('Religious Configurations in Pre-Muslim India and the Modern Concept of Hinduism' in Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron (eds.), *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity* (Thousand Oaks California and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995).), based on his reading of a medieval Saivite text, which he argues clearly identifies a Saivite identity which is separate from other competing religious identities at the time. Although an awareness of the categories of "Hindu" and variations on the concept of "Muslim" did exist in medieval literature, the formation of an all-India Hindu community is very much tied to the modern colonial period. See Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

27. See Mann (1996, 28) and Grewal (1997, especially 77-80, which discusses the *Dabistan-i-mazahib*, a mid-seventeenth century Persian text, which clearly discusses the Sikhs as one of three communities, the others being "Hindus" and "Muslims").

28. Oberoi, *Construction*, 255.

29. *ibid.*, 256.

30. *ibid.*, 255.

31. *ibid.*, 107.

32. *ibid.*, 385. Similarly, he argues that the differences between Sanatan Sikhism and the Tat Khalsa were not based on class (*ibid.*, 260), as was previously assumed – or, we assume, caste, since he remains silent on that issue, even when other scholars have noted the caste and class differences between the different players in the reform movement – but on "radically opposed views of the world" (*ibid.*, 421). Is a negation of class and caste difference necessary to allow Sanatan Sikhism its role as a liberal, progressive alternative to the Khalsa?

33. *ibid.*, 137-8; 201-203.

34. As Philip Lutgendorf has noted, in the context of nineteenth century North India, the use of the term 'Sanatan' constituted "a self-conscious affirmation of religious conservatism in a perceivably pluralistic context" (Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the Ramcaritmanas of Tulsidas*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 363). Notably, the 1860s and 1870s saw the formation of

Sanatan Dharm protection organizations (ibid., 365), including the Hindu Dharm Prakashik Society in the 1870s. I do not know of a comprehensive study of Sanatan Hindu rhetoric and institutions, but it has been touched upon in places. The author met with several leaders of Sanatan institutions in Chandigarh, 1999 (see for example Bhagvati Prasad Madhav (ed.), *Goswami ganeshdatta smriti-granth* (Delhi: Shri Sanatan Dharm Pratinidhi Sabha Punjab, 1969)). See articles by Dalmia and Horstmann in Dalmia and von Stietencron (eds), *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, (Thousand Oaks, California and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995) and Lutgendorf 1991. It is also possible to get a sense of the parameters of the debate through its conflict with the Arya Samaj (see Kenneth Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976)) and from some of its key figures. Sanatan Dharm identity, for instance, was articulated by Swami Ram Tirth in 1896 (in two addresses he gave to the Sanatana Dharm Sabha in Sialkot) as a specifically Hindu ("Vedic" and "Aryan") and Vaishnava identity (Swami Rama Tirtha, *On Sanatan Dharm*, (Lucknow: Rama Tirtha Pratishthan, 1990), 17, 47, 65, 105). More recently, according to Richard Davis ('The Iconography of Rama's Chariot', in David Ludden, ed., *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 53), current Viswa Hindu Parishad discourse positing a uniform Hindu identity prefer the term 'Sanatana Dharm' in their inclusive (and ultimately chauvinistic) vision of Hinduism. As these examples make clear, 'Sanatan' is a heavily loaded term.

35. ibid., 159. Oberoi outlines four major aspects of folk religion: it is not scripturally based, is local rather than supra-local, is focused on pragmatic results, and maintained its own cultural agents and means of transmission, outside of mainstream and organized religious contexts (ibid., 142).

36. The author is currently beginning to study the ways in which the folk finds a place in contemporary Punjabi intellectual and artistic discourse as a 'secular' option, exemplified by the work of Neelam Man-Singh, Atamjit Singh, and others.

37. See, for example, E.P. Thompson's discussion of the construction of the folk as other to developing bourgeois culture in England, born of the alienation of the upper and middle classes from the lower classes (*Customs in Common* (New York: The New Press, 1993)). See also Partha Chatterjee (*The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 73 ff.) on the role of the "popular" in the nationalist imagination in India.

38. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York/London: Routledge, 1990); Russell Ferguson, Martha Gener, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West (eds.), *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*

(New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990); Jonathan Rutherford, *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990).

39. I have discussed this further in an unpublished manuscript, "Theorizing the Sikhs."

40. Such an argument is not new. For an interesting discussion of the relevant issues, see Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980). Ginzburg examined texts related to the inquisition of an Italian miller in the sixteenth century, discovering how the miller's ideas and discourse (as recoverable in the official texts of the inquisition) reflect a complex combination of written and oral traditions, elite and popular culture, and cannot be accounted for by a simple characterization of the influence of elites on passive subalterns (*ibid.*, "Preface to the Italian Edition," xiii-xxvi).

41. Partha Chatterjee, 'Caste and Subaltern Consciousness' in *Subaltern Studies VI: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press., 1989), 207.

42. *ibid.*, 165 ff. and 192.

43. *ibid.*, 189.

44. Anne Murphy, 'Texts of the Guga Tradition: Diversity and Continuity in Changing Contexts', unpublished Master's thesis, University of Washington, 1995.

45. Oberoi, *Construction*, 399.

46. The Tribune On-line News Service (Chandigarh), 7 September, 1998.

47. See also the work of H.S. Bhatti: 'The Cult of Gugga: A Sociological Perspective', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Panjabi University, 1986.; and his forthcoming book (title not available at the time of writing).

48. See, for example, Pandey's (1990, 247-8 and elsewhere) discussion of "syncretism" and the nationalist project – Pandey identifies the nationalist historian as one for whom 'communal' problems are 'new' and the product of the colonial experience, *alone*. For such a scholar, syncretism is the answer. On Kabir, see Hawley (1996) and Charlotte Vaudeville (*A Weaver Named Kabir: Selected Verses, with a Detailed Biographical and Historical Introduction* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993) 11 ff.).

49. Peter van der Veer, 'Syncretism, multiculturalism, and the discourse of tolerance' in Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (eds.), *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

50. For example, although anthropologists Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw do promote the syncretic as a site of tolerance and integration, they recognize the ways



in which syncretism can be both “tolerance” and “hierarchical encompassment” (ibid, 22). Thus, the syncretic can itself become a hegemonic narrative, such that the articulation of an exclusive identity can be villainized and difference can be erased within a happy homogenizing syncretism – or be shown to be ‘invented’ and therefore unreal: “anthropological hegemony now entails taking apart practices and identities which are phenomenological realities for those who use them (‘your tradition is invented’). In our enthusiasm for deconstructing syncretic traditions we may have invented another kind of intellectual imperialism” (ibid., 23).

51. See, for example, brief discussion by Bernard Cohn (*Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 106-162.).

52. Paul Brass (“Secularism Out of Its Place,” public presentation, Association for Asian Studies Meeting, Boston, March 13, 1999) has argued that the rhetoric for ‘religious tolerance’ as articulated by Ashis Nandy and Madan et al. (see for example T.N. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds: Fundamentalism and Secularism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)) has been conflated, and dangerously so, with secularism. This rhetoric ends with a valorization of religion’s role in public life and de-emphasizes the importance of secularist imperatives in the state. It also searches for an undefinable “real religion” which is at the core of all religions and, in the end, privileges a Hindu orientation. Secularism, he argues, does not entail the search for brahmanical, transcendent religious truths, but *equality*. Although Brass’ comments are problematic in their fatalistic condemnation of Indian politics, his argument is compelling.

53. Within Pandey’s (1990) and Chatterjee’s (1989) definitions of “fuzzy” communities, there is more room for the coexistence of “traditions,” invented and otherwise, without denying either field of meaning. This is also in keeping with Ayesha Jalal’s efforts to problematize the communal, allowing for religiously informed political action with an attention to diversity and individual actors. (See ‘Exploding Communalism: The Politics of Muslim Identity in South Asia’ in Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal (eds), *Nationalism, Development and Democracy* (Delhi: Oxford University Press 1998).).

54. Laura Jenkins’ recent work on reservations in India suggests that people resist being pegged in definable categories. (Based on Jenkins’ public presentation “Caste, Class, and Islam: Debating the Boundaries of ‘Backwardness’ in India,” Association for Asian Studies Meeting, Boston, March 12, 1999.) See also Jalal on ways of understanding Muslim debate over Pakistan that is not easily identifiable as “communal,” where she wants to avoid “presuppositions which erroneously link a religiously informed cultural identity with the politics of cultural nationalism... [and

demonstrate] the largely arbitrary, derogatory and exclusionary nature of the term 'communal' as it has been applied to individuals and political groupings claiming to represent the interests of Indian Muslims" (Jalal, 'Exploding Communalism', 79).

55. The writings of Ashis Nandy, van der Veer argues, often have "the unintended ring of the demand in Hindu communalist writings that Muslims as converts should realize that they are Hindu first" (van der Veer, 203) – Paul Brass has noted this as well (see footnote 47).

56. Along similar lines, Singh (1995, 235) argues that "historiography that projects a nostalgia for a lost Sanatana culture fails to acknowledge the role of cultural translation as a mode of agency... [it] disavows the site of enunciation of cultural difference."

57. See Talal Asad, 1999. 'Religion, Nation-State, Secularism' in P. van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann (eds), *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

58. Sheldon Pollock, 'Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power Beyond the Raj,' in Carol S. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds.), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

## **Agrarian Change and Struggle of Rural Labour in Indian Punjab**

**Sucha Singh Gill**  
*Punjabi University, Patiala*

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The paper examines the struggles of rural labour in the context of agrarian change towards emergence of dominance of capitalism in agriculture. The agrarian change has led to more than doubling the proportion of agricultural labour in the total workforce employed in agriculture between 1961 and 1991. They now constitute more than 30 per cent of the total workforce working in the rural areas of Punjab. Since they dominate the other labourers, the struggles of the rural labour have been led by agricultural labourers. The wage has been most prominent among issues of struggles of agricultural labourers. Land for cultivation and for house sites is the second important issue focussed by the unions in the wake of land reforms measures and the Government policy of provision for house sites to the land less people in the rural areas. Other issues of struggle include provision of concessional loans and their remission later on, compensation to victims of farm machinery accidents, old age pension and social oppression from the landed community. It is brought out that the struggles of the rural labour are organised through the efforts of left parties and political groups. In fact the existence of a sympathetic section of peasantry (aligned to the left) and helpful administration are some of the factors in the success of these struggles.

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### **Introduction**

With the arrival of green revolution in Punjab interest of scholars in agricultural labour increased. Initially the issue of distribution of gains of green revolution among various sections of rural population focused agricultural labour as a class placed at the bottom of the rural society. Rate of wages, duration of employment and consequently the level of earnings were the main issues of discussion. The mode of production debate identified the existence of free wage labour as one of the conditions of development of capitalism in agriculture. At the same time agricultural labour as a class began to acquire prominence in the political agenda of the Left political parties and organisations for mobilisation of the rural poor. Its historical revolutionary role began to be discussed in the radical socio-economic

transformation of the society. The Left political parties and various groups decided to organise this class independent of peasant/farmers' organisations. The form of organisation adopted for agricultural labour in the state has been close to the trade union. The organisation of separate unions of agricultural labour has been determined by three factors. First, a distinct class of agricultural labourer came into existence with its own specific problems like the low wages, irregular employment and that too for less part of the year, debt burden at exorbitant interest rates, lack of house sites, etc. The resolution of these problems involves conflict with a section of peasantry. Secondly, the agricultural labourers, by and large, belong to low castes and are subject to caste prejudice and social oppression on that count by the dominant/upper caste peasantry. Thirdly, the whole gamut of socio-economic and political process of post-independence has brought some awareness among agricultural labourers of their exploitation and oppression and some realisation for united/collective action through unionisation. Punjab was the third state of India, (after Andhra Pradesh and Kerala) to start the union of agricultural labour under the banner of Punjab Dihati Mazdoor Sabha (Punjab Rural Labour Organisation) in 1954.<sup>1</sup> With the split in CPI in 1964, Punjab Dihati Mazdoor Sabha (PDMS) was divided into two, one affiliated to Communist Party of India (CPI) and another to Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)]. CPI led PDMS was changed to Punjab Khet Mazdoor Sabha (PKMS) in 1971. This change in name also meant change in emphasis of the organisation from rural labour to agricultural labour. The CPI led organisation continued to be named as PKMS but as a state unit of Bharat Khet Mazdoor Union (BKMU). CPI(M) led PDMS changed its name into Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union (PKMU) in 1989 and is operating as a state unit of All India Agricultural Workers' Union (AIAWU). Besides, all the Naxalite groups active in the state have also created unions of agricultural labourers. The CPI and CPI (M) led unions have their working units in all the districts of the state. The Naxalite led unions are active in some regions of the state of Punjab, they are yet to develop network of organisations at the state level. This paper is organised into three sections. Section I presents a brief account of the nature of agrarian change in Punjab. Structure of workforce is given in section II. The issues of struggle and the nature of intervention of the unions of the labourers are discussed in section III.

### Section I

Punjab State, economically, is one of the most advanced states of India. It experienced a very high rate of economic growth particularly since the mid sixties. This growth is primarily agricultural led growth. The state experienced green revolution and became its heartland very quickly. The adoption of green revolution technology and changes associated with that resulted in far reaching changes in the agrarian structure of the economy. There was transformation of pre-capitalist/semi-

feudal agrarian structure to capitalist agrarian structure. This transformation involved huge investment by the state in the creation of infrastructure in the form of development of canal irrigation followed by rural electrification for tubewell irrigation, network of rural link roads, creation of network of regulated grain markets, establishment of institutional credit system in the form of rural banks, co-operative societies, land mortgage banks, co-operative banks and special schemes for the agricultural sector of the scheduled commercial banks. Further the agriculture was supported by the Punjab Agricultural University through regional research stations and research and extension services, provision of foundation and certified seeds of HYV and land reclamation programmes. The mechanism of minimum support prices, Government purchase agencies, construction of Government owned godowns and storage facilities were also created.<sup>2</sup>

The process of institutional and non-institutional measures created conducive conditions for the adoption of modern technology in agriculture. The farmers were quick to adopt new technology and made huge investment in machinery and land improvements. Mechanisation of production operations have standardised and fastened agricultural operations. The use of capital inputs such as tractors, threshers, seed drills, tubewells, spray pumps, combine harvesters have increased tremendously along with use of HYV of seeds, insecticides, pesticides, fungicides, chemical fertilisers etc. Capital accumulation is observed on a massive scale. The number of tractors per thousand hectares increased from 2.41 in 1962-65 to 81.78 in 1987. The number of pumpsets per thousand hectares increased from 8.20 to 169.09 in the corresponding period. Per hectare use of chemical fertilisers increased from 7.84 kg in 1962-65 to 296.68 kg in 1992-95. The proportion of gross cropped area increased from 58.42 per cent to 94.58 per cent and increase in cropping intensity from 1.29 to 1.81 during this period.<sup>3</sup> The high degree of mechanisation and modernisation of agriculture has transformed the agricultural of the state completely into a commercialised enterprise.

Farmers are now producing mainly for sale in the market for profit. Production involves huge expenditure per acre, which a farmer is interested to recover along with profit. He purchases a large number of inputs from the market and after harvest immediately sells his output in the market leading to his complete integration in the market system. The high degree of integration with market has converted a large number of farmers into farm managers. They no longer contribute their own/family labour in the farm operations. The major farm operations such as ploughing, sowing, harvesting and threshing of the crops is done with hired labour. It is not only the big capitalist farmers (operating 10 or more hectares of land who constituted 6.1 per cent of the cultivators and operated 26.70 per cent of area in 1990-91) but also medium and small farmers who have withdrawn their family labour from tedious manual agricultural operations. Most of the agricultural operations involving physical labour are carried out by hired labour supplied by the

class of agricultural labourers.<sup>4</sup> In the commercialised agriculture of Punjab, labour has become a commodity. The overwhelming majority of these labourers are casual 'free' labourers (free from bondage as well as free from ownership of land and other means of production).

The process of development of capitalism in agriculture of the state has so changed the tenancy relations. Earlier the land was being leased out by the big owners who were unable to cultivate their land and most of the leasing in was being done either by landless (pure) tenants or the small owners of the land. This was one of the features of semi-feudal/pre-capitalist agriculture in the state. This has been replaced by commercial tenancy that has also been characterised as reverse tenancy. Under the system of reverse tenancy it is the big cultivators and owners of modern/capital means of production who lease in the land from those who are either the small owners and lack modern means or unable to cultivate their land due to their involvement in non-agricultural occupations.<sup>5</sup> In some areas where vegetables are grown particularly in Doaba region of Punjab there has emerged huge sized farms covering areas to the extent of 5,000 acres based mainly on leased-in-land. This has been described as 'operational enclosures'.<sup>6</sup> These farms reflect a very high cropping intensity based on capital intensive agriculture being carried out by a large number of casual and regular labourers hired from the labour market.

The emergence of capitalist farming in the state has thrown up a class of agricultural labourers, which is available for carrying out agricultural operations on payment of wages. The agrarian structure has created a situation where on one side there are employers (who though led by big sized farmers yet many of them are medium and small farmers) and on the other are the wage labourers. Both of them need each other but at the same time there is a clash of interest between them. For getting their problems resolved and promote their class interests both farmers as well as agricultural labourers have been able to create their respective organisations. Here our primary interest is to study the role of unions of agricultural labourers particularly their intervention in the current agrarian situation.

## Section II

Punjab area has experienced the largest impact of changes associated with the green revolution.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, there has been a considerable increase in the proportion of agricultural labourers in the total work force of the state. As shown in Table 1 though the proportion of agricultural labourers in the region has been below all Indian average yet there has been considerable increase between 1961 and 1991. In Punjab this proportion more than doubled respectively from 9.65 per cent to 23.31 per cent. In this state the proportion of cultivators has declined from 46.24 per cent to 32.83 per cent. It is evident that as yet the cultivators constitute the largest single

category of main workers, among all the category of workers in India as well as in Punjab.

**Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Total Main Workers by Industrial Categories (1961-91)**

India/ State	Census year	Total main workers	Cultivators	Agricultural labourers	Other workers
India	1961	100.00	52.80	16.70	30.50
	1971	100.00	43.00	26.69	30.23
	1981	100.00	41.58	24.94	33.48
	1991	100.00	38.75	26.15	35.10
Punjab	1961	100.00	46.24	9.65	44.11
	1971	100.00	42.56	20.11	37.3
	1981	100.00	35.86	22.17	41.97
	1991	100.00	32.83	23.31	43.86

*Source:* Census of India 1981, handbook of Population Statistics, pp 42-43, and Census of India 1991, Provisional Population Tables, Government of India, New Delhi, 1991.

In Punjab the proportion of agricultural labourers is quite high and they constitute less than three fourth of the cultivators. In the state, other workers grouped together also are more than agricultural labourers. But most of them are engaged in secondary and tertiary sectors and a large number of them are found in urban centres.

#### **Structure of Rural Workforce and Place of Rural Labourers**

In 1991, 74.28 per cent of the population of India lived in the villages and the rural main workers were 77.64 per cent in the country. Among the states in the north region, Punjab is the most urbanised state in which the proportion of rural population is lower than all India average. Rural population as percentage of total population in Punjab in 1991 was 70.28. The percentage share of rural population corresponds to its share of employment of main workers in the state of Punjab in 1991 and was 69.94 against all India average of 77.64. Data given in Table 2 confirm the proposition that the share of rural population and rural employment go together.

Distribution of main rural workers in different categories is given in Table 3. It is evident that in 1991 cultivators who employ agricultural wage labour constitute the largest category in the country and accounted for 48.47 per cent of the total main

workers. Agricultural labourers constitute the second largest category of main workers.

**Table 2: Rural Population and rural Main Workers in 1991**

Punjab/India	Rural population	Rural Main workers
Punjab	70.28	69.94
India	74.28	77.64

Source: Census of India 1991, op.cit.

**Table 3: Distribution of Main Rural Workers in 1991**

State	Cultivators	Agriculture labourers	Other workers	Total
Punjab	1903941 (45.10)	1289036 (30.53)	1028707 (24.37)	4221684 (100.00)
India	107403044 (48.47)	70397151 (31.77)	43790462 (19.96)	221590657 (100.00)

Figures in brackets are percentages.

Source: Census of India, op.cit.

They accounted for 31.77 per cent of the total rural workers in 1991. All other categories of workers accounted for 19.96 per cent of the total rural workers in the country. The proportion of cultivators in the rural workers in Punjab in 1991 was 45.10 per cent and the share of agricultural labourers was 30.53 per cent. Though the share of agricultural labourers in the state has increased sharply between 1951 and 1991 yet it has not reached all India average. The other category of workers in the rural areas is of those engaged in household industry, factories, trade, commerce, business, transportation, construction, political or social work, government services and also include teachers, priests, entertainment artists etc. In this category the proportion of rural workers in Punjab was higher than all India average of 19.96 per cent. Other workers constituted 24.37 per cent in Punjab.

Strictly going by the definition of a labourer with major source of income from wage labour, agricultural labourers and some portion of other workers come in the class of rural labourers/proletariat. In the state of Punjab there are three main categories of rural labourers. They are agricultural labourers, brick-kiln labourers and construction labourers. Among these categories, agricultural labourer is the dominant category.

Classification of agricultural labour based on sex is given in Table 4. It is revealed that at all India level females constitute 39.11 per cent of total agricultural labourers compared to 60.89 per cent share of males. In the state of Punjab



distribution of agricultural labour is considerably biased against females. They constituted 6.22 per cent of total agricultural labourers in Punjab. It is evident that males overwhelmingly dominate the rural labour market in the region. In the most economically advanced states of India (Punjab) the share of males in total agricultural labour was 93.78 per cent. Punjab also attracts a large number of migratory labourers from East UP and Bihar. These workers are not reflected through census data. According to various estimates, migratory labourers in Punjab in 1983-84 were 4.29 lakhs.<sup>8</sup> This labour seasonally migrates to Punjab in the busy season. Various studies show that this labour solely consists of males. This further adds to the predominance of males in the labour market in Punjab.

**Table 4: Distribution of Rural Agricultural Labourers by Sex in 1991**

State	Males	Females	Total
Punjab	1208850 (93.78)	80186 (6.22)	1289036 (100.00)
All India	42867566 (60.89)	27529585 (39.11)	70397151 (100.00)

Source: Census of India, 1991

Figures in brackets are in percentage

Rural labourers historically belong to those caste groups, which were not allowed to hold land. Most of them belong to Scheduled Castes and backward castes. In the recent period some exceptions have also been observed. Very few pauperised peasants belonging to high castes are also found among the agricultural labourers. Such persons generally become agricultural labourers outside their own villages and even out of their own district/state.

Analysis of occupational distribution of rural workers shows predominance of agricultural labourers. There are three major categories of rural labourers. They are agricultural labourers, brick-kiln labourers and construction labourers. We have also excluded all the workers engaged in the tertiary sector and those engaged in secondary sector in the urban areas and some of them are residing in the villages also.

Occupational distribution of rural labourers in Punjab is given in Table 5. It is revealed that 88.42 per cent rural labourers consisted of agricultural labourers. The share of brick-kiln labourers was 10.80 per cent. The construction labour consisted of 0.78 per cent of the total rural labour. It is evident that agricultural labourers in the green revolution belt constitute the largest and the dominant category of the rural labour. The second major category of rural labour consists of brick-kiln labourers in the state. Construction labour is not only less significant in terms of number but work as agricultural labourers in the busy agricultural seasons. If migratory labour is added to the census figures, the share of agricultural labour

will go up further. In Punjab in some of the districts in peak season this type of labour constitutes near to 50 per cent of the local labour.<sup>9</sup> It is evident that the share of agricultural labourers is higher than the estimated share as shown in the Table 5.

**Table 5: Occupational distribution of Rural Labourers in Punjab**

Agricultural Labourers <sup>1</sup>	Brick-kiln Laboreres <sup>2</sup>	Construction Labourers <sup>3</sup>	Total
1718036 (88.42)	210000 (10.80)	15000 (0.78)	1948036 (100.0)

*Note:* Figures in brackets are in percentage.

1. These data refer to the year 1991 and includes estimated (1983-84) number of 4,29,000 migrant labour.
2. These data are based on estimates given by Comrade Chander Shekhar, General Secretary of Lal Jhanda Punjab Mazdoor Union. These figures belong to the year 1989.
3. We have prepared these estimates on the basis of information collected from contractors of Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal and the contractors engaged in road construction in the state. The estimate covers labour in these two activities only. These figures belong the year 1989.

Another important characteristic of rural labour particularly in Punjab but also to some extent in Haryana is the distribution between local and migratory labour. As is given in Table 6 nearly one-quarter of the total agricultural labour consists of migrants in Punjab. The share of migrant labour in peak agricultural season considerably increases and in certain areas becomes nearly 50 per cent of the total. The share of migrants labour is 40 per cent in case of brick-kiln labour. Construction labour consists almost entirely of migrants. There is negligible participation of local labourers particularly in irrigation works and road construction.

**Table 6: Distribution of Rural Labourers between Local and Migrants in Punjab**

	Agricultural Labourers	Brick-kiln Labourers <sup>3</sup>	Construction Labourers <sup>3</sup>
Local	12890361 <sup>1</sup> (75.03)	126000 (60.00)	negative
Migrants	429000 <sup>2</sup> (24.97)	84000 (40.00)	15000 (100.00)
Total	1718036 (100.00)	210000 (100.00)	15000 (100.00)

Note: Figures in brackets in percentage.

1. These figures belong to 1991 and are taken from census of India, 1991.
2. These figures belong to 1983-84 and are taken from M S Sidhu and S S Grewal, *A Study of Migratory Labour in Punjab*, PAU, Ludhiana.
3. This is estimated (by the author) number and pertains to the year 1989.

The existence of migrant labour in such a large number in the rural areas has very serious implications for organisation of the rural labour. Generally speaking, there is considerable gap between local and migrant labour in terms of language, culture, lifestyle and confidence. In fact there is little interaction between the two major segments of rural labour. This is particularly true about labour in agriculture. Migrant labourers in agriculture generally stay in the accommodation provided by the employer farmers in the tubewell rooms and the cattle sheds. They work in groups in fields and get little chance to interact with local labourers. Since they work at lower wages, for longer hours and are servile, the employer farmers prefer them. Local labourers look at migrants as their rivals and responsible for their (locals') poor terms and conditions of employment. This divide between local and migrants becomes a big hindrance in the way of organisation of the rural labour. Employer farmers are well aware of this gap between the local and migrant labour and they use the differences between the two types of labour in their favour in the eventuality of a conflict between the farmers and the labourers. Besides, the major part of the migratory labour comes in the state seasonally for varying periods ranging from 3 months to 9 months. They also go on shifting from one place of work to another. The shifting place and occupation of the migrants adds to another difficulty in the organisation of the rural labour.

Rural labour can be classified into three categories in terms of nature of employment and freedom to change employers. They are casual labourers, contract/regular labourers and bonded labourers. Casual labourers work on both piece rates as well as on daily wage rates with their employers for days for employment. They are free to change their employers whenever better employment

is available. This is the largest category of labourers in agricultural sector in the region. Though the exact proportion of casual labour is not available with us yet this is the most predominant category of labourers as it suits more the requirements of capitalist agriculture in the green revolution belt. The second category of rural labourers consist of contract/regular labourers. These labourers are employed on regular basis for six months or for a year on the wages and terms of condition settled in advance. Such workers are employed for diverse type of work of the farmers and generally stay with their employers to do work at odd hours. This labour is different from labour working on piece wage rates contract for harvesting and sowing of crops or labour employed on brick kilns. This labour can also be called attached labour through the system of advanced payment of wages and debt contracted. The exact proportion of total labourers employed on contract though not known yet it is very small. Recent changes towards capitalism in the agriculture of the region are favouring decline in the attached labour.

Bonded labour is another category of rural labour. Bonded labour also exists to some extent in case of brick-kiln labour and in construction labour. In such cases bonded labour is also the migrant labour. From the point of organisation of the rural labour the dominant category emerges to be agricultural labour.

### Section III

Establishment of a unit of union of agricultural labour and election of labour committee immediately leads to initiation of the process of class struggle. Summing up the experience of countryside of Eastern Germany towards the end of the nineteenth century Weber stated that '...the oft lamented mobilisation of the rural labourers at the same time sets in motion the beginning of the class struggle'<sup>10</sup> Agricultural labourers being placed at the lowest level in the rural hierarchy, beginning of the process of organisation immediately brings confidence among them of their collective strength to fight economic exploitation and social oppression. As soon as their organisation is established they start questioning the unjust socio-economic order at the village level. In the past they have not been allowed to raise their voice against such order. Their position had been equated with tongueless cattle that could not express their anguish against their oppression.

With the establishment of units of PKMS and PKMU in various districts and enrolment of members at village level, the process of class struggle assumed organised form. But the level of activities of mobilisation picked up after the green revolution particularly in the decade of 1970s.

### Wages Struggles

The decade of 1970s saw outbreak of many wage struggles between agricultural labourers and farmers.<sup>11</sup> In the year 1980 alone such struggles were observed in 100 villages of the state.<sup>12</sup> Some struggles were initiated by unions of the labour but several were sporadic in nature. Though in the decade of 1980s and the first few years of 1990s the number of such struggles declined due to disturbed conditions of Punjab yet many valiantly fought struggles also took place during this period. Wage struggles in the seven villages in Amritsar district in April 1987 took place when Khalistani terror was at its heights in the area.<sup>13</sup> This struggle was fought by agricultural labour against the attempt of the rich peasantry to lower existing wage/pay wage rate lower than that was prevailing in the neighbouring villages. This was a successful struggle of agricultural labour. Another such struggle took place at Sangha Farm, Talwan, district Jalandhar. This was on the issue of payment of minimum wages to 350 labourers employed on the potato farm. The struggle was successful and both male and female workers secured a rise in the daily wage rate by Rs. 5. Though the wage struggle was successful but the court case of labourers on payment of their wage arrears of Rs. 6,50,000 was ultimately dismissed by the court. Isolated cases of wage struggles are also reported from districts of Ludhiana and Sangrur.<sup>14</sup> Wage struggle was reported from a village Sidhwn Jamita in Gurdaspur district in June 1991. In the year 1995, wage struggles took place in five villages (namely Thanewal, Pandori, Mahantan, Jattuwal, Karwal and Kotha Isher Singh) of Gurdaspur district in the month of April.<sup>15</sup>

There is a common pattern of village struggles. A dispute starts from either of the two sides. In some cases farmers decide to reduce the rate of wages (both in kind and cash) than are prevailing in the neighbouring villages or minimum wages fixed by the state. Then negotiations take place either under the auspices of the village panchayat or outside it between the committee of farmers and that of agricultural labour. In the eventuality of the failure of negotiations, tension increases in the village. As a retaliation, the farmers try to build their solidarity and unite all the farmers (irrespective of the size of holdings). They use the infrastructure and facilities of the *Gurdwara* (Sikh shrine) to hold their meetings and all farmers are made to take vow in presence of the holy Granth not to employ any striking labourer till the settlement of the dispute. Low caste of the labourers is used by farmers to develop caste hatred against them. The *Nakabandi* (blockade) of agricultural labourers is announced through the loudspeaker of the *Gurdwara*. To enforce the *Nakabandi*, day and night picketing of the village is done by the farmers. Agricultural labourers, their children, wives are not allowed to go to the fields (owned by the farmers) to defecate and collect fodder. Any one from agricultural labourers found guilty of violation is physically assaulted. This happens invariably because the labourers have to go to fields both for defecation and collection of

fodder every day. They neither have generally stock of fodder with them nor latrines attached to their house/localities. The violence/threat of violence leads to complaint to district/sub-divisional administration. This brings police and civil officials of the administration to the village scene. In the first round the administration tries to intervene in favour of the farmers. Sometimes false cases are also registered against the labourers. Then fresh round of negotiations is started between the two opposing classes in the presence of the police and civil officials.

If the conflict still remains unresolved with workers on strike and farmers continue with Nakabandi then the resolution of the crisis depends on relative strength of the opposing classes, their unity in the respective ranks, the attitude of administration and political intervention from outside the village. Experience of the wage struggles in Punjab shows that the struggle started by the unions or the spontaneous struggles later on adopted by the unions are able to neutralise initial opposition of the police and the civil officials. These struggles have been successful in the sense that the labourers have not allowed the introduction of cut in wages in kind and generally have achieved a raise in money wage rates. This has been the experience of PKMS and PKMU struggles in the past and Pendu Mazdoor Union in the recent years (particularly 1992-95). This has happened in spite of fact that farmers have tried to use the migratory labour to break the local labourers' strikes and consequently the bargaining power of the unionised labour.<sup>16</sup> One of the factors in the success of these strikes has been neutralisation of a section of peasantry that acts a catalytic in withdrawal of Nakabandi. This section is generally sympathetic to the cause of the labourers due to its linkages with the Left through their/(Le ñ) organisation active in the farming community or has linkage with Left and democratic movement in urban centres. In 1974 struggling agricultural labourers in eleven villages of Ludhiana district were confronted by Punjab Kheti Bari Union, a predecessor of BKU Punjab unit. In spite of considerable mobilisation by Kheti Bari Union and use of pressure tactics to terrorise the labourers, the struggles were successful because of outside political support of PKMS.<sup>17</sup> Where outside support is not available (generally in case of sporadic struggles) and a section of sympathetic peasantry in the villages is not existing, the struggles/strikes of the labourers fizzle out. This is experience of village Rajowal of Faridkot district and Thanewal village in Gurdaspur district. In case of Rajowal village partly sympathetic attitude of the district administration could not help the labourers (1996). Now for the last two years all the labourers are forced to find work at the distance of 6-7 kilometres from the village. The farmers are managing their agriculture with the family labour and partly with the use of migratory labour. In case of the Thanewal village of Gurdaspur district nearly one half of the labourers are forced to work in the nearby villages. Though the law favours the labourers yet it is the balance of the political forces that decides the outcome of these struggles. Very few cases are there where the lower courts get involved in disputes between the agricultural labourers and their

employer. In one particular case where the farmer is known as potato king (Sangha Farm in Nakodar area of Jalandhar district), the court ultimately dismissed the case of arrears of labourers worth Rs. 6,50,000<sup>18</sup>.

Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union [CPRCI (ML)] reported successful wage struggle of cotton picking in the village Bhagtuana in 1993 and wheat harvesting in Sewewala village in Faridkot district in 1994. In both the cases support from a section of peasantry and outside political support were the critical factors for the successful struggles of these labourers.

### Land Struggles

Land is most scarce and sought after by peasants and agricultural labour. Land hunger is one of the serious issues on the Indian rural scene. Agricultural labourers demand land for two purposes. One, there is acute shortage of house sites particularly among the landless agricultural labourers. Each family requires some piece of land for house construction and a manure pit. Allocation of house sites has been recognised as one of the important issues of agricultural labour by the Government of India. It has been made an important plank of the Government policy ever since the announcement of 20-point programme in 1975 during the Emergency days. Under Government sponsored programme in many villages such sites have been allotted but at inappropriate places, away from the villages at low-lying areas. This remained an important issue of struggle in the state till early 1980s. Though this has continued to be included in the charter of demand of various unions but has not assumed prominence in the struggles of agricultural labourers. The second purpose for which land hunger persists is land for cultivation. Legally and technically speaking surplus land exists with some big landlords who are cultivating it as capitalist farmers and are politically influential persons. Present Chief Minister and President of Shiromani Akali Dal and former Chief Ministers come in this category. Surplus (*banjar*) land is also available with the state Government. This is largely *nazool* (unclaimed) and that has passed into the hands of the state Government. There is an attempt by influential landed interests to grab this land. In fact the landlord lobby is so powerful in the state administration that a major chunk of this land is already under their control. They are also active to grab this land which is under the occupation of poor tenants and agricultural labourers. The prosperous and capitalist farmers who cultivate land as a business enterprise are against the ceiling on the land holdings. Mann-Rajewal and Lakhawal factions of BKU have raised the demand for abolition of ceiling on the landholdings. Influential bureaucrats in the state administration have also taken such position. Late Chief Minister S Beant Singh set up a committee of ministers headed by S Harcharan Singh Brar (who later on became Chief Minister) to look into this

question. The committee suggested raising of ceiling limit from 17.50 acres of irrigated double cropping land to 100 acres of such land.

S Beant Singh made the announcement of raising this limit to 100 acres in a Kisan rally organised at Patiala on 24th August 1995. To allow transfer of land from the small and marginal farmers and landless tenant the Government has already lowered stamp duty on land sale deeds from 12 per cent to 6 per cent. Under such circumstances it is relevant to look into land struggles of agricultural labourers in the state.

The struggle of *abadkars* (who settled on *banzar nazools* land) for ownership of land has been continuing through 1970s and 1980s. Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union in collaboration with AIKS, CPI (M) has continued land struggles of these *abadkars*. It is reported by PKMU that 18,000 acres of evacuee land has been occupied by 20,000 *abadkar*.<sup>19</sup> They have been threatened of eviction, as the Government wants these occupants to buy the land at high market price. This land was originally *banzar* land in the riverbeds, which was made cultivable by the *abadkars*. Once this land became cultivable it got the attention of the rich farmers who used their influence with the state administration to purchase this land through the system of open auction. Technically this land belongs to the state Government. The policy of open auction of this land did result in a big land scandal that was exposed by Harchand Committee in 1973.<sup>20</sup> The PKMU and Kisan Sabha has resisted the eviction of poor *abadkars* and has not allowed this land to be auctioned by the Government. Beyond this neither PKMS nor PKMU has launched a struggle on land question since the mid 1970s.

Surplus land exists with big farmers in the state. Late D. C. Pavate, ex-Governor of Punjab has observed that despite ceiling laws, there exist 500 big landlords owning and cultivating land between 200 acres and 1000 acres each.<sup>21</sup> PKMU estimated in 1987 that there were 1725 landlords each owned land between 75-100 acres and 744 landlords each owned land between 100-125 acres and 538 landlords, which owned land above 125 acres. Since ceiling limit on irrigated land being 17.50 acres these landlords (3086) were having a large surplus of land illegally occupied by them.<sup>22</sup> The land struggles could have been directed against them. PKMU reported in 1992 that land struggles involving seizure could not be taken up where the landlords concerned are not isolated. The fear of landlords using terrorists against the union leaders and cadres came in the way of such seizure.<sup>23</sup> PKMS (of CPI) participated in land grab movement for seizure of land of big landlords from 15th August to 7th September 1970. The movement kept this issue alive through village to sub division level meetings, conferences, dharnas and demonstrations till October 1974. The issue was also taken to Prime Minister level through delegation of state leadership of PKMS which submitted a memorandum complaining against the sabotaging role of then revenue minister Mr Umrao Singh in implementation of land reforms and distribution of surplus land among the



agricultural labourers. The campaign of PKMS was terminated by the declaration of internal emergency in June 1975.<sup>24</sup> Since then land seizure of surplus land of landlords has never become an issue of struggle. Though the issue remains on the agenda of the Sabha yet it could not be made a live issue of struggle at village level. The issues like higher wages, old age pension, remission of loans up to Rs 5000, greater employment opportunities etc have received greater precedence over the land question in the issues of struggle of PKMS.

Outside the two major state level unions of agricultural labour (ie PKMS and PKMU) some land struggles have been fought under the banner of Naxalite supported unions. One such struggle took place in a village named Kotha Gharala near Gurdaspur (2 km). Nearly 20 acres of land was being cultivated by (Harijans) tenants for nearly 60 years. The land belonged to Mr Randhir Singh of village Kotli Nangal (now part of Gurdaspur). Tenants reduced the payment of rent from one-half of the produce to one-third and also started demanding receipt of the rent. On this Mr Randhir Singh popularly known as Top Sahib felt upset and sold the land at a throwaway price in 1988 to Mr Hari Singh, a transporter of nearby village Gharala. Mr Hari Singh tried to forcibly evict the tenants immediately. He forcibly cultivated the land with a tractor and installed a tubewell with pumpset on that land. He had the support of a large number of *goonda* elements. All the tenants except one compromised with Hari Singh and negotiated payments for leaving the land. The one tenant resisted this effort with the help of Kirti Kisan Union (affiliated to CPI (ML) Pulla Reddy group). Realising impending clash on sustained basis, Mr Hari Singh did not evict that tenant and gave up claim over 1.5 acres of the land. It is the outside political support, which saved that eviction, and till this date the land is being cultivated by that tenant. There are two major economic factors, which prompted other tenants to negotiate their eviction from land and get compensation. First that landholdings were very small ranging from 1 acre to 1.5 acres and were not economically viable. Second, the majority of tenants had sought employment outside agriculture. Some of them (educated) have become Government employees mainly benefiting from reservation policy while others have opted for tailoring shops in the Gurdaspur city. They used the compensation money to make investment in housing and business. In fact, the children of these tenants have lost interest in these petty-landholdings and were not in the mood to enter into conflict with the notorious transporter who had purchased that land.

In contrast to this, the struggle of tenants of Samuchak (near Dinanagar) produced completely different results. Landlord of this village tried to evict the tenants from the land. The tenants took the dispute to the courts. The court decided the case in favour of the tenants. The landlord feeling unhappy with the court decision invited *Nihangs* (Armed Amritdhari Sikhs) to take possession of the land. The *Nihangs* occupied that land. At this stage the tenants approached the Kirti Kisan Union (KKU). KKU organised the tenants, provided them with the support of

men and material to face Nihangs. The Nihangs fearing the force of organised strength of tenants who were determined to retain that land and active support of KKKU, that the land dispute was settled in favour of the tenants. Unlike the tenants of Kothe Gharala, these tenants were mainly dependent on agriculture. They had waged a long legal fight in the courts and were able to create an organised strength to overcome the fighting force of the Nihangs and isolate the landlord in the village.

The analysis of various struggles brings out the position of primacy of wage struggles in the state. It goes well with the ground reality. A careful study based on a sample of 1029 wage labour households spread over 333 villages in Punjab and 484 wage labour households from 329 villages in Haryana pertaining to the year 1975-76 stresses the significance of wage struggles for raising the income and family consumption and reduction of poverty among such households. The results show that where as labour segmentation, size of the labour household and number of dependant per male workers in household tend to increase poverty, increase in productivity, increase in wage rate and availability of non-agricultural employment reduce poverty. Among the poverty alleviating factors higher wage rate is the single most important factor. Summing up his analysis Sidhu brings out the significance of this issue for wage struggles in following words:

If higher wages are the best guarantee against the absolute poverty among rural wage labourers...then the primary task before rural labour organisations should be to make the labourers class conscious and fight for better wages. In future, the struggles of landless labourers have to be on the issue of better wages rather than fighting for getting them postage stamp sized plots in some remote and inaccessible corner of the village land if at all, the 'surplus land' exists in the village.<sup>25</sup>

#### **Other Issues of Struggle**

The growing significance of the wage struggles does not mean that the other related issues are of no consequence. In fact there are some very important issues which have also been important in the campaign of organised unions of agricultural labour. One is related to the growing significance of reduced days of employment for the rural labour in general. In 1970-71, agricultural labourers got work for 210 days in a year.<sup>26</sup> But now the days of employment in agriculture have gone down to 100<sup>27</sup> due to (a) arrival of migrant labour and (b) increased mechanisation in sowing and harvesting of crops particularly increased tractorisation and consequent use of mechanical drill, increased use of harvest combines and threshers. As a result several agricultural labourers have started doing odd jobs such as working as a paledar (labourer in the market places), vegetable vendors and petty businessmen

etc. Second important issue has been indebtedness of the labourers. Organised movement has been trying to create provisions of loans for them from the organised sector of money market. Consequently, it has been demanding remission of such loans to the extent of Rs 10,000. In 1992, the Punjab Government announced remission of loans of Harijans to the extent of Rs 5,000. Since this announcement has not been implemented, the unions have been demanding its implementation. The third important issue has been compensation to the victims of farm machinery accidents. The maximum compensation of Rs 10,000 in case of death was decided to be paid by the Punjab Agricultural Marketing Board in 1978. It was later on raised to Rs 35,000 and now it is being demanded by Punjab units of all Indian unions to be raised to Rs 1,000,000. Fourth issue is for overall protection of the agricultural labourers. The unions are demanding passing of a comprehensive act on the pattern of Kerala Agricultural Workers Act as recommended by sub-committee of the Central Standing Committee on Rural Unorganised Labour in 1980. Other issues are implementation of safety net for agricultural labour such as old age pension at higher rate and greater coverage of the eligible population under International Rural Development Programme (IRDB), Jawahar Rozgar Yojna (JRY) and Public Distribution System (PDS) and other provisions for the weaker sections. Another significant issue is related to social oppression of agricultural labourers by the landowners/cultivators and repression of the police in connivance with the dominant land-owning community.

On count of safety net and certain legislative provisions, the movement of agricultural labour has been successful in getting these conceded on the paper. On implementation front the unions are solely dependent on the administrative machinery of the state government. As yet they are unable to achieve their own involvement through legal sanction in the implementation of these programmes. Though over years the number of cases of social oppression and police repression on agricultural labour has declined yet it remains an important issue on the agenda of the movement. When the agricultural labourers are organised there is sharp decline of it but where the organisation is weak this issue re-emerges as part of the working of the overall socio-economic system against the rural poor. This issue remains an integral part of the struggles of the agricultural labourers and it appears on the scene as and when struggle is fought at a village level.

In summing up it can be observed that in the recent years the emphasis of PKMS and PKMU has been to shift the place of struggle from the villages and turn it against the Government for seeking protection and making it as one of the responsibility of the Government. They are leading, now, less number of struggles against the dominant cultivating community within the villages. On the contrary the recently emerging unions organised by various CPI(ML) groups are primarily emphasising struggles within the rural areas and are organising agricultural labour as part of building struggles against the dominant land owners. But the level of their

intervention is local and concentrated in a few patches. Unlike PKMS and PKM:U as yet they do not have functioning units in all districts of Punjab and they also lack linkages with organisations of agricultural labourers operating on all India level.

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## **Strains on Punjab Governance: An Assessment of the Badal Government (1997-1999)**

**Anne Vaugier-Chatterjee**  
*Centre de Sciences Humaines, Paris*

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This article seeks to assess the two-year rule of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), back to power in Punjab after more than a decade of exclusion from governance. It tries to bring out the elements of both continuity and change in the SAD's political strategies, in particular to analyse the rationale of its alliance with the BJP and the state of affairs within a party prone to factionalism. It also focusses on the feud between the party's stalwarts that arises out of the central issue in Akali politics, namely, the complex links between religion and politics. The tercentenary of the Khalsa, the SAD's economic agenda and its electoral strategies are placed in perspective in this context.

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*'One Akali a Sant, two Akalis a Dal, three Akalis Chaos'*

*Old Punjabi Saying*

In the light of the overall developments in Indian politics, Punjab presents an interesting picture. The rise of regional parties with the concomitant decline of the Congress Party is a phenomenon that one can observe at the all-India level from the mid-eighties onwards. Punjab is no exception to this trend. In 1985, the SAD, the political party representing the interests of the Sikhs, came to power in that state with a landslide victory. Between 1987 and 1992 the state was under President's rule. The Congress returned to power in 1992 largely because the Akalis boycotted the polls that year. Finally, in February 1997, in the Assembly elections contested by all major parties, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) came back to power with a thumping majority (75 out of 117 seats) and thus ended a period of turmoil of more than ten years.

Under the leadership of a seasoned politician, Prakash Singh Badal who had come to embody the moderate trend of the party, the SAD offered at first glance a credible alternative to the unpopular rule of the Congress Party. However, in the elections, the emergence of its alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) raised many questions about its strategies and ideology. Are they viable at the national and regional levels? Further, historical precedents do not speak favourably for the alliance. Thus after seeing how and why the present coalition government came

about, our analysis will focus on the contradictions of the peculiar religio-political fabric of the SAD.<sup>2</sup> This will lead us to an assessment of its chances of survival in a context of extreme regional and national political volatility.

### **The SAD-BJP alliance: strange bedfellows**

In 1997, after four decades of the communalization of politics in Punjab, the coming together of the parties that had earlier encouraged the divide between the state's two main religious communities, the Hindus and the Sikhs, though ideologically objectionable, seemed politically expedient. The most obvious *raison d'être* of the alliance between the Hindu right, the BJP, and the Akali Dal is anti-Congressism. This political strategy had already been tested in 1967, when the SAD allied with the Jana Sangh (the predecessor of the BJP) after the elections. The Congress party dominated Punjab almost continuously for four decades without being seriously challenged by an ever-disunited SAD. During the 50s and 60s, the constantly shifting strategies of the SAD never led to any lasting results.<sup>3</sup> Historians will agree that 1984 marked a point of no return in Congress-Akali relations. The assault on the Golden Temple by the army in June 1984, Indira Gandhi's assassination in the October of that year and the anti-Sikh riots of Delhi that followed cannot be erased from the Sikh psyche.

The BJP's attitude in 1984 in contrast to that of the Congress party, was more favorable to the Sikh cause. Though the party wholeheartedly supported Operation Blue Star, BJP/RSS cadres did not participate in the anti-Sikh violence of November 1984. This largely explains why Delhi, as a Union territory, became nine years later the experimental ground of a BJP-SAD alliance. The support of the Sikhs was a decisive factor in the BJP's victory in the Delhi Legislative Assembly elections in 1993. The BJP, once at the head of Delhi's government, stood by the promises made to the Akalis (recognizing in particular Punjabi as an official language for local government in Delhi). Thereby, it acquired a reliable ally, as testified by the alignment of the SAD (Badal) with the still-born Vajpayee government in May 1996.

The alliance of the BJP with the SAD seems to follow a constant strategy of rapprochement in the difficult years between 1987 and 1992, the period when terrorism had reached a climax. During that time, the fact that members of the Hindu community were the prime targets of the terrorist groupings (composed not entirely but predominantly of Sikhs) could have soured the relationship between the two parties but did not.

The 1997 PLA elections brought about promising electoral party alignments. For the first time in the political history of Punjab, the alliance of the SAD with the BJP was struck before the elections. By underplaying its 'Hindutva' slogan, the BJP



deprived itself of one of its principal mobilizing factors. A new logic seemed to govern the party's electoral strategy. Coalition-building, pre-electoral alliances and the game of numbers seemed to have gained ground over ideologies.

Numerous circumstantial factors made at first the future of this alliance uncertain. In particular, the rejection of the BJP at the national political level in 1996 and its strains in several states of the Federation (such as Gujarat and Rajasthan) could have had a negative impact on its political fortune in Punjab. However, the rising credibility of the party as a national force undeniably attracted the Hindu vote in Punjab towards the BJP.

The motivations of the two partners, however, differed: the SAD's principal objective was to take over power in Punjab but for the BJP, this strategy was not limited to the short-term benefit of a regional victory. In the long run, the party was counting on Sikh votes in other State elections, where, as in Delhi, they could make the balance tilt in its favour.

#### **Old men, new faces**

1997 was the fifth time that the SAD came to power in Punjab and the third time that P. S. Badal became the state's Chief Minister. Badal's popularity reached a peak during the well-orchestrated 1997 election campaign. Few denounced the contradictions of his politics since the early 80s. The man who embodied in 1997 the moderate non-communal trend within the SAD had made questionable moves after the fall of his government in 1980. For one, in 1984 he publicly burnt the page of the Constitution containing Article 25 in which Sikhs are defined as Hindus. Again, he was the one who took part in the passive resistance movement launched by Sant Harchand Singh Longowal in 1982 with which the extremist Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was later associated.<sup>4</sup> Last but not the least, on account of his opposition to the Rajiv-Longowal accord signed between the SAD (Longowal) and the Congress Party in 1985, Badal was instrumental in bringing down the moderate Akali government led by Surjit Singh Barnala in 1986.

The moderate image that Badal attempts to project is rather recent. It goes back to 1994 when at a Pan-Akali conference, he chose to stay away from the six newly-constituted Akali factions and to spearhead instead a secular Sikh movement. Badal's main achievement in his attempt to break the image of the Akali Dal as a Sikh party was to allow non-Sikhs to contest in 1994 an election which had been hitherto reserved for Sikhs, viz. the elections to the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC).<sup>5</sup>

Under his leadership, the political discourse of the Akali Dal has evolved from that of a defensive minority party to one that mouths an anti-Congress combative phraseology. The concept of the 'Panth in danger', launched in the late 40s and recycled in the 80s has been discarded, for it denoted a minority complex

which did not encapsulate the social and political aspirations of mid-1990s Punjabi society. A new slogan, 'Panth, Punjab, Punjabi' was coined at the Mcga Conference in 1996, a reflection of the common goal of unity for both Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs.

More than any slogan, the complementarity of the electoral strongholds of the two partners – the SAD in rural, the BJP in urban Punjab - explains the landslide in favour of the alliance (75 seats, 18 for its BJP ally, out of a total of 117 seats) in the Punjab legislative assembly.

Two conclusions can be drawn from these results. On the one hand, the voters seemed to approve of the secular plank of the alliance and of the stand chosen by the SAD. On the other, the strong bonds of Punjabi Hindus with the BJP have been reaffirmed. For the BJP, these results represented a landmark before the national polls. The success of the alliance helped the BJP to elaborate new strategies at the all-India level. Indeed, the 1998 general elections led the party to power at the Centre. Moderate Akalis were then duly rewarded for their support with two berths in the Cabinet.<sup>6</sup>

However, if political strategies proved successful, the realities of governance showed a different picture at the regional level in Punjab. What remained to be seen were the actual contents of the fabled *Punjabi Ekta* (Punjab unity), which naturally leads us to the quest for unity within the SAD.

### **The elusive unity of the SAD**

Ironically, more than by dissent on issues of governance with its BJP ally, the 35-odd months of rule of the coalition have been marred by internecine feuds among senior leaders of the SAD. This is not really surprising. Any observer of Punjab politics will attest the view that whenever it is out of power all factions of the Akali Dal unite and when it is in power, there ensues a power struggle within the party. The political developments since mid-1997 can be seen both as a continuation of the Akali tradition and a rupture with the past in the present context of Punjab and Indian politics.<sup>7</sup>

There are structural explanations for these developments. Institutionally, there are three recognized political power centres in Sikh politics. 1) The Party President, 2) the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) President and 3) the leader of the legislative wing who becomes the Chief Minister whenever the Akalis form the government. The balance of forces amongst these three centres is maintained through a permanent struggle. A fourth pole of the Sikh polity, embodying the supreme temporal authority of Sikhism, is represented by the Akal Takht (the throne of the Immortals) at the Golden Temple, Amritsar.

Since the 1997 Punjab legislative assembly elections, Badal has been both leader of the legislative wing and Party President. The double mandate is not in

itself a novelty, since another Akali Chief Minister, Surjit Singh Barnala, had also held both posts in 1986 and 1987. What made the real difference in 1997 was that the Badal group dominated all the spheres that mattered in Akali politics : the SGPC General House (with a strength of 136 members out of a total 175) and its executive, as well as the Political Affairs Committee and the Party Working Committee. In addition, its numerical strength in the Assembly (75 of 117 seats), a record in Akali electoral history, guaranteed the government against defections.

### **Badal versus Tohra**

As SGPC President, Akali veteran Gurcharan Singh Tohra represented the continuity factor in Sikh politics. He was elected for the 25th time in 1998 and he had held this post continuously since 1979. This unchallenged position has assured him a considerable influence in the Sikh community even though he did not have a mass following or a political base.

The Akali Dal and the SGPC have been closely intertwined since the mid-twenties. This symbiotic relationship was in the past a liability for the party. In the present context, the alliance of the SAD (Badal) with the BJP was bound to put a strain on the relationship between the two leaders. To project a secular image, Badal had clearly distanced himself from the Akal Takht and other religious authorities during the 1997 campaign. His relationship with Tohra, however, was more ambiguous. They both presented a united front after the victory of the SAD. In spite of their much publicised unity, old personal rivalries however rapidly reemerged.

Badal and Tohra's interests had clashed 20 years earlier when Tohra and another leader, Talwandi, had united against Badal for the election to the post of president of the SAD. This time, what reactivated the factionalism is the fact that Badal holds both the posts of Chief Minister and Party President, a situation which has been openly and heavily criticised.<sup>8</sup> Tohra had steadily endeavoured, in the second half of 1998 and the beginning of 1999, to build an opposition to the Chief Minister, both in the state and at the Centre.

Who started the feud remains an unanswered question. Tohra likes to project himself as a victim of a power-hungry rival, whereas Badal sees himself as the target of a plot by fundamentalist forces. What the 1999 struggle at the apex of Akali religious and political leadership has once again exposed is the seemingly unavoidable factionalism of the SAD. The most obvious explanation for this situation is that both leaders have attempted to interfere in the other's sphere of influence.

The ideal stage for the fight was provided by the tercentenary celebrations of the *Khalsa* in 1999, in a sense the climactic phase of a two-year long process. Without notice, Badal conceived, shortly after his coming to power, the idea to celebrate the Khalsa tercentenary under the auspices of the Punjab government. The

latter donated a huge sum of money, to which a large contribution from the government of India was added. This irreversibly politicized the event. By choosing to monopolise the fundamentally religious event, Badal created a conflict situation vis-à-vis Tohra's hegemony over the religious affairs of the community, vested in the latter by virtue of his position within the SGPC. In political terms, this was an indicator that moderate leadership was slowly giving way to fundamentalist ideologies. The logical outcome of such a deviation from the original agenda was a steady loss of support among Badal's hardcore supporters.

The phenomenon was largely publicized when in November 1998, Jalandhar's newspaper baron (chief editor of the widely distributed Punjabi daily *Ajit*) and Rajya Sabha member Barjinder Singh Hamdard resigned from the post of 'Chief of The Executive Committee of the Anandpur Sahib Foundation', a body set up by the state government to act as a nodal agency for the celebrations. This was a rather unexpected development for the moderate camp. The chief accusation of Barjinder Singh was that the position of the moderates around Badal on religious issues was ambiguous and that this presented a potential danger to the peace and amity in Punjab that had constituted a principal electoral argument. More generally, he was critical of the policy of the SAD leadership that preferred to build bridges outside the party rather than iron out the differences within.<sup>9</sup> The allusion was clearly to the SAD-BJP alliance.

The religious marches to Anandpur Sahib thus gained the flavour of an electoral campaign. The frontiers of the two camps were clearly drawn with separate Khalsa marches organised by the two camps. One was launched under the aegis of the President of the Sikh Students organization, the AISSF (that had earlier been linked to extremist organizations), Harminder Singh Gill, a protégé of Tohra, while the second, the Sarv Dharm Chetna March, was organised by the supporters of Badal under the *Punjabi Ekta Manch* banner.<sup>10</sup>

The traditional *Hola mohalla* celebrations at the beginning of March were the second portent of the public split of the Akali Dal. At parallel functions, each side claimed to be the authentic Akali Dal, accusing its rival of deviating from the basic ideology of the party and from Sikhism. While Tohra accused Badal of 'blatant nepotism' (referring to the latter's grooming of his son Sukhbir Singh Badal), Badal in turn denounced the destabilizing attempts of Tohra saying that he was playing the game of the Congress party. He warned that 'if violence returns, Punjab would be wiped out from the face of the world'.<sup>11</sup>

Ironically, it was the pro-Tohra Jathedar, Bhai Ranjit Singh, who led the main religious procession to mark the end of the three-day festival. Two Jathedars considered loyal to the Badal camp also participated.

Another feature of the politico-religious event, a direct fallout of the BJP-SAD alliance, was the large scale participation of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Rashtriya Swayam Sewak (RSS) volunteers in the celebrations at Anandpur

Sahib alongside Akali youth and the AISSF. This gave rise to various interpretations. Appraised by some as another show of communal harmony and an illustration of the Sikh concept of *Sarbat da Bhala* (equality and universal brotherhood),<sup>12</sup> it was nevertheless strongly criticized by those who recalled the danger of absorption of the Khalsa into the Hindu fold (since right-wing Hindu organizations consider the Khalsa as no more than the militant arm of Hinduism).<sup>13</sup> This again reflected the conflict between the partisans of a strategic political alliance with the BJP and the opponents to any compromise with non-Sikhs (the point of view represented by the radical wing of the party led by Tohra).

Conversely, while Badal's involvement with religious affairs relegated his other responsibilities as a Chief Minister to the background, the SGPC President breached into secular territory by raising a number of political issues at the Centre. He insisted on the protection of the rights of minorities, that is, of the Sikhs in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. More important, he took official positions against the inclusion of Udham Singh Nagar in the new state of Uttaranchal and on the problems of farmers in Punjab. These in sum constitute blatant encroachments on Badal's prerogatives.

#### **A steady monopolization of power through institutional means**

In his capacity as Chief Minister, Badal evolved a multi-pronged strategy to weaken the SGPC chief in his traditional stronghold; the Patiala belt (the districts of Ropar, Fatehgarh Sahib and Patiala). This became manifest in the transfers implemented by Badal in these areas from mid-December 1998 onwards. Significantly, in two instalments, all pro-Tohra officers were transferred from important government posts. In the first, Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and Punjab Civil Service (PCS) officers, then in the second, Indian Police Service (IPS) officers, were replaced. Prior to the Badal-Tohra feud, the acquiescence of Tohra to administrative postings was a must. The upper hand in these districts has now been given to Akali Dal leader Kanwaljit Singh, one of Tohra's staunch adversaries and an equally strong supporter of Badal. This area is also coveted by Punjab Pradesh Congress (PPC) President, scion of Patiala's royal family Amarinder Singh, a Congress member who turned Akali after 1984 and recently rejoined the Congress Party.<sup>14</sup> This policy of the control of the bureaucracy, strongly condemned by Tohra's supporters, took a toll of five members of the Council of Ministers, 3 of Cabinet rank and two ministers of state.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond these politico-administrative stratagems - to which many Chief Ministers have resorted to consolidate their power - Badal innovated by challenging the second significant source of power in Sikhism, the Jathedar of the Akal Takht, the temporal authority in Sikh polity.

In the past, the religious authority in temporal Sikh polity had often played the role of mediator. At Tohra's request, Bhai Ranjit Singh tried rather unsuccessfully to broker a truce between the two factions before the celebrations of the tercentenary. This took the form of a *hukumnama* (religious edict) issued on 31st December 1998, by which both parties were asked to suspend hostilities till the 15th of April 1999. Interpreting it as a pro-Tohra stance, Badal reacted in a rather unexpected manner. He influenced the SGPC into suspending Bhai Ranjit Singh. This marked a turning point in Sikh political history.

What followed in February 1999, namely the installation of Giani Puran Singh, a *Granthi* of the Golden Temple, as acting Jathedar after the sacking of Bhai Ranjit Singh, can be seen as a pyrrhic victory for the Badal government. The absence of the head Granthi from the ceremony constituted a violation of tradition. The disapproval of major conservative Sikh organisations like the Sant Samaj, the Dandami Taksal and the Nihangs compromised the legitimacy of the new Jathedar. This not only led to a widening of the existing schism between Badal and Tohra but also deepened the crisis within the Akali Dal itself. Significantly, three leaders of the more radical trend of the SAD, Jasbir Singh Rode, Kuldip Singh Wadala and Simranjit Singh Mann boycotted the appointment ceremony of Puran Singh.

However, Badal's will to control the entire Sikh polity remained unshaken. His next major move was to assault the second main power source of Sikh politics, the SGPC, through legitimate institutional means.

Since 1979, Tohra's authority over the SGPC had never been challenged. But, given the rising tensions, he had offered in March to resign from the presidency of the SGPC. In what clearly appeared to be a personal blow, the offer was ignored and in pointed contrast, 136 of the SGPC members from the Badal group formally ousted him from the post of President. The no-confidence motion against him was unanimously adopted. It was only the third time in history when the SGPC general house had taken up a no-confidence motion against its President. Veteran Akali leader Master Tara Singh had survived one in the 1930s and Kirpal Singh had had to quit after he lost in 1962. G.S Tohra is thus the second SGPC President to have been ousted from office.

Tohra was replaced by a newcomer in politics, a teacher-become Minister in Badal's ministry, Bibi Jagir Kaur Begowal, on 16th March 1999. Badal thus established his supremacy over Akali politics.<sup>16</sup> This breakthrough into the fortress of the SGPC that holds sway over 20 million Sikhs worldwide, controls more than 300 shrines and whose stated budget was Rs 1.42 billion in 1998, is significant enough. That a woman was elected to this post is a watershed in Sikh history. This election however was widely perceived to be an electoral calculation meant to attract women's votes to the SAD (which is very strongly a mens' party). One should recall here that similar considerations might have been behind the choice by the Congress Party of Rajinder Kaur Bhattal in 1996 as the first woman Chief

Minister of Punjab. The choice of a rather inexperienced person for a post as important for Sikh politics as that of the SGPC chief has evoked much criticism against a puppet presidency.

### **The emergence of an anti-Badal front**

In spite of the success encountered in his various battles, Badal's control over Sikh politics seemed to have been weakened by the discontent that his moves triggered off. To dismantle the political empire that Tohra built up, Badal has attempted to place loyalists in key-positions in various gurudwaras. The Badal faction has had to reckon with opposition from most Akali leaders on many issues. For instance, the most vocal, Simranjit Singh Mann, President of the SAD (Mann), objected to the non-confidence motion against Tohra, saying it was a violation of the Hukumnama issued by the Akal Takht (by which the warring Akali leaders had been asked to desist till April 15th).

Since the sacking of Gurcharan Singh Tohra from the SGPC, the latter's confrontationalist campaign has occupied the forefront of state politics. However, Tohra's offensive had already been launched during the Adampur by-election to the Punjab Legislative Assembly in December 1998. In an electoral speech delivered on the eve of the Adampur poll, Badal had linked the results of that by-election to the 'dignity of the Sikh community', thus violating the secular discourse which had won a massive mandate for the Akali-BJP alliance in 1997.

Communal amity and improved Centre-State relations had been key-elements in the alliance's agenda. Thus the Congress victory in the Adampur assembly by-elections was a pointer to the growing disenchantment of the Punjab people with the BJP-SAD coalition in power. This defeat was indeed a first for the alliance since the 1997 assembly elections and the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. During its first 20 months in power, the SAD(Badal) had trounced the Congress Party twice in two previous by-elections (Qila Raipur and Shan Chaurasi).<sup>17</sup>

Politically, the result of the Adampur by-election indicated perhaps a revival of the traditional social base of the Congress Party (which had last won this seat in 1967). A predominantly rural constituency, Adampur's electorate mostly consists of Dalits and Jat sikhs.<sup>18</sup> The voting trend showed that the Congress has regained most of its support among Dalits, Hindus and a section of Jat Sikhs. It also showed that the Akali Dal's ally, the BJP, has lost ground amongst Hindus. While the BSP has been the main loser, there has also been a definite erosion of the Akali Dal's Jat Sikh vote.

Considering that the main factor that had enabled the Congress party to rule Punjab in the past was the overwhelming support of Hindus and Dalits - besides the support of a section of Jat Sikhs - this could indicate an upward trend for the

Congress. It had in recent years lost a considerable section of the Hindu and Dalit vote to the BJP and the rising Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP).

The support of Jat Sikhs to the Congress has oscillated. While Adampur is the first indication of the BJP having started to lose ground after its alliance with the Akali Dal, the BSP's decline, which had begun earlier in the state, seems to have accelerated. For the SAD, the explanations of this electoral defeat vary. Whereas the Akali Dal puts the blame on the central government having raised the prices of essential commodities and fertilisers, others judge the non-performance of the SAD-BJP alliance to be responsible. A third view holds that the Akali Dal's organisational weaknesses have heavily contributed to the electoral rout. All three explanations are partly true.

#### **Time to ponder : an assessment of the two-year rule of the SAD**

A non viable economic policy?

On the economic front, the financial burden of populist measures has been heavy during the past 2 years of SAD rule. Exempting farmers from paying electricity charges and land revenue and the rural housing plan taken up by the Badal government since February 1997 have cost the exchequer around 8 billion rupees. Coupled with this, industrial subsidies, which used to amount to 6.3 billion rupees in 1992, have shot up to 12 billion in 1997-98. Simultaneously, agriculture sector subsidies have increased steeply from 5.9 billion to 15 billion rupees. This selective prodigality towards certain sections of the population, clearly intended to gain popularity for the state government, has led the exchequer to financial bankruptcy. Moreover, the state government did not at the same time develop resources that could generate commensurate revenue. According to official estimates, the total subsidies during this period amount to about 30 billion rupees, clearly a crippling burden on the state economy.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast, Badal has charged the Congress Party with having ruined Punjab's finances. There is some foundation in the charge since the state had a debt liability of Rs 15344 crores in 1996-97 when the Akali Dal-BJP alliance took over. The problem of youth unemployment, which is at the root of the socio-political crisis that ruined the state in the eighties, has remained untackled during the Badal regime. There are nearly 1.5 million unemployed educated youth in Punjab.<sup>20</sup> In sum, till the end of the first half of 1999, the Badal government has fared no better than its predecessors.



### **Two-faced stances**

Badal's ideological stance continues to be unclear. Old rhetoric resurfaced during the Punjab legislative assembly's budget session when he demanded 'total economic autonomy and political autonomy to a great extent' for the states within the Indian union. First articulated in 1973, these demands constitute the core of the much-discussed Anandpur Sahib Resolution, the base of the dialogue between the Centre and the Punjab government.

However, inconsistency between speech and action remain. For example, Badal has repeatedly demanded the scrapping of the Constitution's article 356 that empowers the Centre to impose President's rule in the states in which governance is threatened. With reason, since successive Akali governments have been dismissed in the past on political rather than administrative grounds. Yet Badal, undisturbed by the SAD's contradictions, justified the Akali Dal's support to the BJP's decision to impose President's rule in Bihar.<sup>21</sup>

There has been similar equivocation over other issues. Regarding the long pending river waters dispute, Badal has been under attack from the Congress Party which has accused him of siphoning off 20 million rupees intended for the long overdue construction of the Sutlej Yamuna link (SYL), a bone of contention between neighbouring Haryana and Punjab. Objecting to the construction of this canal had been one of Badal's electoral commitments.

Because of Badal's prevarication on this issue, the filling up of the SYL canal had been undertaken by two Akali groups opposed to his government. SAD (A) and SAD (D-for Democratic) activists resorted to the symbolic filling up of the SYL canal near Doomcheri Ropar on March 20, 1999. S. S. Mann said that Badal should complete the filling up of the canal since it had been one of his unfulfilled electoral promises. Incidentally after the SYL canal, Mann has decided to fill up its Rajasthan feeder with earth since the Rajasthan government has imposed an undeclared ban on the purchase of land by Punjabi residents, especially Sikhs.<sup>22</sup> But beyond Centre-State relations and regional issues, the SAD also has to face the challenge of asserting and consolidating its position at the Centre.

### **Electoral Challenges at the Centre**

It may be recalled that the fall of the Vajpayee led -BJP government at the Centre in April 1999 was not significant for the SAD's political future. Indeed, the SAD (Badal) faithfully stood by its BJP ally during that political crisis at the Centre. On the 17th of April 1999, Akali MPs voted unanimously against the no-confidence motion passed in Parliament.

A far more crucial factor for Punjab's political future was the growing rift within the party which could benefit the Congress and ruin the Akalis' decade long struggle for power in their own state. This would go some way towards explaining Badal's powerful anti-Congress diatribe at Faridkot even before the Lok Sabha polls were announced. In the days following the BJP's dismissal from the Centre, he virtually launched the election campaign for the Faridkot seat from the local gurudwara, thus violating the Election Commission's rules that forbid the use of religious places for political purposes. Resorting to the usual anti-Congress rhetoric, he once again condemned the 'divide and rule policy' of that party and judged it solely responsible for the terrorism in the state in the 80s and the failure to transfer Chandigarh to Punjab.<sup>23</sup> While denying that he had any political motive for his attack (which could disqualify him from contesting the elections), he accused the Congress Party of triggering off a poll that would cost 10 billion rupees to the exchequer.

In a volatile political context, there were certain constants: in particular, the major alliances remained untouched. The Akali Dal-BJP combine was retained for the 13th Lok Sabha polls. Thus the campaign was a logical extension of the strategy followed for the 1997 state assembly polls and the 1998 general elections. Rather than elaborate new programmes, the two leaders of the alliance, Atal Behari Vajpayee and Prakash Singh Badal, have inverted their roles. Vajpayee campaigned for the SAD candidates in Punjab while Badal addressed rallies of the BJP candidates in other states.

The allocation of seats within the alliance itself did raise some controversy. Badal's SAD had for these elections staked its claim to at least four Lok Sabha seats from the BJP's share (one in Rajasthan (Ganganagar), one in Delhi, one in Uttar Pradesh (Nainital which includes Udham Singh Nagar), and one in Haryana (Kurukshetra).<sup>24</sup> In 1998, the SAD-Badal's demand for seat adjustments for the Assembly elections had not been conceded by the BJP. The fact that Punjabis are dominant in at least seven assembly constituencies in Rajasthan (in Ganganagar and Hanumangarh districts) and in Delhi is the main argument on which the SAD based its claim. This time, the allocation of seats outside Punjab could have been a reward for the unflinching support that the SAD has given the BJP in times of trial but none of their demands was granted.<sup>25</sup>

#### **Political realignments on the eve of elections**

After Badal's decision to go to the polls with the BJP, it was to be expected that Tohra's loyalists would explore the possibility of constituting a third front by reviving their old alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Punjab. This alliance had proved fruitful when the SAD and the BSP had fought the 1996 general elections together and three BSP candidates (including Kanshi Ram) had won. The

BSP had, as we have seen earlier, in 1999 made a political statement by attending the parallel Khalsa functions organized by Tohra's supporters.

Even if no decisive breakthrough was made by Tohra's splinter group, by the sole fact of remaining isolated, it did play a negative role in the elections. Its choice of alliances was a significant factor. Kanshi Ram was perceived by the ex SGPC supremo as the natural ally of his SAD. It seemed a choice by default since the chances of Tohra's floating a third front with the SAD-Amritsar, the SAD-Panthic and the SAD-Democratic were low. Tohra, like many other public figures, disapproved of the filling up of the SYL and thus distanced himself from S.S. Mann. In any case, Tohra's chances, no matter whom he allied with, were low since his single recent electoral victory had been in the comparatively less significant bloc *samiti* elections at Sirhind in May 1999.

Another potential bloc in these elections was the alliance of secular forces with the left parties which still have some pockets of influence in the state. The idea of constituting a *Secular Democratic Front* consisting of all democratic secular parties, including the Congress, the BSP, the Janata Dal, the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) was aired by the CPI shortly after the general elections were announced but did not fructify.

#### **An ever splintering and merging SAD**

Last but not the least, a potential group of allies of the Tohra faction consisted of the supporters of that ousted and controversial figure of Akali politics, Jathedar Ranjit Singh. He had the support of the Akali faction led by former Jathedar, Jasbir Singh Rode and former SAD's Vice-President, Kuldip Singh Wadala. The most likely strategy was therefore to bring together all the diverse opponents of Badal to form some kind of fragile alliance. This was achieved with the constitution of the Sarb Hind Shiromani Akali Dal.<sup>26</sup>

Two events during the months of April and May 1999, underscored the factional divide. Tohra's loyalists launched a parallel Youth Akali Dal at Fatehgarh Sahib on 27th April 1999 where they announced their policy of equidistance from the BJP and the Congress, holding both parties responsible for the mid-term poll. Secondly, the expulsion on May 14, 1999 of Tohra from the SAD for a duration of six years can be considered a point of no return in political terms. Tohra's opposition to the government left no options for Badal but to expel the former chief of the SGPC from the party. Hailed by the partisans of Badal, including the Delhi Shiromani Akali Dal representatives, this measure on the other hand provoked a rebellion within the party and hastened the split in the SAD. This was rightly seen as serving the interests of the Congress Party, which still remains the second most powerful force in the state.

### **The 1999 Lok Sabha Poll : a severe test of Badal's legitimacy**

Against this backdrop, as was anticipated, the Lok Sabha poll of October 1999 proved to be a crushing defeat for the BJP-SAD alliance. Though not really surprising, the electoral debacle of the ruling coalition was a particularly severe blow to the Badal government after the landslide victory in the PLA elections of 1997 and the LS elections in 1998. It also confirmed the trend heralded by the Adampur by-election. The SAD (Badal) in alliance with the BJP managed to get just 3 out of the 13 Lok Sabha seats, whereas the Congress, which had won no seat in the 1998 LS polls, gained 8. Its alliance partner, the CPI gained 1 and the previously marginalised Akali Dal leader Simranjit Singh Mann, 1.

Two factors seem to have provoked the defeat of the ruling combine. The first is the 'anti-incumbency' vote, according to which the voters, when dissatisfied with the performances of a government, vote for the opposition party. The second factor, weighing equally strongly in the redefinition of the balance of forces, is the negative outcome of the internecine feuds of the Akali Dal, the 'war within'. A closer look at the election results can however test the view that the thumping victory in terms of seats for the Congress Party is a sign of its regaining lost ground in Punjab.

On the surface, the most significant outcome of the 1999 elections is that it demolished the theory of the infallibility of the Akali Dal-BJP alliance as representing the two dominant communities in the State. The failure of the ruling alliance and the negative feelings it generated in the electorate were particularly blatant in four significant constituencies: Faridkot, Gurdaspur, Amritsar and Jalandhar.

One can however clearly distinguish two patterns of vote distribution in the constituencies where the contest was bipolar (between the SAD and the INC) and in those where it was triangular, where Sarb Hind Shiromani Akali Dal (SHSAD) candidates were also in the fray.

The defeat of Badal's son, Sukhbir Singh in Faridkot symbolises the rejection of Badal's highly personalised government. The contest however between the Congress candidate Jagmeet Singh Brar and Sukhbir Singh Badal was extremely tight (Badal lost by a small margin of 5148 votes, winning 413,306 votes against 418,454).<sup>27</sup>

In Jalandhar, the Congress party won by a higher margin (267,209 as against 232,543 for the SAD). The SHSAD did not contest in either Faridkot or Jalandhar. This factor has to be taken into account while analysing the Congress victory in these two constituencies.

In a majority of cases, the division of the Akali camp was the cause of its defeat. Three factions of the party, namely, the Tohra-led All India Shiromani Akali Dal (AISAD), the Akali Dal (Panthic) and the Akali Dal (Democratic) had united to put up candidates against Badal's leadership. This move was supported by another regionally significant political force, the Bahujan Socialist Party (BSP).

This is why in Patiala, for example, the Congress candidate won by a comfortable margin of 78,908 votes (360,125 for the Congress as against 281,217 for the SAD). However, the combined votes of the SAD (281,217) and the SHSAD (89,268), totalling 370,485, amount to more than that of the Congress Party.

A similar phenomenon can be observed in the reserved constituency of Ropar. The Congress candidate secured 326,651 votes while the SAD got 249,270. However, when taken with the SHSAD votes (118,353), the SAD tally again amounts to more than that of the Congress Party.

In the three constituencies of Ludhiana, Hoshiarpur, Amritsar and the reserved constituency of Phillaur, the victory of the Congress Party seems more genuine. In Ludhiana, for instance, the combined votes of the SAD and SHSAD (respectively 241,682 and 64,893) do not match the Congress Party's score (346,982).

In Hoshiarpur and Amritsar, the defeat of the BJP candidates can be attributed to a shift of a section of urban Hindu votes in favour of the Congress party. This could explain that in Amritsar, a former Union Minister but political lightweight, R. L. Bhatia, defeated a political stalwart, the BJP's state president, Daya Singh Sodhi.

The picture is different in the Phillaur reserved constituency where the contest took place between the Dalit Bahujan Samaj Morcha (DBSM) and the Congress party. The comfortable margin that the Congress won by can be attributed to the return of the Dalit vote to the Congress fold.

Considering the various contexts in which electoral choices are made, it is inevitable that the main rivals in the fray, the BJP and the Congress-I would have different interpretations of the results.

Whereas the BJP sees two causes for the defeat of its alliance viz. the anti-incumbency factor and the split in the SAD's vote, the Congress party analysts tend to emphasize the impact of three other factors : (i) the ineffectiveness of the Kargil electoral campaign of the BJP, (ii) the electoral adjustments of the Congress-I with left political forces and (iii) a significant shift of the Dalit vote from the BSP to the Congress I.<sup>28</sup>

After the electoral rout of the ruling coalition in Punjab, more and more dissidents, as has been observed earlier, have started rearing their heads within the ruling Akali Dal. A signature campaign, spearheaded by Ravi Inder Singh, (a former speaker of the Vidhan Sabha) seeking Badal's resignation as leader of the

Legislature Party was launched in October 1999. However, Badal has succeeded so far in resisting these pressures to oust him from power.

Another significant event in Punjab politics was the annual election to the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (which took place in the wake of the LS polls) on November 10 1999. In a repetition of the previous year's scenario, the contest for the presidency of the elected Parliament of Sikhs triggered off anew the struggle between the main rival factions of the Akali Dal. As we have seen, a commonality of views between the SGPC President and the Chief Minister is a prerequisite to the good functioning of the government. Thus the reelection of Bibi Jagir Kaur as President of the SGPC and her victory over the candidate put up by Tohra, Surjit Singh Cheema, (an SGPC member from Jalandhar) once again established the supremacy of the Chief Minister and President of the Shiromani Akali Dal, Prakash Singh Badal, over Sikh politics.<sup>29</sup> However this supremacy was short-lived since on 26th January, 2000, Jagir Kaur was excommunicated by Jathedar Puran Singh. The seesaw battle thus continues.

If on the surface it seems that Badal has managed to control the dissidents, it is nevertheless true there still remains strong resentment amongst the rank and file of the party. Of course, his government still benefits (unlike those of many other Akali Dal leaders in the past) from the backing of the Centre. The precise form of an alternative political articulation, the need for which seems to be indicated by the present electoral fluidity, is yet to crystallise. Nevertheless, Punjab seems to be heading for another period of comparative political instability. Fortunately, however, its characteristics would be different from the agitated decade of the 80s in view of the moderation of erstwhile extremist elements.

### Notes

1. See, Gurharpal Singh, 'The Akalis and the BJP in Punjab: From Ayodhya to the 1997 legislative Assembly election', in *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India*, T. Blom Hansen, C. Jaffrelot (ed.), (Delhi, OUP, 2000); 'India's Akali-BJP alliance: the 1997 Legislative assembly elections', *Asian Survey*, vol. XXXVIII, n° 4, April 4 1998.
2. See J. S. Grewal, *The Akalis. A Short History*, Chandigarh, 1996.
3. B.R. Nayar, *Minority Politics in the Punjab*, Princeton, 1966.
4. For an analysis of the political shifts of the early eighties; see Pritam Singh, 'Akali Agitation, Growing Separatist Trends', *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 1984, pp.195-196.
5. *The Spokesman Weekly*, Monthly Issue, October 1996, pp. 13-14
6. Surjit Singh Barnala had been included in the Union cabinet as Minister of Chemical and Fertilizers, Sukhbir Singh Badal, Badal's son was Minister of State for Industry.

7. For a historical perspective see, A.S Narang, 'Akalis' Secular Turn', *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 20 1999, 664-665.
8. S. Dang, 'Background and implications of Akali Dal Feud', *Mainstream*, March 27, 1999, 19-20.
9. See *The Hindu*, November 25, 1998.
10. *The Tribune*, December 20, 1998.
11. *The Hindu*, March 3, 1999.
12. *The Tribune*, April 19, 1999.
13. *Seminar*, April 1999, 16.
14. *The Tribune*, Chandigarh, December 18, 1998.
15. M.H.S. Grewal; Manjit Singh Calcutta, Harmail Singh Tohra, Inderjit Singh Zira, S.S. Kohli., *The Tribune*, December 21, 1998.
16. Jagir Kaur was elected as a SGPC member in 1996 from Bolath, *The Times of India*, Bombay, 17 March 1999.
17. *Mid-day*, Delhi, December 6, 1998.
18. Out of an electorate of 120,000, 45,000 are Dalits and 35,000 Jat Sikhs. The number of Hindu voters varies between 15,000 and 20,000, *ibid*.
19. *The Times of India*, March 24, 1999.
20. For an analysis of Punjab's distorted economic development, see P. Singh, 'Punjab's Economic Development and the Current Crisis', *Seminar* 401, January 1983, pp 60-65. As was noted recently by a Punjab expert in the matter of unemployment and its increasing dimensions, the Planning Commission has bracketed the state with Bihar, UP and Kerala. Moreover Maharashtra has overtaken Punjab and Haryana in 1992-1993 in per capita income, *The Tribune*, November 11, 1999.
21. *Newstime*, March 2, 1999.
22. *The Tribune*, March 23, 1999.
23. *The Tribune*, May 4, 1999.
24. *The Tribune*, May 3 1999.
25. One should recall in this context that the SAD was in particular instrumental in securing the support of Om Prakash Chautala's Indian National Lok Dal for the BJP. Also, the SAD had earlier confirmed its choice by not withdrawing its support to the BJP in spite of Tohra's pressure on the issue of Udham Singh Nagar, a district to be attributed to a prospective state, Uttaranchal, to be carved out of Uttar Pradesh.
26. Another dissenting voice against the ruling coalition is that of Balwant Singh Ramoowalia, National President of the Lok Bhalai Party who rejoiced at the fall of the BJP coalition government at the Centre in mid-April 1999. His party had been recognized in June as a legitimate contestant for the 1999 general elections.

27. The election data used is based on the detailed results published in *The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 8 October, 1999.
28. In many states, the BJP has electorally capitalized on the victory over Pakistan during the Kargil conflict in the summer 1999.
29. The set-up Jagir Kaur presides over has an 11-member executive committee which includes three opposition members, two from the Gurcharan Singh Tolra camp and one from Simranjit Singh Mann's SAD Amritsar.



## **Dowry abuse in Britain: a culture-specific form of domestic violence**

**Ranji Devadason**  
*University of Bristol*

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Dowry-related violence has claimed the lives of thousands of women in South Asia and is now emerging as an issue affecting South Asian women in Britain. If a husband or his family is not satisfied with a bride's dowry, they may physically abuse her, drive her to suicide, or even kill her. Greed is presumed to be the chief motivating force behind these atrocities, however, this form of abuse is far more complex than simplistic causal models suggest. The link between dowry and domestic violence is debated extensively in South Asia. In this paper Western theoretical perspectives on domestic violence are used to elucidate alternative factors sustaining dowry abuse. A case study of a legal 'dowry dispute' in an English court provides new evidence for the emergence of dowry-related violence amongst South Asians in Britain and reveals that a complex combination of socio-economic and culture-specific factors sustain abusive relationships.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Asian women in Britain are suffering from threats, beatings and murder attempts by husbands and relatives in disputes over dowries.<sup>1</sup>

Dowry is essentially movable property given to the bride or the couple at the time of marriage by the bride's parents, to provide for their daughter's needs in establishing her marital home.<sup>2</sup> In South Asian contexts this usually includes gifts given to the groom and his family in order to establish a positive affinal relationship between the two families. This tradition has been maintained by members of the South Asian diaspora in Britain, along with the arranged marriage system, as a distinctive marker of South Asian culture.

The system of giving dowry is not inherently abusive in itself; however, dowry becomes a problem for the South Asian wife when dissatisfaction with the quantity given is used, literally and figuratively, as a 'stick to beat her with'. This form of dowry has been labelled as a 'social evil' in India primarily because of its horrific fatal consequences. 'Dowry death' has become one of the most frequently publicised crimes in the Indian press.<sup>3</sup> Young wives are either

driven to suicide by their in-laws' excessive financial demands, or have actually been murdered by families disappointed with their first dowry and hoping to reap a second from the re-marriage of their son. This flagrant abuse of the dowry system has arisen with the inflation of dowries, such that the amount a girl's parents are expected to give has become one of the chief criteria determining whom she may expect to marry.<sup>4</sup>

Accumulating a substantial dowry has increasingly become a source of anxiety for South Asian parents with daughters in Britain; their ability to comply with the expectations of potential husbands is a prerequisite for marriage and is viewed as a means of securing future happiness for their daughter. Even in the early stages of settlement, the increasing organisation, confidence and affluence of British South Asian communities created 'a social arena within which there was both the scope and pressure for the elaboration of marriage ceremonials'.<sup>5</sup> The dramatic inflation in dowries and increasingly elaborate wedding celebrations in recent years serve as a vivid reflection of the communities' transition from 'sojourners to settlers'.<sup>6</sup> As most research relating to dowry amongst South Asians in Britain relates to changes in the contents of dowries,<sup>7</sup> the issue of dowry abuse in Britain remains relatively uncharted territory. Nonetheless, as increasing affluence in the communities co-exists with the cultural norms and marital pressures found in South Asia there is no reason to expect the phenomenon of dowry abuse to remain confined to the subcontinent.

In this article, I seek to understand why dowry provokes violence against wives, and the intra-household dynamics which allow this situation to arise. My analysis of dowry-related violence will focus on the primary causes of domestic violence and question whether greed for dowry is an essential precursor of this violence or whether other principal factors are at work.

The structure of authority within most South Asian households, is defined by the principles of seniority and of gender.<sup>8</sup> In cases of dowry-related violence, criticism of a bride's dowry, and persistent demands for more, seem to act as a culture-specific means of asserting dominance over her and reinforcing this structure of authority. However, this manipulation of dowry is not unique to cases of domestic violence. Research suggests that as a matter of course the contents of a woman's dowry are subject to critical inspection, particularly by her husband's female relatives, as a means of indirectly attacking her father's *izzat* (family pride or honour), thereby creating ammunition against her for future use.<sup>9</sup> As this pattern does not necessarily co-exist with domestic violence there may well be a ritual element to this use of dowry which, in its extreme form, culminates in the strategic use of violence against the wife. If this is the case 'it is a fallacy to see dowry as the root cause of harassment of wives',<sup>10</sup> and the emphasis in South Asian literature upon dowry as the main cause of domestic violence may well be misplaced. Criticism of the dowry is an effective means of articulating dissatisfaction with the wife, as dowry represents her and her family's *izzat*, as such I would argue that abuse of dowry is implicitly linked to power relations within the joint household, while anticipated economic gain is a secondary factor.

The dowry problem is multi-faceted and has provoked debate among academics and activists as to how to stem this increasing trend. Condemnation of greed, consumerism and ostentatious weddings may well tackle one aspect of the problem, but if dowry is not the fundamental reason behind violence against wives, as I have suggested above, these patterns of behaviour will continue unchecked. Dowry demands are merely a facet of a far greater problem - the devaluation of women in their marital homes.

This study analyses behaviour patterns and expectations which lead to dowry-related violence amongst South Asians in Britain. To this end, I explore the proposed link between dowry and domestic violence. As the bedrock of research into dowry-related violence stems from the subcontinent I begin by addressing this issue from its socio-cultural roots in South Asia. The following section utilises western social theories on the causes of domestic violence as analytical tools to shed light on this South Asian phenomenon. Finally, I consider how migration has affected dowries, the structure of South Asian households in Britain, and subsequent changes in dowry abuse drawing upon a case study of a legal dowry dispute in an English court.

It is important to note from the outset, the degree to which patterns of behaviour found in South Asia are replicated in Britain varies according to a number of factors and must not be taken for granted. One factor to consider is the distribution of dowry-related violence across the subcontinent. According to statistics published by the National Crime Bureau of the Government of India, the incidence of dowry deaths is highest in Delhi, closely followed by Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.<sup>11</sup> As around two-thirds of Britain's South Asians are of Punjabi ancestry<sup>12</sup> this may account for the emergence of dowry-related violence in the British context.

### DOWRY IN SOUTH ASIA

The South Asian dowry system is characterised by a number of ambiguities, which have significant implications in cases of dowry-related violence. Some anthropologists conceive dowry as a sort of pre-mortem inheritance and therefore an asset specifically for the bride. However, others define it as bridegroom price, a reflection of the bride's inferior status in marriage negotiations. Underlying these contrary perspectives are the two ideological principles of *stridhanam* and hypergamy. While *stridhanam* encapsulates the notion of female property, hypergamy perpetuates the use of dowry to acquire status.

#### Dowry as female property: *Stridhanam*

It is an essential family obligation to seek a balance between the amount of family property and the number of offspring produced.<sup>13</sup> Throughout South Asia different cultural practices govern the way in which this problem is resolved. Generally, property is divided into immovable and movable, males inherit the former while females 'inherit' the latter in the form of dowry at the time of

marriage.<sup>14</sup> Dowry is therefore conceived as a cultural mechanism whereby part of a bride's parents' assets are transferred to her affinal home. This corresponds with the shastric concept of *stridhanam* literally meaning female property.<sup>15</sup>

This idealistic notion of dowry has been criticised on several counts: Miller draws attention to regional differences relating to the exchange of property at the time of marriage, stating 'the actualisation of the concept of *stridhan*, cannot be said to characterise all of India'<sup>16</sup>; while Sharma rejects this perspective on the basis that South Asian dowries are not defined as an equal share in the parents estate, but rather correspond with fluctuations in the marriage market.<sup>17</sup> In actual fact dowry might be better understood as a form of compensation for females' lack of inheritance rights.

These debates surrounding the function of dowry in society carry a particular weighting when analysing the relationship between dowry and domestic violence. For dowry to be an incentive provoking violence against wives this customary exchange of property must benefit husbands and their families *more* than the wives in whose name the property is given. Within the traditional joint family set-up, property, including dowry, accrues to the household as a corporate group rather than to individual persons.<sup>18</sup> In this context to speak of individual female property rights is something of an anomaly. The notion of corporate ownership infers that the real beneficiaries of dowry are the groom's kin as a collective group. Thus, dowry may benefit the bride indirectly but only at her husband's or in-laws' discretion.

### **Dowry and Status: hypergamy**

Dowry is integral to the hypergamous system of marriage which is widely practised in North India. In practice hypergamy exerts a greater influence upon dowry and its abuses than the notion of *stridhanam*. Hypergamy denotes the system whereby a woman marries a man from a superior grade or clan to her own. An hypergamous marriage is characterised by status asymmetry between the bride's family (wife givers) and the groom's family (wife takers).<sup>19</sup> This perpetuates the payment of bridegroom price by placing the burden on the bride's parents to secure a marriage with a groom of higher status. Dowry, thereby, contributes to class formation and maintenance by ensuring that women secure partners of at least equal if not superior status to themselves.<sup>20</sup>

According to Brahmanical ideals the gift of dowry accompanying the 'gift of a maiden or a virgin' (*kanya daan*) are extremely meritorious. The sheer act of giving enhances an individual's status provided that no greater return is accepted. In giving generously the bride's parents hope to secure the favourable treatment of their daughter after marriage. Dowry becomes a symbol of family honour (*izzat*) bestowing the bride with status and prestige amongst her husband's relatives. Marriott explains this as follows: 'Behind this organisation of marriage is the feeling that one's daughter and sister at marriage become the helpless possession of an alien kinship group. To secure her good treatment, lavish hospitality must be offered and gifts made to her husband's family

throughout life'.<sup>21</sup> The elaboration of gifts varies and this variation is dependent on the bride's parents' ability to give and the groom's expectations.

Dowry, therefore, serves as a vehicle by which material wealth can be translated into spiritual wealth and prestige in the eyes of the community for a bride's family. Although Brahman values have greatest currency amongst the upper social strata of northern India, they also exert a potent influence upon Indian society as a whole. Kinship groups from the lower social strata aspire to this instruction regarding marriage in order to enhance their status or *izzat*.<sup>22</sup>

The ideological basis for the dowry system accounts for certain features of dowry-related violence; the differential status accorded to wife givers and wife takers, for example, is a key to understanding the susceptibility of women and their natal families to excess dowry demands. However, marriage patterns such as hypergamy and the *kanya daan* marriage, have been around for centuries whereas dowry murders are apparently quite new. In the next section I will address changes in Indian society which have prompted this development.

### Modern Dowry

This brings me to the question of why dowry, as a meritorious exchange of property at the time of marriage, provokes violence against wives in South Asia. 'Modern dowry' is an expression coined by Srinivas to distinguish between the traditional concept of dowry and its contemporary misuses.<sup>23</sup> Modern dowry consists of expensive clothing and jewellery, consumer goods, furniture and large amounts of cash, in short, as much as a bride's parents can afford to secure a 'suitable' groom. In contrast pre-modern dowries were composed of conventional household goods, many of which could be made by members of a girl's family (e.g. rugs, clothing, bedding) and cumulated over a number of years until the time of marriage.<sup>24</sup> These qualitative changes in the contents of dowry have been brought about by India's transition from an agricultural to a market cash economy over the past fifty years. Increased access to education and the organised sector has facilitated a sharp rise in cash incomes. This in turn has created potential for upward mobility among lower status groups which was previously restricted. In India's hierarchical society wealth does not automatically equate with status. Dowried marriages provide the means for the translation of this new found material wealth into status. Upward social mobility has, thus, given rise to the dramatic inflation of dowries. As Kumari comments, waged labour and the success of India's business community has produced a *nouveau riche* mentality, characterised by insatiable greed.<sup>25</sup> In this context, marriages provide perfect arenas for lavish displays of wealth. Visibly expensive dowries are particularly popular amongst middle income groups as overt expressions of affluence, hence the popularity of consumer items, such as televisions, scooters, refrigerators etc. As such, contemporary abuses of dowry have been described as 'a modern consumer society phenomenon'.<sup>26</sup>

The range of factors inducing dowry abuse in South Asia are not fully reproduced in the British context. Nevertheless the *nouveau riche* mentality of middle income groups could be said to characterise certain sectors of the South

Asian community in Britain. It is worth noting here, inflation of dowries is not the crux of the issue. Ostentatious displays of wealth through elaborate weddings and voluminous dowries may be of dubious worth but they do not equate with violence.<sup>27</sup> The penetration of these socio-economic changes into the domestic sphere in the form of violence will be addressed in the following section.

Through cross-cultural analysis, I hope to provide a broader framework for understanding the causes of dowry-related violence by stepping back from the entanglements of dowry-based arguments and considering alternative perspectives on the abuse of women.

### **WESTERN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE <sup>28</sup>**

The South Asian dowry system and its subsequent abuses have no direct parallel in western research relating to domestic violence. However comparative studies, assessing the extent and effects of wife abuse world-wide, reveal recurrent themes from different cultural contexts. As Fischbach and Herbert write, 'Despite cultural variations in the manifestations of domestic abuse, the underlying factors which promote and perpetuate violence are remarkably similar.'<sup>29</sup> This section draws selectively from the prominent social theories relating to domestic violence in the West in order to elucidate the factors perpetuating dowry-related violence. It is important to recognise the cultural-specificity of the arguments put forward here. These theoretical perspectives are based upon the Western model of the nuclear family and Western cultural norms, and therefore can not be applied directly to the South Asian extended family or South Asian culture. However, through migration the South Asian diaspora may well be affected by the cultural trends and socio-economic factors outlined.

Given the proliferation of research literature pertaining to domestic violence, there is limited space for a full discussion of these texts within the remit of this paper. I will therefore present a summary of two dominant schools of thought as to the causes of violence within the home: (1) The family violence perspective, (2) The feminist perspective.<sup>30</sup>

#### **The family violence perspective**

The family violence research programme at the University of New Hampshire has conducted the largest body of scientific research into domestic violence. Straus, Steinmetz and Gelles have been particularly influential in producing innovative research for this model. They conceptualise domestic violence as integral to the structure of society and the contemporary family. In using the terms 'family violence' and 'spouse abuse', rather than battering or wife abuse, Straus *et al.* emphasise it is the family, not the relationship between men and women, that is the central unit of analysis. Adherents to the family violence

perspective believe that all family members carry out and are victims of violence.<sup>31</sup>

Straus *et al.* conducted a series of studies quantifying the levels of abuse in households in concurrence with factors such as income, number of children, experience of life-stresses, and the balance of power within the household. They found violence to be a problem in certain 'types of families' which they define as 'abuse-prone'. From these studies researchers identified two sources which, they assert, provoke and legitimise the use of violence in the home: life-stresses and the structure of the family unit. Socio-structural conditions such as bad housing, poverty, unemployment and unfavourable working conditions promote life-stresses, while the structure of the family defined by established gender roles and domestic privacy allow violence to persist unchecked. Significantly, from analysis of the decision-making process in a number of households they found a strong correlation between high levels of violence and the concentration of power in the hands of one family member. In contrast households which were democratically run, with husbands and wives sharing decisions between them, experienced extremely low levels of violence.<sup>32</sup>

### **The feminist perspective**

Feminist researchers place male-female relations at the centre of their analysis of domestic violence. Dobash and Dobash assert that domestic violence is a reflection of unequal power relationships between women and men in society.<sup>33</sup> This inequality extends to personal relationships, as feminists argue marriage institutionalises the control of wives by their husbands. The use of physical force for the control or chastisement of wives by their husbands was not only socially accepted but legally endorsed up until the late nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Thus, feminist researchers root their analysis in historically constructed norms surrounding marriage and gender roles.

In essence, adherents of the feminist perspective maintain: domestic violence can be better understood if it is seen as an extreme form of normality - an exaggeration of how society expects men to behave as the authority figure in the family.<sup>35</sup> This view is corroborated by studies revealing that men in abusive relationships are particularly likely to favour traditional gender roles within marriage.<sup>36</sup> Another recurring feature of abusive relationships seems to be the economic dependency of women upon their husbands. The control of money within the household appears to be an integral feature of marital relationships in which the husband assumed he would be the dominant partner. One study revealed that women who had experienced violence were more likely to have had husbands who kept control over finances.<sup>37</sup> These husbands seem to use control of money as part of a general attempt to control or subordinate their wives.

### Cross-cultural analysis

As 'greed for more dowry' is presumed to be a primary motive behind dowry-related violence, this phenomenon contrasts with domestic violence in the generic sense which has no such tangible goal in sight. Western social theorists are in some senses left floundering, speculating as to the ultimate reasoning behind violent behaviour without defined parameters as to the desired results of violence. For the basis of my analysis, however, these theories are useful as they remove 'greed for more dowry' from the domestic violence equation, thus enabling me to elucidate certain themes which otherwise might remain subsumed in dowry-based arguments.

If dowry-related violence is 'built into the family system and the structure of society itself'<sup>38</sup> we would expect to see aspects of South Asian society which mirror structural conditions found in the West. Recent research points to the penetration of capital into former agricultural economies transforming the relations between men and women in the household.<sup>39</sup> In India socio-structural changes could arguably create the 'stresses' which are unleashed in domestic violence. The market economy has brought with it associated pressures: migration to cities, subsequent employment and housing difficulties, as well as increasing consumerism and status competition. Dowry-related violence conforms with the family violence perspective particularly as it has the added dimension of potentially relieving financial pressures and realising the goal of upward mobility (unlike most Western cases of domestic violence). This could explain why the highest numbers of dowry deaths are found among middle classes.<sup>40</sup>

Straus *et al.* and other advocates of the family violence perspective understate the gendered character of domestic violence by adopting gender-neutral terminology and concepts. Instead of emphasising the husband-wife relationship as the central unit of their analysis the terms 'dominant partner' and 'family violence' are utilised. These gender-neutral expressions are useful for conceptualising violence within South Asian joint families. Violence is not necessarily perpetrated by husbands against their wives but corresponds with the wider norms of hierarchy within the extended family. Thus, corresponding with the conclusions of the family violence research program: 'violence is used by the most powerful family member as a means of legitimising his or her dominant position.'<sup>41</sup> The correlation between concentration of power (un-democratic decision-making) and domestic abuse is particularly pertinent in this context. One could argue that the types of South Asian family in which one or two members dominate the decision-making process are 'abuse-prone'.

The usefulness of the family violence perspective does not negate the value of the feminist perspective on domestic violence in South Asia. Gender inequality in South Asia adopts different forms in accordance with extended family dynamics. As power relations within the joint household are defined in



terms of seniority and gender, a woman's place in the hierarchy is determined by her relationships with the household men (i.e.: as daughter / wife / mother).<sup>42</sup> The fact that mother-in-laws are one of the chief perpetrators of dowry-related violence does not deny the gendered character of domestic violence, but rather reinforces the notion of violence as a means for enforcing gender inequality within the extended family set-up.

The family violence and feminist perspectives are not mutually exclusive, both attest to the significance of power relations within the household. The family violence perspective implicates gender inequality as a sustaining feature of domestic violence without this being the sole cause. This approach is helpful in conceptualising dowry-related violence which, as a relatively recent phenomenon, has clearly been influenced by the effects of socio-economic changes upon the household. Conversely, patriarchy as an endemic feature of many South Asian societies does not *on its own* account for recent abuses of women through the dowry system. This issue is clearly more complex than the two-dimensional greed-versus-gender debate allows. Several features of South Asian society and culture are instrumental in perpetuating this social evil. However, if all members of the society are exposed to similar socio-cultural norms legitimising violence, the absence of violence in a large proportion of South Asian households is an anomaly. Further research is needed into the individual pathology of offenders and specific circumstances surrounding this form of domestic abuse to account for its occurrence. On the basis of this comparative cross-cultural analysis of domestic violence I am inclined to agree with the conclusions of Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz that certain types of family are abuse-prone as an alternative explanation for the selective nature of violence.<sup>43</sup>

### **DOWRY ABUSE IN BRITAIN**

This section addresses the impact of migration upon dowry and its abuses among South Asians in Britain. For many South Asians in Britain arranged marriages and the dowry system are important features of South Asian culture and are preserved in order to foster their distinctive ethnic identity.<sup>44</sup> However, it is a mistake to represent South Asians as carriers of 'homogeneous and fixed cultural values'.<sup>45</sup> The heterogeneity of South Asians in Britain is due to regional, religious and caste diversity in South Asia, as well as differences which have arisen through settlement in diaspora. The 'typical' patterns associated with dowry-related violence in South Asia may not be reproduced in Britain due to social and structural changes in British society. Having established the place of dowry in the conventional North Indian household, it is clear that an understanding of the effects of migration upon the dowry system in Britain is needed before we can reach any valid conclusions about the occurrence of dowry-related violence in this context. One significant question here is: has the British environment instituted changes in dowry which protect women from dowry-related violence?

Roger Ballard identifies two general categories of 'sources of change' in his analysis of family organisation among Sikhs in Britain: (1) environmental factors, such as economic changes, which may lead to considerable changes in behaviour patterns, but do not necessarily affect the moral or jural norms of the community; and (2) moral and jural norms, such as codes of behaviour and practice, which may change as a result of pressures stemming from the new economic environment, or may be generated wholly at the level of morality.<sup>46</sup> These distinctions provide a useful framework for analysing changes in the dowry system in Britain and subsequent changes in the manifestations of dowry abuse.

### Changes to dowry in Britain

The most comprehensive and descriptive research into dowry in Britain has focused upon the Sikh community, namely Bhachu's innovative work focusing specifically upon East African Sikhs analysing the changes in dowry-giving practices over a number of decades.<sup>47</sup> Many of Bhachu's findings are substantiated by Jhutti's interviews with Sikh women and their parents which reveal attitudes underlying the preservation of the dowry system in Britain.<sup>48</sup> On the basis of these studies we cannot draw conclusions about dowry in Britain *per se*, however they do serve to highlight emerging trends which undoubtedly effect all sectors of the South Asian community.

On the basis of Ballard's analysis of 'sources of change' there are essentially three environmental factors influencing the contents of British dowries. Firstly, the increasing affluence of South Asian communities facilitating a further inflation in dowry expenditure. Secondly, the increase in wealth corresponding with qualitative changes in the goods selected. British dowries increasingly reflect British consumption styles and class locations; Bhachu notes distinctions between exclusive 'Knightsbridge/Sloane Square locale' dowries to 'middle/lower class mass-produced department store' types and provincial Midlands or Mancunian dowries.<sup>49</sup> Both of these environmental factors reflect alterations in the contents of dowries without necessarily impacting on codes of practice regarding the system. These changes in British dowries have been described as wealth 'translated in a classical manner';<sup>50</sup> the qualitative changes in dowry goods correspond with the use of dowry to attain status and prestige.

The third environmental factor I will address has wrought change not only in the contents and size of dowry, but also in the control of dowry within the household. This signifies a change in moral norms from conventional joint household property management – with control resting in the hands of senior members of the household – towards women exercising individual control over their property. This change has been brought about by the entry of women into the labour market enabling them to play a central role in the accumulation of their dowries. As young women are now using their earnings to build up their own dowries they assume greater control over the contents than in the past. Some research suggests the practice of in-laws confiscating a bride's dowry on

her arrival in her new home is now regarded with some distaste. This implies that independent waged labour has had a strong impact upon the power relations within the South Asian household and on traditional patterns. The economic power working wives wield within a joint household increases their capacity to have a say in and even control their financial assets including dowry, since 'economic power and wealth has been channelled into areas over which they have greatest control and from which they enjoy the greatest benefit'.<sup>51</sup> However, the processes of social change are by no means straightforward, whilst certain communities and families have adopted a more 'anglicised' individualistic approach to dowry others adhere more vehemently to traditional North Indian values regarding property ownership.<sup>52</sup>

### **Dowry disputes in English law**

Dowry abuse in Britain is emerging as an issue for South Asian women not through dowry murders, but in conjunction with divorce proceedings, as increasing numbers of Asian women are leaving abusive relationships (with husbands or in-laws) and seeking to reclaim their dowries through the courts.<sup>53</sup> There is a clear legal precedent for dowry being classified as woman's property on the breakdown of the marriage.<sup>54</sup> Dowries in Britain can cost anything from £1000 to £50 000 - indicating that this is no minor legal matter. I will draw on a case study of one particularly prominent 'dowry case' and explore the issues which arise from this account: *Samra vs. Samra* (1997). This case received a lot of publicity in Asian and local newspapers although it has not been ratified in legal reports. In many respects it has served as a test case encouraging more Asian women to set about retrieving their dowries through the courts in concurrence with divorce proceedings. Interviews with the plaintiff's legal representatives suggest that the retrieval of dowry through ancillary relief proceedings is becoming increasingly prevalent in the South Asian community in Britain. As the number of women who actually reach the courts will be limited, I suggest that this recent development - as measured in terms of the number of dowry disputes contested in English courts - is just the tip of the iceberg. Dowry disputes are essentially a money matter dealt with under English property law, however, as they are implicitly related with the control and possession of a woman's dowry in her marital home and these disputes invariably co-exist with incidences of domestic abuse, they provide invaluable evidence for my analysis of dowry-related violence.

The following account is based upon interviews conducted with the plaintiff, Mrs Dwinderjit Virk (the ex-Mrs Samra), and her barrister Mrs Usha Sood, as well as a copy of the draft judgement. On the basis of the information made available to me my position is inherently biased, this is of particular significance in this case as the Samras' testimonies of events preceding the breakdown of the marriage differ sharply from Mrs Virk's account. The judge himself commented: 'The conflict between the versions of events covering the short history of this marriage was remarkable.' However, since my purpose in this

paper is to explore underlying causes of dowry-related abuse of wives it is fitting that I should base my analysis upon a wife's perception of this abuse rather than getting bogged down in arguments relating to the claims and counter-claims over dowry and other property which dominated the legal proceedings. For this reason many of the details of events which are not directly relevant to dowry abuse have been omitted.

### Case study

Dwinderjit married Mr Sokhbinder Samra in January 1991 in Nottingham, home of Dwinderjit's parents. The marriage was arranged between the two families with both individuals' consent. The introduction had been made by a mutual relative who acted as a matchmaker. As Dwinderjit was working as a civil servant in London she agreed upon the match on the condition the couple would establish a nuclear residence in London in due course. At the time of the wedding ceremony and celebrations monetary gifts for the bride were kept in a wedding purse (*shagan*) as according to Sikh tradition. During the course of the celebrations the wedding purse went missing, it contained around £1100. Upon the discovery of the purse's disappearance the Samras made demands upon Dwinderjit's family to reimburse the lost money, which they subsequently did. This incident was the first of many indicating the mercenary attitude the Samra family adopted towards the marriage.

The couple commenced their married life at the Samra family residence in Southampton, living with Sokhbinder's parents and his younger brother and sister. The jewellery given to Dwinderjit at the time of marriage by her parents and in-laws was valued at approximately £10, 000. The jewellery was kept in a lockable filing cabinet in her in-laws bedroom at their insistence, only being released for her to wear on certain occasions. Her silks, also part of her dowry, valued at £4000 were also kept in her in-laws bedroom. Despite her requests for the return of her jewellery after the breakdown of the marriage, the Samras retained it.

Dwinderjit was expecting arrangements to be made for them to move to London and mentioned this to her husband on a few occasions. A few weeks into the marriage Sokhbinder attacked Dwinderjit declaring that he would not leave his family. This spontaneous attack had the effect of frightening Dwinderjit so that she did not mention moving out to her husband again, although he later apologised.

During the course of the marriage several claims upon Dwinderjit's income were made by her father-in-law. Whether these were voluntary payments or under threat of punishment was contested in the court case. Dwinderjit re-calls being forced to withdraw cash from her bank account and subsequently make monthly cheque payments to her father-in-law. She was also forced to open a joint building society account with her husband and deposit a £3000 gift from her father and the replaced wedding purse money. Some time later she was required to withdraw this money and give it to her father-in-law.

Dwinderjit's experience of life in the Samra household was one of misery and subjugation. Her mother-in-law compelled her to do all the housework despite her working full-time in London, and even during the later stages of her pregnancy. She was frequently subjected to verbal abuse by her in-laws. This included criticism of her appearance and her family, accusations of having boyfriends in London, and being told she was not good enough for their son. During these times of character assassination her husband remained silent. Dwinderjit's relationship with her in-laws was characterised by psychological abuse and physical threats, such that when she eventually left her husband, after the birth of her son in July 1992, she was thoroughly demoralised and suffering from extremely low self-esteem.

### **Case study analysis**

As increasing numbers of women come forward to re-claim their dowries from abusive husbands/in-laws. Patterns are emerging regarding the abuse and manipulation of British Asian women in their marital homes. I will therefore analyse certain aspects of the Samra case in further detail to stress certain points which I believe to be key aspects of this form of domestic abuse amongst South Asians in Britain.

In this case dowry, in itself, did not become an issue until the breakdown of the marriage. However, if we broaden the scope of 'traditional' dowry-related violence to include the bride's finances (i.e.: her monthly income and £3000 gift from her father) it is clear that this case exhibits a new form of dowry abuse in the British context. Regular demands for cash and cheque payments were made directly to the young wife herself, with physical threats against herself and her family ensuring her unquestioning submission. In South Asian accounts of dowry-related violence demands are made to the wife's parents for additional dowry, in this British case it appears that the earning capacity of the daughter-in-law herself was exploited.

I will now turn to relationships in the household which in a sense predetermined the subordinate position Dwinderjit found herself in. Dwinderjit was under the impression that her mother-in-law actively discouraged the formation of a relationship between herself and her husband, such that she was perceived as the 'family daughter-in-law, not a wife' within the household. The strength of the relationship between a mother and son and the ensuing power struggle between women on the new wife's arrival to the household is well documented in South Asian literature as well as research into arranged marriage in Britain.<sup>55</sup> As Kumari writes, the mother's 'deprivation in her own personal life, and her complete dependency on the son as saviour and self-esteem' furthers the development of a mother-son relationship which assumes 'mammoth proportions' in the Indian joint family.<sup>56</sup> This description characterises the relationship between Sokhbinder and his mother.

Traditionally an Indian woman's status within the household begins to rise as she gives birth to children, especially sons, yet a number of British dowry cases reveal that a woman's status as mother did not prevent her

maltreatment. Dwinderjit's pregnancy, particularly her period of maternity leave, was an intense time as she was subject to her mother-in-law's demands for her to do housework throughout the day. This seems contrary to Indian ideals of the auspicious status of a fertile wife, and reflects an emerging trend in South Asian dowry murders. James and Stone comment upon the startling numbers of dowry murders in India of women who had already produced children, even sons. They suggest the strong value placed on female fertility may be changing due to urbanisation in India as the 'cost' of children increases while their economic benefits decline.<sup>57</sup> If this is the case we could see a similar change at an ideological level amongst South Asians in Britain.

The hypergamous character of the relationship between the bride's and the bridegroom's families was played upon at the time of the Registry marriage ceremony, when the Samras complained to Dwinderjit and her family about the hospitality offered to them. This reinforced the status of the two families from the outset. Srinivas describes this type of behaviour as the 'element of unpredictability' in modern dowried weddings: 'the groom's kin assume that it is the duty of the bride's kin to keep them pleased, and they appear keen to find fault with the arrangements made and the gifts given, and they are also known to make sudden demands. The bride's kin have to take this in their stride as the inferior party'.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, criticism of Dwinderjit's family was one of the many weapons used against her during the marriage. This behaviour exemplifies Fischbach and Herbert's conclusions regarding the effects of domestic violence across cultures:

Manifestations of shame or diminishment of worth may take other forms in cultures which differentially value family and kin group over any individual members. In these cultures, the intense shame and/or loss of face suffered by mockery or verbal abuse may disproportionately devastate a wife, and preclude her utilization of customary networks and social supports to ameliorate her psychological and spiritual pain.<sup>59</sup>

There is clearly a danger in attributing pre-meditated motives to potentially spontaneous acts of violence. Theorising about abusive behaviour in hindsight may well stretch the data beyond its empirical limits and overestimate the capacity of the individual to rationalise his/her every move. However, on the basis of the evidence made available to me one aspect of this mental and physical abuse is clear: the impact upon Dwinderjit extended far beyond the physical harm inflicted. Low self-esteem, hypervigilance, augmented startle response and unhappiness are all said to characterise abused women in multiple cultures.<sup>60</sup> In this case Dwinderjit suffered 'typical' trauma related symptoms. Ultimately, the physical threats and verbal abuse served as a comprehensive strategy to undermine the newcomer to the household, whether this was pre-meditated behaviour or operated at a subconscious level is debatable, either way the effects were the same. Dwinderjit was frightened to the extent that she was scared to contact her family, in fear of their safety as well as her own; the idea

of establishing a nuclear residence in London was automatically dropped; and the development of a relationship of any depth between husband and wife was effectively curtailed.

Differing expectations regarding the legitimate control and possession of a new wife's dowry within her affinal home can create tensions and be an early sign of marital difficulties (including problems with in-laws). In this context, marriage of a son not only poses a threat to the strong mother-son relationship it also jeopardises the joint family unit. Ballard expounds the basis for the joint family as follows: 'By remaining joint, a family, whether in agriculture or in business, can often achieve economies of scale which would be unobtainable if partition were to take place . . . Property underpinned the structure of the traditional joint family'.<sup>61</sup>

I suggest, in the Samra case, it was in the economic interests of Dwinderjit's in-laws to discourage relationship formation between the newly married couple and this was a predominant factor promoting her systematic abuse. The ideal joint household as described by Ballard is subject to stresses introduced by new wives and subsequently conflicting interests within the household. Wives lack the initial emotional commitment to the family unit, and thereby pose a potential threat to the stability of their husband's family. In Britain the young wife's potential for disturbing the status quo, so to speak, is exacerbated by her economic power, subsequent independence and the increasing popularity of the nuclear family amongst South Asians. This is a threat to the stability of the joint household and may pose a serious psychological threat to parents, particularly those who are economically dependent upon their sons. This could induce fervent adherence to traditional joint family values. In this context the confiscation of dowry, as a symbol of the new wife's family honour (*izzat*) within the household, is highly significant. Similarly abuse, be it verbal or physical, is a means of asserting dominance within the home.<sup>62</sup> It can be argued, therefore, that when control of a bride's dowry coincides with the use of violence against her a comprehensive strategy enforcing her submission is in place.

Several aspects of the Samra case which I have discussed (confiscation of dowry, hypergamy, the position of the mother-in-law and joint family values) reflect well established South Asian cultural norms. One could argue dowry-related violence is an extreme form of 'normal' behaviour combining 'expected' levels of psychological abuse with the use of force to extract property/cash. The dowry system and concurrent expressions of gender inequality provide a framework within which a wife/daughter-in-law can be exploited for economic gain. This potential for exploitation is implicit to the system whereby the giving of dowry is in one sense to appease the groom's family and ensure the good treatment of a daughter. Surely this alludes to the potential for her maltreatment also. I was initially reluctant to reduce the phenomenon of dowry-related violence to a matter of cost-benefit analysis but in view of the circumstances in this case and many others it seems to boil down to just that, the benefits of abusing a new wife outweigh the costs.

### **Dowry deaths in Britain: the evidence**

As legal dowry disputes draw attention to the existence of dowry abuse in Britain, it is worthwhile investigating whether dowry murders have also been taking place. While this problem has not gained widespread recognition as a real danger facing South Asian women, there are significant indications it has not ceased to exist in the British context. Southall Black Sisters, an organisation primarily dedicated to supporting the needs of Black and Asian women leaving violent homes, have counselled many women who have been subjected to verbal abuse and violence for failing to bring adequate dowries.<sup>63</sup> Isolated articles in the British press and in local Asian papers confirm the incidence of dowry-related violence in Britain. In addition a group of pioneering researchers have made some striking discoveries. Raleigh, Bulusu and Balarajan found a dramatically high suicide rate among Indian women, specifically young married women (age group 15-24) when analysing mortality rates among immigrants in England and Wales between 1970 and 1978. In one third of these cases the cause of death was burning. These figures contrast with trends in the general population.<sup>64</sup>

'Culture conflict' is commonly referred to as the reason for high suicide rates among young Asian women.<sup>65</sup> An interview-based study of 'ethnic differences in self-poisoning' refers to forced arranged marriages and subsequent marital difficulties as reasons for the excess.<sup>66</sup> Any number of factors could have prompted these suicides and self-poisoning attempts, however, the fact that these women were married strongly implicates their husbands/in-laws in the women's decisions to take their lives. 'Culture conflict' could mask a plethora of problems stemming from persistent psychological abuse by husbands/in-laws giving rise to feelings of hopelessness and despair such that suicide seems the only way out. An alternative, and more sinister, explanation is that these women were purposefully driven to suicide, or even murdered. The statistics signify a small scale replication of the situation in India where suicide rates for women are high, and the excess is largely attributed to dowry-related problems.<sup>67</sup> As James Turnbull, Bradford coroner, points out police and coroners in Britain are unaware of the crime of bride-burning so may not detect evidence of false or forced suicides.<sup>68</sup> Whether dowry or domestic violence is implicated in these results is merely informed speculation on my part. However, there is clearly a need for further research, and publicity to be accorded to this issue in the British context for the security of women.

### **DISCUSSION**

Dowry abuse differs from other forms of domestic violence such as abuse, wife battery and marital rape, precisely because it has a defined end in sight the procurement of more dowry. I have questioned whether dowry is the real motive sustaining the violent abuses of thousands of women in South Asia and unknown numbers of women in Britain, or as Kishwar writes dowry is a 'phoney symbol' which obfuscates the fundamental issue of gender-based



violence.<sup>69</sup> Cross-cultural studies reveal domestic violence to be a pervasive feature of women's lives world-wide. Forms of abuse which appear to have no obvious economic goal substantiate the arguments of feminist researchers who conceptualise domestic abuse as an extension of the husband's authority over his wife. This supposition gives rise to the question: Would women be abused in South Asian households without the incentive of dowry?

In this paper I have sought to investigate the motives behind dowry-related violence with the help of western social research models. The different western perspectives highlight potential causes of domestic violence: socio-structural conditions, the family unit and traditional gender roles, in actual fact reiterating themes and debates found in South Asian literature relating to dowry-related violence. However, these theoretical approaches did not advance my understanding of the complex culture-specific behaviour patterns underlying domestic violence in South Asian households. It was, therefore, necessary to examine in greater detail the place of dowry in the joint household and differential power relations between affinal families.

In order to deconstruct the phenomenon of dowry-related violence we need to understand dowry in its socio-cultural context as an integral part of a number of complex transactions and interactions between members of South Asian joint households. The criticism of a bride's dowry, which often coincides with criticism of her appearance, her family and her 'domestic' skills, is severely demoralising. Persistent verbal abuse in conjunction with ritual expressions of her and her family's inferior status through the hypergamous system of marriage serve as cultural mechanisms to inculcate submission. The effective subjugation of the new wife from the beginning of a marriage minimises the threat she poses to the stability of the joint family. Within this framework, physical violence can be conceived as an additional measure enforcing these unequal power relations within the family unit. As such this behaviour is not inane random cruelty, but rather appears to be purposefully enacted with the ultimate goal of preserving the joint family structure. Dowry adds another dimension to this strategic abuse, the confiscation and control of dowry within the household by senior family members reinforces their position of authority in relation to the new wife. The vulnerable position a new wife in her husband's family is, therefore, a multi-dimensional construction, a comprehensive strategy enforcing her submission.

Here I must make a distinction between this 'ritual abuse' of the newcomer to the household, calculated to preserve the unity and stability of the joint family unit, and violent or threatening behaviour towards a young wife which is specifically calculated to obtain more dowry. Actual cases of dowry murder reflect a transition from the former systematic psychological abuse of women towards the treatment of women as expendable commodities which can be manipulated for economic gain. In real life situations it may be difficult to disentangle these two forms of abusive behaviour as they are implicitly linked, nonetheless it is worthwhile emphasising the different motives perpetuating these varying degrees of dowry abuse.

Power relations within the household and economic control (including dowry) are inextricably linked. Feminist researchers revealed the control of finances within the household to be an integral feature of many abusive relationships. In cases of dowry-related violence this concurs with the control of dowry as well as other household income. The newly emerging British cases reveal that dowry is not necessarily the central issue. Dowry acts as a medium for articulating power relations and is not the principal factor sustaining the abuse. The well defined hierarchy within conventional South Asian joint households involves power being concentrated in the hands of one or two senior members. According to the findings of Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz there is a dramatic correlation between undemocratic households and the occurrence of abuse.<sup>70</sup> This is not to say that most South Asian families are abuse-prone, merely to suggest that in households where the dominance of one member reaches extreme levels wife/daughter-in-law abuse is more likely to be a problem.

The occurrence of dowry-related violence amongst South Asians in Britain indicates that despite new employment opportunities for women and subsequent alterations in the dowry system, change has not necessarily penetrated the domestic sphere – specifically the traditional set-up of the joint family unit. As I have indicated, dowry abuse is implicitly linked with intra-household power relations. In South Asia the subordinate status of the wife often corresponds with her economic dependence upon her husband's family, however, for many South Asian women in Britain this is not the case. For these women independent waged labour increases their bargaining power within the household, yet for some, as my interviews revealed, their earning power may actually be exploited as their wages are appropriated to subsidise the joint family income. These women are divested of their economic power, thus reinforcing their subordinate status within the traditional joint family structure. The reason for this may lie beyond the preservation of traditional family values, for the sake of psychological security, and actually be a survival strategy as ageing parents increasingly depend upon their sons (and their daughter-in-laws) for financial support. Thus, parents seek to deter the development of a relationship between husband and wife which threatens the family as a corporate unit. The defining forces of economic obligations and dependence are not unique to South Asian families in Britain. My exploration of these themes in the British context point to underlying motives for dowry-related wife abuse in South Asia.

On the basis of this research it is clear that a further analysis of British 'dowry cases' would provide insights into culture-specific forms of domestic violence amongst South Asians in Britain, particularly exploring ideas I have mentioned such as control of finances within the household, concentration of power (assessing the decision-making process) and the threat of the nuclear household to the established joint family set-up. Furthermore, it is critical that public awareness of dowry-related violence, dowry deaths and the risks facing British South Asian women in their marital homes is raised in order to tackle this emerging problem.

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### Notes

1. *The Observer* (London) 13 October 1987.
2. K. Bhopal, 'South Asian women within households: dowries, despair and degradation', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 20,4 (1997) 483.
3. Dowry death is an officially recognised crime in the Indian penal code. This states a husband or in-laws will be presumed responsible for a wife's unnatural death during the first seven years of marriage if there is sufficient evidence of cruelty or harassment. Nonetheless the number of reported dowry-related deaths continues to increase yearly, averaging at six thousand a year. The official figures are likely to misrepresent the actual death toll as police are renowned for negligence in detecting and prosecuting these crimes. Murders are frequently presented as kitchen accidents or suicides, burning is the most commonly reported means of death. See H. Thakur, 'Preface', and W. Menski, 'Legal strategies for curbing the dowry problem: a glimpse of some success', in W. Menski (ed.) *South Asians and the Dowry Problem*, (London: Group for Ethnic Minority Studies, SOAS, 1998).
4. U. Sharma, 'Dowry in North India: its consequences for women', in R. Hirschon, (ed.), *Women and Property, Women as Property* (New York: St. Martin's press, 1984) 71.
5. C. Ballard, 'Arranged marriages in the British context', in *New Community* 6 (1978) 181-196.
6. As described by R. Ballard, 'The Emergence of Desh Pardesh', in R. Ballard, (ed.), *Desh Pardesh* (London: Hurst & Co, 1994) 11.
7. See for example: P. Bhachu, *Twice Migrants: East African Sikh Settlers in Britain* (London: Tavistock, 1985); and J. Jhutti 'Dowry among Sikhs in Britain', in Menski, *South Asians and the Dowry Problem*.
8. Sharma: 'Dowry in North India', 63.
9. Ballard, 'Arranged Marriages', 190.
10. M. Kishwar, 'Rethinking Dowry Boycott' *Manushi* 48, (1988) 12.
11. H. Thakur, 'Preface', in Menski, *South Asians and the Dowry Problem*.
12. Ballard: 'Desh Pardesh', 19.
13. Friedl (1959) quoted in B. Miller, *The Endangered Sex: Neglect of Female children in Rural North India* (Oxford: University Press, 1997) 133.
14. Miller, *The Endangered Sex*, 133-4.

15. For further elaboration on this see S.Tambiah 'Dowry, Bridewealth and Women's Property Rights', in J.Goody & S. Tambiah (eds.) *Bridewealth and Dowry*, (Cambridge: University press, 1973).
16. Miller, *Endangered Sex*, 137.
17. Sharma: 'Dowry in North India', 70.
18. Ibid., 62.
19. For a full discussion of this see M.N. Srinivas, 'Some reflections on dowry' in *The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization and other Essays*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989)160, and P. Bhachu, *Twice Migrants: East African Sikh Settlers in Britain*,102.
20. Sharma: 'Dowry in North India', 70.
21. Marriott (1955) quoted in Srinivas: 'Some reflections on dowry', 160.
22. Miller, *The Endangered Sex*, 159.
23. Srinivas: 'Some reflections on dowry', 161.
24. Sharma: 'Dowry in North India', 127.
25. R.Kumari, *Brides are not for Burning: Dowry victims in India*, (Delhi: Radiant, 1989), 37.
26. W. Menski, 'Dowry a survey of the issues and the literature' in Menski, *South Asians and the Dowry Problem*.
27. Kishwar, 'Rethinking dowry boycott', 11.
28. The term 'western' is ambiguous, and may be used to make inappropriate generalisations about a large proportion of the globe; in this context 'Western' refers specifically to theories developed in Britain and North America.
29. See R.Fischbach and B.Herbert, 'Domestic Violence and Mental Health: Correlates and Conundrums within and across Cultures' in *Social Science and Medicine*, 45, 8 (1997) 1161-1176.
30. For an overview of the key literature see L. Smith, *Domestic Violence: an overview of the literature*, (London: Home Office Research and Planning Unit report, 1989), and D. Kurz 'Social Science Perspectives on Wife Abuse: Current Debates and Future Directions', in P.Bart and E. Moran (eds.) *Violence Against Women: the bloody footprints*, (California: Sage, 1993).
31. For a detailed description of their research see M.Straus, R.Gelles and S. Steinmetz, *Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American family*, (California: Sage, 1980).
32. Straus et al., *Behind Closed Doors*, 174-197.
33. R.E. Dobash and R. Dobash, *Violence Against Wives*, (New York: Free Press, 1980).
34. A. Shupe, W. Stacey and L. Hazelwood, *Violent Men, violent couples: the dynamics of domestic violence*, (Massachusetts: Lexington, 1987) 11.
35. Wilson (1983) quoted in L. Smith, *Domestic Violence: an overview of the literature*, (London: Home Office Research and Planning Unit report, 1989) 27.

36. Fischbach and Herbert, 'Domestic Violence and Mental Health', 1173.
37. Smith, *Domestic Violence*, 28.
38. Straus et al., *Behind Closed Doors*, 44.
39. E. Malos 'The politics of household labour in the 1990s: old debates, new contexts' in E. Malos (ed.), *The Politics of Housework* (1995) 207, and Sharma: 'Dowry in North India', 73.
40. Kumari, *Brides are not for Burning*, 37.
41. Straus et al., *Behind Closed Doors*, 193.
42. B. Agarwal, *A field of one's own: Gender and land rights in South Asia*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1994) 51.
43. Straus et al., *Behind Closed Doors*, 5.
44. Bhopal, 'South Asian Women within households', 490, and Ballard, 'Arranged Marriages', 192.
45. P. Bhachu, 'Identities Constructed and Reconstructed: Representations of Asian Women in Britain', in G.Buijs (ed.), *Migrant Women* (Oxford: Berg, 1993) 109.
46. R. Ballard, 'Family organisation among Sikhs in Britain' in *New Community* 2 (1972 - 3) 13.
47. Bhachu, *Twice Migrants* and 'Identities Constructed and Reconstructed'.
48. Jhutti: 'Dowry among Sikhs in Britain'.
49. Bhachu: 'Identities Constructed and Reconstructed', 107-8.
50. G.Buijs: 'Introduction' in G.Buijs, (ed.) *Migrant Women*, (Oxford: Berg, 1993) 11.
51. Buijs: 'Introduction', 11.
52. See Bhopal, 'Dowries, degradation and despair', 486; and Jhutti: 'Dowry among Sikhs in Britain'.
53. See S. Johal, 'The dowry in law', in *The Law Society's Gazette* 38 (1992) 34-36; J. Karet 'Ancillary to Belief' in *Family Law*, March (1994) 133-134; and U. Sood 'The dowry problem in its legal context' in Menski, *South Asians and the Dowry Problem*.
54. Samson vs. Samson, *All England Law Reports* 1960, 654.
55. See Kumari, *Brides are not for burning*, 38, and Ballard, 'Arranged marriages', 194, respectively.
56. Kumari, *Brides are not for burning*, 12 and 38.
57. C. James and L. Stone, 'Dowry, brideburning and female power in India' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, 18, 2 (1995) 125-134.
58. Srinivas: 'Some reflections on Dowry', 126.
59. Fischbach and Herbert, 'Domestic Violence and Mental Health', 1168.
60. *Ibid.*, 1168.
61. Ballard, 'Family organisation', 13-14.
62. See Straus et al., *Behind Closed Doors*, 193; and Dobash and Dobash, *Violence Against Wives*, 15.
63. Southall Black Sisters, *Domestic Violence and Asian Women: A collection of reports and briefings*, (Middlesex: SBS, 1994) 21.

64. V.S. Raleigh, L.Bulusu and R. Balarajan, 'Suicides among Immigrants from the Indian Subcontinent' in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* 156 (1990) 46-50.
65. For example: J.Merrill and J. Owens, 'Ethnic differences in Self-poisoning: A Comparison of Asian and White Groups' in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 148 (1986) 709; and Raleigh et al. 'Suicides among Immigrants'.
66. Merrill and Owens, 'Ethnic differences in Self-poisoning', 709.
67. Raleigh et al., 'Suicides among Immigrants', 49.
68. *India Today* (Delhi), 31 May 1996.
69. Kishwar, 'Rethinking Dowry Boycott', 11.
70. Straus et al., *Behind Closed Doors*, 193-196.

## **Punjabi, Pakistani, Muslim and Norwegian? Self-perceptions and Social Boundaries among Pakistani Children in Oslo**

**Sissel Østberg**  
*Oslo University College*

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The theme of this article is Norwegian-Pakistani children's self-perceptions and social boundaries in their lives. Theoretical concepts of 'cultural and social identity' and 'ethnicity' are operationalised by empirically close categories like 'I feel like...' (self-ascriptions), 'us-them categories' (social boundaries), language identifications and attachments to global and local communities. These categories arose as part of children's verbal self-presentations. Children's discourse is analysed in relation to the discourse of mainstream society. Their self-presentations were found to include a broad complexity, and they seemed to have developed plural identities despite hard pressure from mainstream society which ascribed to them a well-defined static and limited identity.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

This article will discuss how Pakistani children in Oslo negotiated their identities by ascribing themselves, and being ascribed by others, with shifting terms like Punjabi<sup>1</sup>, Pakistani, Muslim, Norwegian, Asian etc. When the children are called Pakistani it is in accordance with their self-presentations, but the terms 'second generation Pakistanis' and 'Norwegian-Pakistanis' will be applied alternatively. In Norwegian statistics (Statistical Yearbook) they figure within the category 'second generation immigrants' although they are all born in Norway. The term 'first generation Norwegians' would be more appropriate.<sup>2</sup> The topic for discussion is not the terminology as such, but the negotiation of identities expressed through shifting terms. As a contextualisation of the discussion some data on Pakistanis in Norway will be presented.

At the beginning of 1996 the immigrant population numbered 223,800, i.e. 5.1% of the total population. Included in this number is 191,900 first generation and 31,900 second generation immigrants (cf the discussion above).

The Pakistanis formed the largest group within the immigrant population: 19,400, followed by Danes (18,200), Swedes (15,200) and Vietnamese (13,800). There were also large groups from Bosnia-Herzegovina (11,300), Great Britain (10,700) and Yugoslavia (9,600). Among the 19,400 Pakistanis, 11,800 were first generation immigrants compared to 7,600 second generations.

The first group of Pakistani men arrived in Oslo in 1967.<sup>3</sup> They all had close kin in Denmark or Britain, and their reason for coming to Norway was a more difficult working market in other parts of Europe. At the same time there was a need for unskilled workers in Norway. This situation made Norway part of the prevalent European migrant working market. The immigration of Pakistanis to Norway was a typical labour seeking chain immigration, similar in character to the immigration of Pakistanis to Britain.<sup>4</sup> Pakistani men clustered together in the central parts of Oslo where they shared cheap rooms or flats. This first settlement pattern laid the foundation for later residential concentration.<sup>5</sup>

80-90 % of Pakistani immigrants came from the province of Punjab and of these the majority belonged to rural areas like Gujrat or Jhelum.<sup>6</sup> The *tehsil* Kharian in the district of Gujrat had the highest emigration density to Norway. In some aspects this homogeneous immigration background explains characteristic traits of the Pakistani community in Oslo. The relatively strong socio-economic and socio-cultural homogeneity of the Pakistani majority in Oslo has made it difficult for those Pakistanis who do not associate with this group to be seen or heard in Norwegian society. Some of them have an urban middle class background and are well educated. These Pakistanis distance themselves from the majority of Pakistanis in Norway and they suffer from what they experience as cultural stigmatisation. A characteristic trait of the Pakistani community in Oslo is that it is large enough to form a community, but too small for individuals, who do not identify with the group, to choose an alternative lifestyle or for minorities within the minority to be respected. Because of their size, most Asian communities in Britain offer greater opportunities for alternative lifestyles, despite the constraints of a strong and tight Asian family life.<sup>7</sup>

Another characteristic trait is the dominance of Pakistanis in Norway compared to other Asian groups. This situation gives less opportunity, compared to Britain, for negotiating a flexible Asian identity.

A related structural difference between Norway and Britain was Norway's ethnic and cultural homogeneity at the end of the 1960s when the first wave of immigration took place. The host country encountered by the Pakistani immigrants in the beginning of the 1970s differed therefore from what Pakistani immigrants to Britain had met ten to fifteen years earlier. In Norway immigrants found a welfare society which, on the one hand, appreciated their work and had no colonial past but, on the other hand, had little multicultural and multireligious competence.

The second phase of the immigration history of Pakistanis in Norway started with the immigration ban of 1975.<sup>8</sup> After 1976 Pakistanis had to apply for a visa to Norway. As in Britain after the Commonwealth Immigrants Act



1962, the nature of migration changed.<sup>9</sup> Despite the fact that no labour seeking immigrants from Pakistan were accepted, the number of Pakistanis still increased because of family reunions or the establishment of new families. This second phase of immigration history (the period of establishment of family life in the host society) lasted throughout the 1980s. In the 1990s a third phase, which is the actual context for my study, is characterised by the increased social and cultural influence of second generation Pakistanis.

### **METHODOLOGY**

In designing the fieldwork and conducting the interviews, it was almost impossible to approach the ethnic dimension without making contrasting pairs of concepts, like Pakistani-Muslim/ Pakistani-Norwegian/ Norwegian girls/ Muslim girls etc.<sup>10</sup> The conclusion is, however, not based solely on verbal answers in relation to this choice of opposing categories, but takes also into consideration other non-verbal ways of signaling cultural and social identity. In this way my study deviates from the Identity Structure Analysis method (ISA) as developed by Weinreich, and applied by him and by Kelly.<sup>11</sup> In the ISA method, respondents are asked to rate entities (like grouping of people) by using a set of bipolar constructs (cognitive categories used to construe one's social world, for example ideologies or values). This method may be adequate for the study of identity processes among adolescents but is not applicable for research among children. Even if constructs and entities should be elicited from the respondents themselves, one cannot expect children to be able to rate entities using sets of bipolar constructs. Research among children needs another way of operationalising identity theories. The researcher will eventually have to transform constructs and entities into an everyday dialogue, and the researcher will have to interpret both verbal and non-verbal self-presentations.

How children presented themselves verbally and non-verbally in dialogue with the researcher will be the focus of this article.<sup>12</sup> For this reason the concept 'self-presentations', and not 'self-representations' is used.<sup>13</sup> An analysis of how children presented themselves conveys their self-perceptions.<sup>14</sup> To avoid losing sight of individual expressions, parts of the dialogues will be reproduced, not only categorised answers, and some situations will be described. This way of presenting the data is influenced by the criticism of Geertz that he concentrates on 'the whole', the generic, and loses sight of individuals, including the presence of the researcher. Experience-near concepts<sup>15</sup> are retained and ambiguities in children's ways of expressing themselves are not hidden.

## A THEORETICAL POSITIONING

Theoretically the article deals with aspects of 'social and cultural identity', especially 'ethnicity' and 'nationality'. These concepts are operationalised by empirically close categories like 'I feel like...' (self-ascriptions), 'us-them dichotomies' (social boundaries), and language identifications and attachments to global and local communities. These categories arose as part of children's self-presentations.

The position taken in this article is to regard ethnicity as one aspect of the total identities of the children. Ethnic identity is not regarded as having a fixed content shared with all other Pakistanis, but rather being a complex of processes by means of which Pakistanis construct and reconstruct their lives.<sup>16</sup> Ethnicity is regarded as one among other dimensions of 'the great cultural discourse'. The great cultural discourse is the expression of culture understood as a configuration of shared and condensed knowledge derived in a dialectic between earlier knowledge and experience in on-going social life. Ethnicity is part of this discourse but not necessarily a very important dimension. Long-term ethnic processes show that ethnicity at one point in time may be of no relevance for how a person acts but then later on may become highly significant. This is explained by ethnicity being a metacontextual idiom existing as a potentiality without being supported by everyday interactions.<sup>17</sup> This is comparable to viewpoints of Rex: '...the theory of ethnicity should recognise that collective ethnic organisation may often lie dormant and only become activated by the emergence of shared interests.'<sup>18</sup>

The relationship between religion and ethnicity as significant sources of social and cultural identity is a central theme in many recent research studies on second generation immigrants. British research has documented a tendency of giving Islam priority compared to ethnicity as a provider of a broad and complete frame of reference for most aspects of life among second and third generation immigrants from the South Asian sub-continent.<sup>19</sup>

Jacobson, on the basis of her research on British Pakistani youth (the age group 17 to 27), draws the following conclusion:

My suggestion is that the specific contents of the identities are such that whereas the ethnic boundaries are becoming increasingly permeable, the religious boundaries are remaining clear-cut and pervasive and thus serve to protect and enhance attachments to Islam.<sup>20</sup>

In a paper from 1996 Jacobson developed this analysis further in a discussion of how British Pakistanis understood 'Britishness'. The distinction was made between three boundaries of 'Britishness': a 'civic' boundary, a 'racial' boundary and a 'cultural' boundary.<sup>21</sup>

Gardner and Shukur discussed context-dependent ethnicity among the new British Bengalis; how some of them developed a *creolised* cultural identity - a Bangla music oriented youth culture - and some of them developed world-wide oriented Muslim identity. 'More and more young Bengalis now identify themselves first and foremost as Muslims rather than as Bengali or Bangladeshi.' The blanket category 'Bangladeshi' was for both groups obsolete and both attitudes were 'a reaction to, and a defence against, the experience of racial exclusionism.'<sup>22</sup>

Knott and Khokher analysed young women's testimonies in terms of religious and ethnic orientation rather than in terms of the two cultures of home and school. Through a perceptual map of four religio-ethnic orientations (*religiously orientated, not religiously orientated, ethnically orientated, non ethnically orientated*) it was clarified how these young women negotiated religious and ethnic factors, and perhaps gave preference to one over the other, according to context.<sup>23</sup>

The following sections will explore how individual Pakistani children in Oslo expressed and classified themselves and thereby constructed and reconstructed themselves.

#### SELF-ASCRPTIONS (I FEEL LIKE...)

Ethnicity was not an emic or experience-near category for children. Self-ascription as Pakistani, however, was. This section will explore how children used this self-ascription, for example if this term for them was an ethnic or cultural category or both. It will also be of interest to consider whether the vocabulary at their disposal worked in expressing their feelings and values, or whether they were limited by concepts imposed on them by the mainstream society or by the minority community.<sup>24</sup> An analysis of their self-ascriptions is one among other ways of understanding their self-perceptions. Especially relevant to this discussion will be Weinreich's distinction between *ego-recognised identity, alter-ascribed identity* and the *metaperspective of self*.<sup>25</sup> One's ego-recognised social identity may not be in accordance with the ascription imposed by another (an alter-ascribed identity). Sometimes one does not have direct access to another's view of oneself and in such cases one forms a metaperspective of self, i.e. one's interpretation of alter-ascribed identities. Alter-ascribed identities may be regarded as parallels to 'coercive' (as opposed to 'voluntaristic') boundaries; boundaries imposed upon a person by fellow-members of the group or externally.<sup>26</sup>

Tajfel also touches on the problem of cognitive categorisation in relation to value differentials. He says: 'Categorization is a guide for action in the sense that it helps to structure the social environment according to certain general cognitive principles.'<sup>27</sup> The categories used by the children will accordingly structure their social environment. This is also in accordance with Berger's

statement: 'The individual realizes himself in society - that is, he recognizes his identity in socially defined terms and these definitions become reality as he lives in society.'<sup>28</sup> This does not exclude men's capacity to create new concepts or, as Weinreich says, men's power of reason and innovative thought which also includes the ability of 'changing definitions of themselves together with altered lifestyles and value systems.'<sup>29</sup>

The emotional, pre-theoretical character of children's self-ascriptions are underlined by focusing on what they *felt* themselves to be.<sup>30</sup> In the elaboration of the answers a diversified set of arguments was presented, from the more formal classifications like citizenship to 'racial' or 'cultural' distinctions. These distinctions were, in practice, partly overlapping or they were used side by side in a sequence of arguments. For analytical purposes, it is therefore more important to focus on the linkages and the transitions than to find distinguishable categories. Illustrative examples and longer sequences of dialogue will be given to contextualise the categories and to demonstrate the overlaps.

Most children answered that they felt *both* Pakistani and Norwegian. Typical of these answers, however, was that most of them ended up by giving priority to the feeling of being 'a little bit more Pakistani'. The following dialogue with Nasir (m 13)<sup>31</sup> may illustrate this transition. In a context where we were talking about Religious Education (RE) at school, Nasir mentioned that identity had been one of the recent subjects. We then had the following conversation:

- I: Have you ever reflected on that subject in relation to yourself...who you are?  
 N: Who I am?  
 I: If you are Pakistani, if you are Norwegian, or if you are just....?  
 N: I do feel both. I do feel Pakistani. I do feel Norwegian.  
 I: Mmm  
 N: But surely I say that I'm not Norwegian, even if I am born here.  
 I: Why so surely?  
 N: I don't know. I feel a little bit more Pakistani.  
 I: Yes.  
 N: I am a Pakistani citizen, you know.  
 I: OK  
 N: I may change citizenship at any time.  
 I: Do you see any advantages connected to that?  
 N: No, I don't see any advantages except that we now have to have a visa to go to other European countries.  
 I: OK, there might be that kind of practical thing... like the right to vote....  
 N: Yes, dad is not allowed to vote, except at the local elections.

It is interesting to see how he started by saying that he felt both, but at the same time had no doubt in ascribing himself as Pakistani. As an explanation for this self-ascription he first referred to his feelings (they were after all more in the one direction), and then referred to more formal categories such as

citizenship. Citizenship may express or symbolise emotional attachments, but may also have a more practical side. Nasir rapidly underlined the fact that he might easily change citizenship, but that would hardly imply anything for his self-ascription. This is in accordance with what Jacobson states about British Pakistanis. To have British citizenship 'entails a kind of membership of British society that is official but not truly meaningful.'<sup>32</sup> In the same way Nasir does not feel Pakistani because he has Pakistani citizenship. I asked him to tell me more about why he felt Pakistani. He said:

Our social surroundings are both...Pakistani and Norwegian. Both are together, keep together. The Norwegians, of course, call themselves Norwegians. And the Pakistanis call themselves Pakistanis. But when they are together, then they don't say they are not Norwegians. You don't say you are not Norwegian, even if you are not, in that social setting. When we have lived here our whole life, we don't say we are not Norwegians. We call ourselves Pakistanis like our parents...in the way that we have our own culture.

Nasir distinguished between:

1. Which groups actually existed in his social surroundings.
2. What people called themselves.
3. The importance or non-importance of ethnicity in the social interaction.

For Nasir it seemed self-evident that there were two different ethnic groups, and what these two groups called themselves was in accordance with what they were called by 'the others' (ego-recognised and alter-recognised identity). Most important, however, was his observation about the indifference of these ascriptions when people did things together or lived in the same community. Then ethnicity was clearly undercommunicated (we don't say we are not Norwegians). This is in accordance with Lithman's statement:

...ethnic labels may be of no relevance at all, as eg in certain work situations involving individuals drawn from different immigrant ethnies (sic).<sup>33</sup>

Nasir's way of ascribing himself is typical for most respondent children. Their identities were clearly situated; they expressed a tendency to undercommunicate their double or multiple identities in everyday social life, but at the same time had a clear opinion of being culturally different from other groups.

### Hyphenated identities

Some children had problems in conceptualising a double or multiple identity. In Norwegian, as in American, it is possible to form *hyphenated concepts* such as Norwegian-American, Norwegian-Pakistani etc. The category Norwegian-Pakistani was, however, non-existent in the vocabulary of the children. There was a discrepancy between what the children expressed concerning plural identities and the ethnic vocabulary at their disposal. The lack of awareness among most Norwegians about a possible Punjabi identity within the broader category Pakistani-ness or transcending national categories may have influenced the way Pakistani children spoke about their ethnicity. Dominantly they seemed to be caught in a conceptual trap of dichotomies. According to Wallman it is 'this conceptual failure of the majority culture that puts so pessimistic a gloss on multiple or marginal identity patterns.'<sup>34</sup> Saifullah Khan underlines that hyphenated concepts do not exist in English. She says: 'These concepts and classifications and the lack of them tell us more about our ethnicity or the dominant ethnicity than about the minority culture.'<sup>35</sup> The question raised by Saifullah Khan, Wallman and by this article is whether hyphenated concepts in a better way would express children's plural identities. When it is not there as part of everyday speech, the reason may be that neither majority nor minority has accepted the idea of 'plural identities'. The purpose of a hyphenated concept, such as Norwegian-Pakistani, would be to express the integrated plurality, not to characterise their identity as hyphenated in the meaning of being 'something in between' or 'split'.

### Shifting terms

From time to time I tried to 'lead' interviewees into answering that they felt Norwegian by stressing that they were born in Norway, spoke Norwegian etc., but this never led to answers that went beyond the feeling of being both Norwegian and Pakistani.

Aisha (f 9) said:

A: I feel like both.

I: Yes, OK.

A: I feel mostly like Pakistani.

I: Yes.

A: But when I am outdoors and that sort..., I do not feel like an outsider.

I: No, it is perhaps possible to be both. It may be difficult, but can you tell me why you feel mostly to be Pakistani?

A: Yes, because we *are* Pakistani, you know. At home when we speak Urdu...

These self-ascriptions are apparently inconsistent. Aisha first explicitly states her double identity (Norwegian and Pakistani), then conveys that her feelings are more in the one direction (Pakistani), and ends up by a taken-for-granted assumption (*we are* Pakistanis). Language is mentioned as the marker

of the specific Pakistani identity. However, 'to be Pakistani' implied neither a culturally distinct content, except the speaking of Urdu at home, nor a social boundary (she did not feel like an outsider); it was rather an idiom as part of the everyday discourse.<sup>36</sup> An ethnic idiom may under other circumstances be revitalised to have a culturally distinct content or to mark a social boundary.

Another way of speaking about ethnicity is to reflect on how you feel in relation to 'the others' (I don't feel like an outsider). When Aisha initially said she felt she was both Pakistani and Norwegian, she expressed a feeling of 'multiple cultural competence.'<sup>37</sup> If this utterance is combined with her own language practice and lifestyle, the taken-for-granted Pakistani identity is seen to have a content that is increasingly dominated both by Norwegian language and the Norwegian way of life. The ethnic boundaries were fluid and permeable in the way documented in Jacobson's study from the London Borough of Waltham Forest.<sup>38</sup> If the concept Norwegian-Pakistani had been at Aisha's disposal, it might have covered her identity in a more accurate and descriptive sense. A descriptive concept like Norwegian-Pakistani, might, however, not be adequate to convey children's *feelings* of identity. According to the theory of situational ethnicity<sup>39</sup>, the context is decisive for which ethnic labels are used. A diversified shifting terminology might therefore be more in congruence with children's shifting plural identities than a hyphenated concept. Even those children who had Norwegian friends, spoke Norwegian fluently and participated in social arenas of the mainstream society (such as sporting activities), ascribed themselves as Pakistanis.<sup>40</sup>

The reference to parents as Pakistanis is given by most children as the main legitimisation of their own Pakistani-ness. As Yasmin (f 14) expressed it: 'I have Pakistani parents. My whole family is Pakistani, and...I feel Pakistani.' Yasmin's utterance is typical and interesting because the reference to parents is not presented as something formal or mechanical but combined with a subjective emotional expression: 'I feel like Pakistani.'

As a conclusion of this section's discussion it might be stated that the self-ascriptions given above may all be classified as expressions of ethnic identity as Pakistanis in the sense of *situational ethnicity*. The feeling of being Pakistani is strong, but the content of this self-ascription varies according to the situation or, as expressed by Eriksen, 'ethnicity is essentially *conditional* pertaining to persons-in-situations and not *categorical* pertaining to persons-as-such.'<sup>41</sup>

### **SOCIAL BOUNDARIES (US -THEM)**

The focus of this section is on how Pakistani children spoke about themselves (us) in relation to others (them). This dichotomisation was partly implicit in the self-ascriptions presented above. Eriksen distinguishes between dichotomisation, complementarisation and we-hood.<sup>42</sup> Dichotomisation refers to the establishment of a distinct identity through contrasts vis-a-vis the other. The

contrasts are often of a negative character. Complementarity, however, refers to the creation and reproduction of a comparative terminology for dealing with cultural differences. The development of a shared language is often necessary for conceptualising these differences. We-hood presupposes some kind of internal solidarity or cultural commonality and is often a condition for both dichotomisation and complementarisation.<sup>43</sup> Theoretically it is of interest to distinguish what constitutes we-hood (we as subject) from what constitutes us-hood (we as object), but every empirical context seems to encompass both aspects of social identity.<sup>44</sup>

In this section the conceptual pair 'us-them' is not used as dichotomisation as opposed to a complementary pair 'we-you', in the sense of marking a mutual demarcation process<sup>45</sup> but simply as opposing terms within an ethnic context marked by interethnic relationships. The analysis will, however, discuss children's use of the dichotomy, to explore whether it inclines more in a direction of mutual demarcation or complementarity.

The respondents used the dichotomy 'us-them' in a variety of ways. They made a distinction between:

- Pakistanis and Norwegians.
- Themselves and Pakistanis in Pakistan.
- Family/*biradari*/those among whom marriages might be arranged and others.
- Themselves as born in Norway (and well established in the local community) and 'newcomers' (like refugees etc.).
- Asians and Westerners.
- Muslims and non-Muslims.

A key issue in the following analysis is the discussion of the context and content of these distinctions. Which of them should be classified as ethnic, cultural or religious categories and whether there are different layers of ethnicity, culturality and religiousness in each distinction will be discussed.

Gender and gender roles were often mentioned by both boys and girls as explicit markers of ethnic or cultural group identification. This is in accordance with other studies (which often combine a discussion of gender as a marker of ethnic and Islamic identity.<sup>46</sup> Gender is generally 'deeply implicated in the complex of societal processes'<sup>47</sup> and in the following discussion the gender dimension will be illuminated from the viewpoints of both boys and girls as it manifested itself as an aspect of each of the six distinctions.

#### **Pakistanis versus Norwegians**

As the previous section has shown, most children said they felt they were both Pakistani and Norwegian. However, they frequently used the dichotomy 'us-them' when speaking about Pakistanis in relation to Norwegians. This 'us-them' dichotomy was a dominant part of their everyday vocabulary, mostly used



complementarily to conceptualise cultural distinctiveness without necessarily implying conflicting identities. There were, however, children who articulated a feeling of conflict. Rifat (f 17) was one of them. She said she felt 'divided'. When asked to elaborate that saying, and also to reflect on eventual differences between her way of being Pakistani in Norway and for others to be Pakistani in Pakistan, she said:

When I am in Pakistan, it is always like this: I can't be just like them you know. They know a lot of things I don't know, for instance. It means I feel a little bit like an outsider there as well. It has to do with language and habits, what they know about history and so on. In Norway too, I don't know that much about Norwegians, about Norwegian people. Here I am not completely Norwegian, and there I am not completely Pakistani, you know.

Rifat here speaks about two sets of dichotomies: Pakistanis vs. Norwegians and Pakistanis like herself, from Norway, vs. Pakistanis in Pakistan. She expresses a feeling of belonging completely to neither the Pakistanis in Pakistan nor the Norwegians in Norway. I tried to turn her argument around, suggesting that she had a double competence, knowing something from both sides, but she said:

I actually do feel stupid. At home, I am something quite different from what I am when I am out. Some Pakistani persons I know are more like Norwegians, being more together with Norwegians and that sort of thing, but then they don't know anything about their own country, about their religion and that sort of thing. You have to be on one side!

Rifat's point of view seems to be quite distanced from what was written above about hyphenated and shifting identities. Her terminology, however, may be questioned. One of the examples she gave of feeling like an outsider in Pakistan was her own lack of knowledge of Shia history and rituals. One of her cousins in Pakistan was a Shia Muslim, and Rifat had felt rather strange when observing the bloody Muharram ritual. For Rifat this exemplified her split between a Pakistani and a Norwegian identity. Many Sunni Muslims in Pakistan would, however, feel the same way as Rifat did, watching this Shia ritual for the first time, but they would not at all connect these negative feelings with a deviant ethnic identity. What Rifat experienced was a cultural distance between 'us' and 'them', but this cultural distance was not necessarily an ethnic one. Whenever she felt herself to be an 'outsider', she seemed to ascribe the feeling to a divided ethnic identity, what she experienced as a Pakistani-Norwegian dichotomy. These ethnic categories were the only concepts at her disposal. She was caught up in what Baumann calls the dominant discourse, namely that an ethnic group shares a specific culture.<sup>48</sup> Within this kind of discourse all members of an ethnic group are supposed to share 'a culture' and it is taken for granted that social and cultural boundaries run along ethnic lines. Rifat's

'problem' was one among many examples of conflicts, diversities, 'us-them' dichotomies being interpreted as ethnic conflicts without actually being so.<sup>49</sup>

In some of the Pakistani girls' development from childhood to adolescence there had been changes in lifestyle, and these changes had increased differences between being Norwegian and Pakistani. The girls insisted, however, that these changes were not forced upon them. Rifat (f 17) said:

I haven't really thought about it, but...nobody has forced me not to do things, except myself. It is not that mum or dad have instructed me. I realised all these things by myself.

The 'things' she, and other girls, talked about all concerned their relationship to boys.

I: Do you feel that you are kept under stricter control?

R: No. I don't think so, or I withdraw by myself.

Their attitudes may be said to express internalised values, but at the same time a consciousness (an increased reflexivity) about these values. They were not taken for granted, because the girls were aware of the fact that these values made the distinction between 'us' (the Pakistanis) and 'them' (the Norwegians) sharper. It is too easy to characterise these internalised values, more or less consciously chosen by the girls, as a total female submission.<sup>50</sup> Most girls combined the attitude of female withdrawal from some specific social youth arenas with a strong emphasis on the importance of 'making something out of your life', for instance to study, not only marry. Most girls wanted to pursue a career, for instance to become lawyers, and *then* to marry. Even if social identification with one group (the Pakistanis) for some seemed to be strengthened with age, the same girls' cultural identity had changed in the sense that aspects of 'meaning' expressed through gender roles had become more complex. The girls accepted, adjusted to and negotiated values.

There were, however, situations in which Pakistani children experienced not the 'cracks in the ethnic wall',<sup>51</sup> but borders which were impossible to cross without losing one's social, cultural and religious identity: 'When it is a barbecue at the sports club, the only thing they serve is hot dogs, and then you feel an outsider' (Nasir m 13). Some children admitted that they sometimes avoided going to sports club parties or to Christmas balls at school. In most social situations, they were active and well integrated, but occasionally there were limits to their participation. These boundaries were connected to gender roles and food restrictions. Children tried to undercommunicate the importance of participating in such events, but from what is known about youth socialisation in Norway generally, these arenas are important elements of mainstream enculturation.

Children talked about Pakistan and Pakistani culture both as outsiders and insiders, and they compared their own categories with Norwegian characteristics in a diversified way. Despite their diversified views on Pakistanis, they also had a view that Pakistanis in Norway should be positive models for Norwegians, thus making a sharp distinction between 'their group' and Norwegians.

#### **Pakistanis in Norway vs. Pakistanis in Pakistan**

As noted above, Rifat, like most of the children, operated with different 'us – them' classifications. Besides the Pakistani - Norwegian dichotomy, Rifat talked about the Pakistanis in Norway (us) opposed to the Pakistanis in Pakistan (them). This was an explicit part of her experience of feeling 'divided', as discussed in the previous sub-section, and it was also present when she talked about marriage:

R: I would like to marry someone who lives here more than someone who lives in Pakistan.

I: You don't think you will go to Pakistan?

R: Not forever. Holiday is something else, different from staying there forever.

When she talked about marrying someone who lived here, she meant marrying a Pakistani who lived in Norway. Marrying a Norwegian was not even a theme of discussion.

The opposition Pakistanis in Norway vs. Pakistanis in Pakistan was a typical situationally experienced dichotomy. It is not recognised as a dichotomy in their discourse in Oslo. On the contrary, we have already seen how children conceptually included Pakistan and Pakistanis generally in their 'us'-categorisation. When children (and adults) visited relatives in Pakistan, however, they often unexpectedly met 'the others'. They felt like strangers and easily talked about 'us' (Pakistanis from Norway) in contrast to 'them'. The content of this dichotomisation was, however, not unambiguous. First generation Pakistani immigrants often experienced 'them' (Pakistanis in Pakistan) as far more modernised and culturally changed than expected: 'We had not changed as much as they had,' was a common utterance. Children and youth coming from Oslo to rural areas in Punjab, however, often experienced 'the others' as unmodern or old-fashioned. In this context, more important than the characteristics in themselves is the experience of dichotomisation.

#### **Family/biradari/those among whom one should marry vs. others.**

The Pakistani tradition of marrying a cousin or another relative is a strong factor, not only in keeping the family together, but in maintaining Punjabis, Kashmiris etc. as ethnic groups.<sup>52</sup> The 'us-them' dichotomy established through

marriage practice is not clearcut and impermeable (and it is contradictory to prescribed Islamic doctrine), but it is still strong and influential, even in a minority situation. The relatively small number of Pakistanis in Norway, however, causes problems for the practice of this system. It is difficult to find a suitable partner within the *biradari* in Norway, and even within broader groups, like *zat* or the wider Punjabi Muslim population. Partners have to be found in Pakistan (or occasionally among relatives in other European countries). From a male perspective, this is not regarded as very unusual or problematic, but for Norwegian Pakistani girls this represents a rather traumatic experience, since they are expected to move to their in-laws after marriage.<sup>53</sup> Within a traditional setting this would imply staying with relatives already known ('us'-group). For Norwegian-Pakistani girls, however, it increasingly implied moving to someone unknown in a 'foreign' country far away (to 'them').<sup>54</sup> A consequence seems to be the trend to have bridegrooms move from Pakistan to Norway to stay with their bride and her family. From one point of view, this may be regarded as a demonstration of the conservatism and pertinence of the old system of arranged marriages.<sup>55</sup> From another point of view, the new practice may be regarded as a consequence of the girls' increased influence. Families have to accept that their Norwegian-Pakistani daughters neither want to stay nor are 'trained' to stay with their in-laws in Pakistan.<sup>56</sup>

#### Asian vs. Westerners

The distinction 'us – them' was also present when children spoke about music or film preferences. In these contexts the distinction 'Asian'-'Western' was sometimes used, but the most striking finding was a notion of distinctiveness combined with a confusion of terminology. When Yasmin (f 14) was asked what kind of music she liked, she said:

It is something in between. It is Pakistani or Indian or Norwegian, I mean American, like Whitney Houston (Yasmin f 14).

The interesting thing here is not that she listened to both Asian and Western music, but that Whitney Houston was first categorised as Norwegian music. Likewise her favourite programme on Norwegian TV was Santa Barbara, but she also watched Asia Channel with great pleasure.

For most respondents, as for Yasmin, it was easily accepted that Whitney Houston and Santa Barbara were absorbed as part of the Norwegian and not as part of the Pakistani youth culture. For Yasmin they were both part of her lifeworld, on the same line as the pop music on Asia Channel, and this shows that the content of the youth culture might be the same, regardless of which ethnic terms are used. Whitney Houston and Santa Barbara were part of the common popular youth culture and created a culturally 'neutral' 'bridging' arena of interaction, whereas Pakistani pop music as part of Yasmin's world was kept 'concealed from public life and restricted to families, relatives, churches,

and ethnic associations.<sup>57</sup> The pop music on Asia Channel might be said to come closer and closer to the common youth culture, but as long as it is watched, and listened to only by those who subscribe, and that means only by Asian minorities, this music is far from being transferred to the common youth culture.

There are, however, some new tendencies that 'ethnic' inspired pop music (eg bhangra music) might win general popularity.<sup>58</sup> It is, however, still too early to say if, and how, this might influence the 'identity work' of Norwegian-Pakistani children.

The greater variety of people with Asian background in Britain compared to Norway seems to lead to a more extensive use of the term 'Asian'. Young Norwegian-Pakistani informants who have stayed temporarily in London, expressed relief at the broader spectrum of identifications offered by this term compared to 'Pakistani'.

#### **Local community members vs. 'newcomers'.**

One variant of the 'us-them' dichotomy was expressed when children identified strongly with their school or local community and felt a distance to 'newcomers' regardless of their ethnic background. Rashid (m 14) illustrates this attitude. He was born in Norway, and had lived at his present address for as long as he could remember. He expressed a strong social belonging to this local community, his school and especially his football club. His weekdays were fully booked with homework and sports activities, and even at the weekends there might be football or handball matches. Otherwise the weekends were a time for receiving visitors or visiting family or Pakistani friends of the family. Rashid's personal friends at school and at the club were mainly Norwegians, and he regarded himself as one of them: 'I was born here and I speak Norwegian'. He often spoke of himself as different from the others: those coming from abroad.

#### **Muslims vs. non-Muslims**

This sub-section will not deal with all implications of being a Muslim, but will focus on how children *spoke* about themselves as Muslims in contrast to others. Some recent British research, presented above, has concluded that Islam has priority in relation to ethnicity in the lives of young adults. This implies that young adults increasingly use the dichotomy 'us-them' in the meaning of Muslims vs. non-Muslims. Ethnic boundaries seem to be much more permeable than religious ones (cf the increased use of 'Asian' among British Pakistanis, Bangladeshis etc.) and young adults distinguish clearly between what they call Pakistani-ness (or Asian-ness) and being a Muslim.<sup>59</sup>

In the casual language of my respondents, however, terms like Muslim and Pakistani were overlapping. Three reasons may be found for this difference in findings between Jacobson's research and my own. First of all the difference

in age between her respondents and mine is decisive (her respondents are between the age of 17 and 24). At an early stage of a child's development the child does not feel any need to distinguish herself or himself from their parents, eg when it comes to ethnic self-presentation.<sup>60</sup> Secondly, the longer establishment of Pakistanis in Britain may have led to a stronger enculturation. Thirdly, the Islamic Movement has in Britain and elsewhere attracted Muslim youth from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.<sup>61</sup>

The children seemed to feel a problem in dealing with, for them, conflicting categorisations. I asked Iqra (f 9) if she felt a relation to Norwegian converts to Muslims, or if she felt different from them. She answered 'No, I...They do have the same religion, but maybe have another way of living'.

Another girl also talked about how confused she had been once she had met some Christian Pakistanis. They had looked just like herself 'with long hair, real pigtail and Pakistani clothes', she said. She had asked: 'Are you really Christians?'

The data of my study clearly shows that even if the dichotomy Muslim - non-Muslim was known to the children, this categorisation was not as dominant in their way of thinking as was the dichotomy Pakistani - Norwegian.

The flexibility of social boundaries is also expressed in the way children created something new, acceptable to themselves and different 'others'.<sup>62</sup> When children used the term 'in between' in such cases, it did not necessarily mean falling between or having to choose between opposites, but it meant adjustment to the mainstream youth culture without losing one's integrity. Yasmin (f 14) was one of those who used the term 'in between', both when she talked about music and about how she dressed: 'If I am going to a party, I wear clothes that look almost Norwegian...it is in a way in between. I wear long dresses or a skirt'.

Children have been seen to be caught up in conceptual and social quandaries, but also seen to handle these quandaries in their daily life through a diversified and flexible set of us-them dichotomies. The next section will look into how children presented themselves directly and indirectly through languages.

#### **LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY (MY TONGUE SPEAKS...)**

Language was often referred to by children when they were asked to explain their immediate self-ascriptions as Pakistanis. Using Urdu or Panjabi was experienced as a sign of belonging to a culturally distinct community. For some children, this was primarily part of a sector of their lives that linked them to parents and grown-up relatives. For others, this language use dominated most sectors of their lives. When it comes to competence in Urdu or Panjabi, one has to distinguish between these languages as mother tongues and Urdu as the national language and between oral competence and literacy.<sup>63</sup>

For Pakistani children who lived in the central parts of Oslo, the daily language situation was characterised by an extensive use of their mother tongue. Children were surrounded by Urdu or Panjabi speaking people at home, in the

neighbourhood and even at some schools. Norwegian was spoken in the classroom, but Urdu or Panjabi (or Pakistani as some of them called it) in the breaks. Omar (m 10) is a typical boy within this category. He was Panjabi speaking, but did not feel any difficulties combining Panjabi and Urdu, for instance, when he was out playing with other children. At home all conversation between family members was in Panjabi, even in my presence. Omar said:

O: All those who don't speak Panjabi, they know Urdu. They understand what I say.

I: Do you feel it's more natural to speak Panjabi or to speak Norwegian?

O: Panjabi. I always speak Panjabi.

Omar said that all his friends knew some Urdu.

I: Why do they know that?

O: It is Pakistan, you know! In Pakistan they cannot speak Norwegian.

A recognition of Urdu or Panjabi as a strong identity marker might, however, be combined with a feeling of distance from Pakistan as a country, as the following example illustrates. Jamshed (m 9), like many children, thought of sickness when he thought of Pakistan. One of his first memories from visits there was that watching a sheep being slaughtered as part of the *Id al-azha* celebration, made him feel ill. He had never seen animals being slaughtered before. At other times he got head lice, he broke his leg, and he took medicines which he hated. He said he did not like the hot climate either, and I teased him by saying:

I: You are Norwegian, you know.

J: Yes, but not that much Norwegian.

I: No? What do you think you are, Norwegian or Pakistani?

J: Pakistani.

I: Mmm, how can you say that without hesitation?

J: I feel it.

I: How do you feel to be Pakistani?

J: Emmm, my tongue speaks Urdu most easily.

I: Does your tongue speak Urdu more easily than Norwegian?

J: Yes

I: In your dreams in the night....do you speak Urdu or Norwegian?

J: Both. In the middle I come to Norwegian and sometimes I come to Urdu.

Jamshed's self-ascription expressed a pre-theoretical consciousness. He felt it as something he had not chosen or controlled, but just something that was there. He did not say: I speak Urdu or I prefer Urdu, but: 'my tongue speaks Urdu'. This is a bodily expression of language identity, and his experience may

be said to convey 'deep-structures' of identity. Such deep-structures connect the child to its parents and their common lifeworld of sensibility and meaning.<sup>64</sup> The mother tongue is developed as the language of primary communication and interaction within the family. This is often called the popular (or common sense) approach to native language: native language is the language learnt from the mother, the language in which you dream and think. Most psychologists and educationalists stress adolescence as a particularly important phase for the development of identity, but they also underline the gradual integration of identification elements made during childhood, not least through the mother tongue.<sup>65</sup>

Whereas the children whose families had moved to one of the suburbs experienced a problem in the lack of opportunity to practise Panjabi or Urdu, the respondents who lived in the central part of town often lacked the opportunity to practise Norwegian. The exceptions were those children who - despite living in areas dominated by immigrants - participated in leisure activities like sports, music, scouting etc. together with Norwegian speaking friends. Another important factor for the Norwegian language training, besides the training through schooling, was attending a kindergarten.

For some children, Urdu or Panjabi seemed to be less decisive for their identity, but was still a part of what made them culturally distinctive. For these children, and their parents, Urdu or Panjabi competence was constantly a question of concern. This was typical for children whose parents had moved to one of the suburbs in order to get away from the 'ghetto-like' situation in central Oslo, not least to increase their children's training in Norwegian. Rashid's (m 14) language competence - and lack of competence - may illustrate some of the consequences of this socially upward move. Rashid claimed to speak Urdu fluently in Pakistan. There he also had to speak Panjabi with his grandmother. At home in Oslo Rashid spoke Urdu with his parents and with his grown-up relatives, but increasingly he spoke Norwegian with his sisters and brothers and younger relatives. If they spoke Urdu, they mixed in a lot of Norwegian vocabulary. They identified themselves with Norwegian language, but were identified by others (including their parents) through speaking Urdu.<sup>66</sup> Rashid would like to learn Urdu properly, including how to write and read, but he was not motivated to work hard to achieve this competence. Urdu competence was a 'qualifying capital' within the Pakistani community, but the same 'capital' gave no qualifications for improved status within mainstream Norwegian society.<sup>67</sup> (Lien 1997:141,148). For many children an 'investment' in Urdu was felt to be a waste of time.

Rifat (f 17), Rashid's sister, spoke Urdu, but not perfectly. She too mixed a lot of Norwegian into it. Rifat and her sister and brothers had a 'problem': Because they lived far away from the mosque and had few Pakistani neighbours, they lacked the opportunity to practise Urdu (and to learn to read the Qur'an). Rifat said about her nine year old sister:



My sister has just recently started to read (Urdu). After all it is important to know...it is our language. I do help her sometimes. I nag her, insisting she has to learn the Qur'an and learn Urdu.

Even those children who spoke Norwegian with each other spoke Urdu with their parents. Nasir (m 13) said:

Dad always insists: speak Urdu, speak Urdu, speak Urdu. It is in a way a rule. We, the sisters and brothers, often speak Norwegian, and we mix Norwegian words into Urdu.

What is expressed above, is typical both as a description of the language situation for many children and as a value statement from *their* point of view:

- They know oral Panjabi or Urdu, but very little written Urdu.
- To learn to read and write Urdu is regarded as important within the Pakistani community, but gives no status in the Norwegian society.
- To learn to read the Qur'an (in the meaning of recitation in Arabic) is important as part of being a Muslim.

The concern about protecting their mother tongue did not contradict a wish to improve their Norwegian language competence. Quite another thing was, however, how to do that. Most children, and their parents, felt this to be the responsibility of the school and again the socio-economic background of the families was decisive for their attitudes. Educated parents, mostly with an urban background, gave a lot of positive feedback on childrens's schoolwork generally and Norwegian language competence in particular. Even mothers who themselves had very little competence in Norwegian were often enthusiastic about the success of their children. Among my respondents the attitudes of parents seemed to be more decisive for children's school success (including practical skill in Norwegian) than their own language competence.<sup>68</sup>

Even for children who had a double language competence when it came to practical functional skills, language use was contextually dependent. Some life situations were dominated by their first, some by their second language. This underlines the importance of language as an identity marker. Not only were some social arenas, like school, mosque or home, dominated by a specific language, but certain themes required a specific language. Often when religious or cultural issues were focused as part of interviews, children used Urdu terms and did not know how to translate them.

The religious aspects of Urdu should not be neglected. Not only in Pakistan, but all over the Indian sub-continent, Urdu is an identity marker for Muslims both in contrast to Hindus and Sikhs and to the rest of the Muslim world dominated by Arabs.<sup>69</sup> Some of the most central Islamic literature is written in Urdu and some Pakistani parents in Oslo felt a special responsibility to make this literature available for their children. A presupposition for active participation in the Pakistani dominated mosques in Oslo would also be a certain knowledge of Urdu, both oral and written. Even if this situation changes

over time, in that Norwegian is likely to become the language spoken in the mosques (cf the tendencies in England as recorded by Lewis<sup>76</sup>), it is almost as difficult to imagine a complete absence of Urdu in the Pakistani-dominated mosques as it is to imagine an absence of Arabic in the Islamic world.

All respondents between 8 and 17 had some formal training in reading the Qur'an in Arabic, but Arabic was never mentioned by children when they listed language competence. The recitation of the Qur'an belonged to another context, not associated with language as practical skill. When confronted with a lack of knowledge concerning reading in Arabic children might, however, argue quite rationalistically, like Rashid (m 14) did. He knew how to read the Qur'an in Arabic, but he had not practised regularly. He said:

But I don't think it matters much... I think it is more important to read Urdu. I am not very good at that. To read Arabic...it is seldom I will go to Arabia. It is more Pakistan. Writing to relatives and all that.

## CONCLUSION

This article has analysed how Pakistani children presented themselves by referring to social networks, parent's country of origin, citizenship, language use, physical features (colour of skin, hair), cultural specificities, religious affiliation, and the country or local community where they lived. The focus of the analysis has not been the classifications in themselves, but to understand how children spoke about these issues, what they felt and thought, and how they handled social boundaries in daily life. The interpretation of the diversity of their self-presentations, verbally and non-verbally, have led to an understanding of their self-perception and ethnic identity.

Their self-presentations included a broad complexity - and they seemed overall to have developed what Jackson and Nesbitt have called 'multiple cultural competence'<sup>71</sup> despite hard pressure from mainstream society which ascribed to them a well-defined static and limited identity. Their ethnic identity may be described as a situated identity and covered a spectrum from Punjabi-, Pakistani-, Norwegian-ness to youth-nicity.<sup>72</sup> The social boundaries were shifting and layered. No single and fixed boundary existed, but rather a 'series of dichotomies' and a 'set of boundaries' were found as part of the identity process. Pakistani children's comprehension of being Pakistani in Norway exhibited a complexity that included both aspects of cultural and social distinctiveness and a periodic, situationally dependent denial of that distinctiveness.

## Notes

1. This article diversifies between 'Panjabi' (language) and 'Punjab' (province). Cf Eleanor Nesbitt, *The Religious Lives of Sikh Children* (Leeds Community Religious Project, University of Leeds, 2000)
2. Cf the substitution of 'first', 'second', and 'third' generation with 'the new arrivals', 'the go-betweens' and 'the inheritors' in Sophie Gilliat, 'Back to Basics: The Place of Islam in the Self-Identity of Young British Muslims' in Peter Clarke (ed) *New Trends & Developments in the World of Islam* (London: Luzak Oriental, 1998).
3. Nora Ahlberg, *New Challenges. Old Strategies. Themes of Variation and Conflict among Pakistani Muslims in Norway* (Helsinki: Tafas 25, Finnish Anthropological Society, 1990) 17.
4. Eg Muhammad Anwar, *British Pakistanis: Demographic, Social and Economic Position* (Coventry: Centre For Research In Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick, 1996); Roger Ballard, (ed) *Desh Pardesh. The South Asian Presence In Britain* (London: Hurst & Company, 1994); Danièle Joly, *Britannia's Crescent: Making a Place for Muslims in British Society* (Aldershot, Research in Ethnic Relations Series, Avebury, 1995); Hans Jørgen Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992); Verity Saifullah-Khan, 'Perceptions of a population: Pakistanis in Britain', *New Community*, 5 (1976) 222-9; Alison Shaw, *A Pakistani Community in Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988); Pnina Werbner, 'Manchester Pakistanis: division and unity' in Colin Clarke, Ceri Peach and Steven Vertovec (eds) *South Asians Overseas. Migration and Ethnicity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
5. Cf Inger Lise Lien, *To land og en fremtid. Dilemmaer for pakistanske migrantere tilpasning sosialt og arbeidsmessig* (M Phil dissertation, Inst. for Sosialantropologi, Universitetet i Oslo, 1982) 18-19, and Pnina Werbner, 'Manchester Pakistanis: division and unity' in Clarke, Peach and Vertovec (eds) *South Asians Overseas*.
6. Ahlberg, *New Challenges. Old Strategies*. Lien, *ibid*.
7. Cf Gerd Baumann, *Contesting Culture. Discourse of identity in multi-ethnic London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Heidi Jane Larson, *Culture at play: Pakistani children, British childhood*, (PhD thesis, University of California, Berkeley, UMI Dissertation Services, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1990); Shaw, *A Pakistani Community*.

8. The law was said to be preliminary, but was renewed yearly and made permanent (St.mcl.d.74 (1979-80); NOU 1983:47).
9. Cf Ahlberg, *New Challenges. Old Strategies*, 23. Cp Ballard, (ed) *Desh Pardesh*, 11.
10. Five Pakistani families in Oslo with varied socio-economic and cultural backgrounds were followed closely throughout a year. Participant observation was one of the key methods. The sample consists of 16 children within these five families, supplemented by more children, young people and grown-ups who were part of their lifeworlds at school, in the mosques and at leisure activities. For more details of the study, cf Sissel Østberg, *Pakistani Children in Oslo: Islamic Nurture in a Secular Context* (PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, Institute of Education, November 1998, forthcoming (2000) as Monograph Series, Community Religions Project, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds).
11. Cf Peter Weinreich, 'Variations in ethnic identity: Identity Structure Analysis' in Liebkind, Karmela (ed) *New Identities in Europe. Immigrant Ancestry and the Ethnic identity of Youth* (London: Gower Press, 1989) 41-77, and Aidan A.J. Kelly, 'Ethnic identification, association and redefinition: Muslim Pakistanis and Greek Cypriots in Britain' in *ibid.*, 77-116.
12. Cp Eleanor Nesbitt, 'Bridging the Gap between Young People's Experience of Their Religious Traditions at Home and School: The Contribution of Ethnographic Research', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 20:2 (1998) 102-115.
13. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 13ff.
14. Robert Jackson and Eleanor Nesbitt, *Hindu Children in Britain* (Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books, 1993) 27.
15. Clifford Geertz, 'From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding' in Clifford Geertz *Local Knowledge* (London: Fontana Press, 1993) 57; Robert Jackson, *Religious Education - an interpretive approach* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997) 34.
16. Weinreich 'Variations in ethnic identity', 45.
17. Yngve Georg Lithman, *Ethnicity: Idiom and Organization* (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, Department of Social Anthropology and Centre for Research in International Migration and Ethnicity, (1987) 8.
18. John Rex and David Mason, (ed.) *Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 81.
19. Cf Ron Geaves, *Sectarian Influences within Islam in Britain with reference to the concepts of 'ummah' and 'community'*, Monograph Series Community Religions Project, Department of Theology and Religious Studies (University of Leeds, 1996); Sophie Gilliat, 'Back to Basics: The Place of Islam in the Self-Identity of Young British Muslims' in Peter Clarke (ed) *New Trends & Developments in the World of Islam* (London: Luzak Oriental, 1998); Jessica

- Jacobson, *The Persistence of Religious and Ethnic Identities Among Second-Generation British Pakistanis*, (PhD thesis, LSE, University of London, 1995); Jessica Jacobson, *Islam in Transition: Religion and Identity among British Pakistani Youth* (London: Routledge, 1998); Kim Knott, 'The Role of Religious Studies in Understanding the Ethnic Experience', Community Religions Project, Research Paper 7, Department of Theology and Religious Studies (University of Leeds, 6-9, 1992).
20. Jacobson, *The Persistence of Religious and Ethnic Identities*, 2.
  21. Jessica Jacobson, 'Perceptions of Britishness', Paper presented at a conference on 'Multicultural Competence' at Bergen College of Higher Education, Bergen, Norway, 28-30 August 1996, 9.
  22. Katy Gardner and Abdus Shukur, 'I'm Bengali, I'm Asian, And I'm Living Here'. The Changing Identity of British Bengalis' in Ballard (ed) *Desh Pardesh*, 163.
  23. Kim Knott and Sajda Khokher 'Religious and ethnic identity among young Muslim women in Bradford', *New Community*, London, 19, 4 (1993) 593-610.
  24. Baumann, *Contesting Culture*.
  25. Weinreich, 'Variations in ethnic identity: Identity Structure Analysis', 62.
  26. Richard Jenkins, 'Social anthropological models of inter-ethnic relations' in Rex, J. and Mason, D (eds) (1986) *Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations* (Cambridge: University Press, 1986).
  27. Henri Tajfel, (ed) *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (London: Academic Press, 1978) 62.
  28. Peter L Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Penguin Books, 1991) 107.
  29. Weinreich, 'Variations in ethnic identity: Identity Structure Analysis', 43.
  30. These self-ascriptions may be called conceptual boundaries (cf Jacobson, *The Persistence of Religious and Ethnic Identities*, 152) but in order to underline the affective aspects stronger than the cognitive ones, this terminology is avoided.
  31. Gender and age are indicated like this: m=masculine f=feminine.
  32. Jacobson, 'Perceptions of Britishness', 10.
  33. Lithman, *Ethnicity: Idiom and Organization*, 15.
  34. Sandra Wallman, 'Identity Options' in Fried, C. *Minorities: Community and Identity*, Dahlem Konferenz (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1983) 75.
  35. Verity Saifullah-Khan, 'Some Comments on the Question of Second Generation', Conference Paper, *Linguistic Minorities Project* (University of London: Institute of Education, 1981) 16.
  36. 'Idiom' here refers to the fact that ethnicity can be seen as a language, a mode of communication, in which certain things are expressed' (Lithman, *Ethnicity: Idiom and Organization*, 3).
  37. Jackson and Nesbitt, *Hindu Children in Britain*, 175.
  38. Jacobson, *The Persistence of Religious and Ethnic Identities*.

39. Eg Wallmann, 'Ethnicity and the Boundary Process in Context.'
40. Jackson and Nesbitt, *Hindu Children in Britain*, 27.
41. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, 'We and Us: Two Modes of Group Identification', *Journal of Peace Research*, 32, 4 (1995) 432.
42. The terms *dichotomisation* and *complementarisation* was first used in Eidham's study of interethnic relationships between Sami and Norwegians. Cf *ibid.*, 434. Cf Harald Eidheim, *Aspects of the Lappish Minority Situation* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1971).
43. This is a modification of a strict boundary approach to ethnicity.
44. Eriksen, 'We and Us: Two Modes of Group Identification', 429.
45. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Pluto Press, 1993) 27.
46. Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora. Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996); Verity Saifullah-Khan, 'Purdah in the British situation' in Barker, D.L. and Allen, S. *Dependency and Exploitation in Work and Marriage* (London: Longmans 1976).
47. Weinreich, 'Variations in ethnic identity: Identity Structure Analysis', 58.
48. Baumann *Contesting Culture*, 22.
49. Saying this does not imply that some of the value conflicts experienced by children may be connected to tensions between ethnic groups.
50. Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 77.
51. Billy Ehn, 'Youth and Multiculturalism' in Cecilia Palmgren, Karin Lövgren, Göran Bolin, eds. *Ethnicity in Youth Culture*. (Report from a symposium in Stockholm, 1991) 133.
52. Roger Ballard, 'Migration and Kinship: the Differential Effect of Marriage Rules on the Processes of Panjabi Migration to Britain' in Clarke, Peach and Vertovec (eds) *South Asians Overseas*.
53. *ibid.*, Ballard, (ed) *Desh Pardesh*; Inger Lise Lien, *Moral og emosjoner i pakistanske Punjab* (PhD Thesis, Avhandling til dr.polit, Institutt og Museum for Antropologi, Universitetet i Oslo, 1993); Shaw, *A Pakistani Community in Britain*.
54. In this perspective the importance of regular visits to Pakistan becomes evident.
55. There is some evidence that arranged marriages may be used as a strategy for immigrating to the West.
56. There are of course examples of girls (and boys) who reject the whole idea of arranged marriages. Some tragic incidents of young people being forced by their parents to marry have been reported and even taken to court. Cf Nazim Karim, *Izzat* (Oslo: J.W. Cappelen's Forlag, 1996). Norwegian studies within this field are needed.
57. Ehn, 'Youth and Multiculturalism', 144.

58. The Norwegian-Pakistani pop artist Deepika may serve as an example. Cf Gerd Baumann, 'The Re-Invention of Bhangra: Social Change and Aesthetic Shift in a Punjabi Music in Britain', *The World Music, Journal of the International Institute for Comparative Music Studies and Documentation* (Berlin) 32, 2, (1990) 81-97; Gardner and Shukur, 'I'm Bengali, I'm Asian, And I'm Living Here'; Marie Gillespie, 'Technology and Tradition: Audio-Visual Culture Among South Asian Families In West London', *Cultural Studies*, 11, 2 (1989) 226-239.
59. Jacobson, *The Persistence of Religious and Ethnic Identities*; Jessica Jacobson's PhD thesis has been published as: *Islam in Transition: Religion and Identity among British Pakistani Youth* (London: Routledge, 1998).
60. Larson, *Culture at play*, 57.
61. Philip Lewis, *Islamic Britain. Religion, Politics and Identity among British Muslims* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994).
62. Yngve Georg Lithman, 'Cultural creativity and the second generation' in Palmgren, Lövgren, Bolin, (eds) *Ethnicity in Youth Culture*.
63. There is not a necessary link between ethnicity and the use of ancestral language (the Irish may have an Irish identity even if they speak English, see Weinreich in Liebkind 1989:58). To the respondents, however, language seemed clearly connected to ethnicity both as function and as symbol.
64. Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World. A Psycho-analytical Study of Childhood and Society in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992) 52ff.
65. Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1963); Erik H. Erikson, *Identity - Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968); Kakar, *The Inner World*; Hans Mol, *Identity and the Sacred. A sketch for a new social-scientific theory of religion* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976).
66. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, *Tvåspråkighet* (Lund: LiberLäromedel, 1981).
67. Inger Lise Lien, *Ordet som stempler djevlene. Holdninger blant pakistanere og nordmenn* (Oslo: Aventura, 1997) 141, 148.
68. This finding contradicts what is often maintained in media and in the public debate in Norway, eg Unni Wikan, *Mot en ny underklasse. Innvandrere, kultur og integrasjon* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1995), but is in accordance with socio-linguistics' emphasis on the importance of a linguistically rich environment in early childhood, regardless of the use of first or second language (cf Skutnabb-Kangas, *Tvåspråkighet*).
69. Lewis, *Islamic Britain*, 65.
70. Ibid.
71. Jackson and Nesbitt, *Hindu Children*, 175.
72. Ballard, (ed) *Desh Pardesh*, 32; Johan Fornäs, 'Otherness in youth culture.' in Palmgren, Lövgren, Bolin (eds) *Ethnicity in Youth Culture*, 16; Gardner and Shukur, 'I'm Bengali, I'm Asian, And I'm Living Here', 163.

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**About the Authors**

**Pritam Singh** is Senior Lecturer in Economics and Chair of the Economics Field at Oxford Brookes University. His main research interests are in the area of development studies, marxism and political economy of India and Punjab and he is a member of the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Punjab Studies.

**Shinder Singh Thandi** is Senior Lecturer in Economics at Coventry Business School, Coventry University and is also a member of the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Punjab Studies. His main areas of interest are development studies, ethnic conflict and the political economy of Punjab.

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**Proceedings from the Sikh Studies Conference,  
'Guru Gobind Singh: His Life and Mission' held  
at the University of California at Santa Barbara,  
December 4-5 1999**

In December 1999, the University of California at Santa Barbara held a major conference in the field of Sikh Studies in order to inaugurate the Kundan Kaur Kapany Chair of Sikh Studies established by Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany and family in conjunction with the University. This international conference witnessed the gathering of dozens of world renowned scholars in the fields of Sikh and Punjab Studies and was well attended by scholars, graduate students, and the Sikh community.

The success of the conference was due not only to the enthusiasm and contributions of the participants, but also to the organizers of this event. Professor Gurinder Singh Mann, holder of the Kundan Kaur Kapany Chair in Sikh Studies, was the visionary behind this conference, and without his patience and conviction this landmark event would not have occurred. Dr. Mark Juergensmeyer, Director of the Global and International Studies Program at UCSB also played an integral part in the conference proceedings. As a champion for Sikh Studies in North America, Dr. Juergensmeyer played an instrumental role in helping to establish the chair for Sikh Studies at UCSB, and without his unflagging and generous efforts, this event would not have been possible.

Although the duration of the conference was two days in length, the scholarly impact of this event will be felt well into the twenty first century. In many ways, the conference represented the consummation of years of scholarly discourse in the academic and Sikh community. At the same time, however, this conference placed Sikh Studies at the crossroads of the twentieth and twenty first centuries, with every indication that in the upcoming years the field will expand by both building upon existing scholarship and charting new paths of exploration and discovery.

The conference itself was divided into four panel sections: i) The Life of Guru Gobind Singh, ii) The Legacy of Guru Gobind Singh, iii) Upcoming Voices in Sikh/Punjab Studies, iv) Challenges Facing Sikhs in the Diaspora. As is evident from the panels, this conference attempted to deal with the broad and detailed strokes of history, religion, and culture that have defined the Sikh community from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries up to the present day.

The first session dealt with 'The Life of Guru Gobind Singh,' and was presided over by Professor Ainslee T. Embree, regarded by many as the 'Father' of South Asian Studies in North America. The morning started with a groundbreaking presentation by the eminent historian J.S. Grewal entitled 'Guru Gobind Singh: Life and Mission.' In his presentation, Prof. Grewal presented new ideas regarding the institution of the Khalsa, Singh identity, and the possible intentions of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. Following the presentation of Prof. Grewal, were three presentations which focused on the Dasam Granth and upon certain devotional and liturgical compositions found therein. Professor John Stratton Hawley, a leading expert on medieval Indian devotional bhakti poetry, focused his discussion around 'Devotional Hymns in the Dasam Granth.' Prof. Hawley presented his new and original translation of the Shabad *Hazare* in English and discussed the presence of Vaisnava motifs in these devotional hymns. Dr. W.H. McLeod, the leading Western scholar on the Sikh tradition, continued the discussion on the Dasam Granth by presenting the conference with a new translation of the Jaap Sahib. The title of Dr. McLeod's presentation was 'Translating the Jaap Sahib,' and in his comments, he highlighted the difficulties attendant upon translating the Jaap Sahib and the mysteries regarding the authorship contents, and historicity of the Dasam Granth. Professor Christopher Shackle of the School of Oriental and African Studies, rounded out the discussion on the Dasam Granth by his presentation of 'The Zafarnama of Guru Gobind Singh.' Although the Zafarnama, 'Epistle of Victory', is a relatively short composition that occurs at the end of the Dasam Granth, Christopher Shackle stressed its importance as a literary document and discussed its message and stylistic qualities. Finally, Professor Gurinder Singh Mann closed the first session through his paper entitled, 'The Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh'. Using literary and scriptural sources, Prof. Mann challenged conventional understandings of the institution of the Khalsa by presenting new ideas on the role and function of the Khalsa as understood by Guru Gobind Singh.

The second panel took as its subject matter 'The Legacy of Guru Gobind Singh' and was chaired by Professor Ninian Smart, President of the American Academy of Religion and Professor Emeritus at UCSB. Professor Lou Fenech started the session with this paper entitled 'The Concept of Shahadat in 18th Century Sikh Literature.' Prof. Fenech fashioned his discussion around the question of how Sikhs of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries understood Guru Arjar's martyrdom. While many of his ideas proved controversial, Prof. Fenech's presentation challenged notions of martyrdom within the Sikh tradition. Professor Indu Banga, a leading historian of Sikh and Punjab history at Panjab University, Chandigarh, followed with a paper on 'The Khalsa Raj'. Prof. Banga's paper provided unique insights into the role that Sikh theology and tradition played in shaping the social, cultural, and economic landscape of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's kingdom. In a historical move to more 'recent' history, N.G. Barrier continued the

discussion by presenting a paper entitled 'The Khalsa Diwans (1900-1930).' Questions regarding Sikh identity, both individually and communally, have been an integral component of the legacy of Guru Gobind Singh, and Prof. Barrier highlighted the importance of those questions in light of the history of the Khalsa Diwans with specific reference to the role of Babu Teja Singh Bhasaur. The hotly contested nature of Sikh identity came to the fore with even more force in Professor Mark Juergensmeyer's paper entitled, 'Sant Jarnail Singh and the Khalsa Ideal.' In his comments, Prof. Juergensmeyer discussed notions of cosmic war, and enumerated a list of five qualities that could possibly constitute a paradigm for the Khalsa: purification, honor, courage, sacrifice, and victory. Professor Reeta Grewal of Panjab University, Chandigarh, brought the day's discussion to a symbolic close as she returned to the place of Anandpur and sifted through its history in a paper entitled, 'Anandpur through the Centuries.' Anandpur, a symbolic city par excellence in Sikh history and imagination, was the focus of her talk as she sifted through over three centuries of transformation at Anandpur.

The second day of the proceedings began with a panel of upcoming graduate students presenting their research in the fields of Sikh and Punjab Studies. Given the academic brilliance of the preceding day, this session began with a tremendous sense of humility but with the hope that the ideas and work presented by the graduate students would mark the beginning of a new phase in Sikh and Punjab Studies. This session was chaired by Arvindpal Singh Mandair of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Due to the fact that many of the graduate students were at different stages of progress in their research and publications, the list of interests presented here will be brief. Some of the research interests of the 'upcoming voices' include:

*University of Paris:* Francisco Luis (Nirmala Sikh tradition and history), Christine Moliner (Sikh Diaspora in England and France)

*University of Ottawa:* Suzanne Evans (Mothers of Martyrs in the Sikh tradition)

*Columbia University:* Farina Mir, (Punjabi Kissa Literature and Publication) Anne Murphy (Sikh Relics)

*University of Missouri:* Jugdeep S. Chima (Punjab politics)

*University of Washington:* Virginia VanDyke (Role of Sikh Leaders in Politics)

*UC Berkeley:* Rubina Singh (Analysis of Gender in Singh Sabha Ideology)

*UC Santa Barbara:* Anna Bigelow (Study of Malerkotla and Religious Shared space), Gibb Schreffler (Role of Bhangra in Diaspora communities), Gurdit Singh (Study of Sikh Communities in Pakistan), Varun Soni (History of Udasis and Study of Punjabi Sufi Poets and Singers), Ami Shah (Dasam Granth)

The final session of the conference was entitled 'Challenges Facing Sikhs in the Diaspora' was chaired by Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany. This panel featured

community leaders from North America who discussed their own work within their respective communities. The speakers who participated and shared their experiences were Dr. Rabinder S. Bhamra (New York); Dr. Satnam Singh Bhugra (Michigan); Dr. Avtar Singh Dhaliwal (Tennessee); and Dr. Jasbir Singh Mann (Southern California).

This conference brought together a large number of committed scholars, students, and community members. Ideas of the highest intellectual order were exchanged during these two days; friends separated by continents but united by professional and personal interest were brought together; students sat at the feet of their teachers and imbibed knowledge; scholars and community members engaged in dialogue in the hopes of clarifying and resolving issues within the Panth; and ultimately, the twentieth century closed with great expectations for a new millennium in Sikh Studies.

## Book Reviews

### Contents

- Darshan Singh, *Western Image of the Sikh Religion* by **W Owen Cole**
- G. Bhatti, *Asian Children at Home and at School: An Ethnographic Study* by **Sissel Østberg**
- Karen Isaksen Leonard, *The South Asian Americans* by **Ishtiaq Ahmed**
- Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India: 1925 to the 1990* by **John Davos**
- Harry Ricketts, *The Unforgiving Minute: A Life of Rudyard Kipling* by **Harold Lee**
- Andrew Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling* by **Harold Lee**
- Pervez Hoodbhoy, *Education and the State: Fifty Years of Pakistan* by **Nafisa Shah**
- Ross Mallick, *Development, Ethnicity and Human Rights in South Asia* by **Ishtiaq Ahmed**
- Apurba Kundu, *Militarism in India: The Army and Civil Society in Consensus* by **Tim Moreman**
- Akmal Hussain, *Overcoming Poverty: The Report of the Task Force on Poverty Eradication* by **Salman Khan**
- S. Akbar Zaidi, *The New Development Paradigm: Papers on Institutions, NGOs, Gender and Local Government* by **Sher S Verick**

## **NEW BOOKS FROM AJANTA**

A WINDOW ON PUNJAB SERIES: GENERAL EDITOR OF THE SERIES: S BALWANT

AN ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF PUNJABI CULTURE AND HISTORY, compiled and edited by V P GUPTA AND MOHINI GUPTA, 1998 pp.400 (ILLUSTRATED) RS 495, US \$ 27 ISBN 81-202-0506-7

The editors of the present volume have endeavoured to provide information about some of the major aspects of Punjabi culture and history including arts, architecture, battles, beliefs, castes, crafts, economy, education, events, geography, institutions, language, literature, monuments, movements, mythology, personalities, philosophy, places, polity, practices, races, religions, rituals, sects, shrines and tribes of Punjab, an epitome of India itself in all its splendor.

PUNJAB: HISTORY AND CULTURE THROUGH THE AGES, compiled and edited by V.P. GUPTA AND MOHINI GUPTA, 1999 pp.290 Rs.295 US\$ 20 ISBN 81-202-0494-8

The present volume is devoted to an understanding of some of the major aspects of the history and culture of Punjab. It pertains to the earliest period in Punjab history and ranges from its past to present-day, when we are celebrating the fiftieth year of Indian Independence. The present work is divided into seven chapters dealing with the history, political developments, religious heritage, literature, social and economic life, art and culture and finally a comprehensive chronology of Punjab with background notes and important events and personalities. The book aims at presenting a kaleidoscopic view of the life and ethos of a vibrant people who inspite of facing endless vicissitudes of history are standing firm and making their own valuable contribution to the growth of India. It is hoped that the book will help the reader to understand and appreciate the moorings of modern Punjab in its varied manifestations.

The *Window on Punjab Series* has been planned as reference manual for the growing number of people in India and abroad who are keen to be enlightened about the triumphs and tragedies of the land of the five rivers throughout its chequered history extending over five thousand years. V.P. GUPTA, has been devoted to the cultivation of KNOWLEDGE in various facets. He has authored more than 150 books including a number of encyclopaedias, dictionaries and other reference works both in Hindi and English. MOHINI GUPTA has been assisting her husband V.P. Gupta in the pursuit of his intellectual vocation. She is a joint author with him in a number of reference works.

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Darshan Singh, *Western Image of the Sikh Religion*, (Delhi: National Book Organisation, 1999), 417pp, Rs. 750, ISBN 81-85135-97-5.

This important publication by the head of department of the Guru Gobind Singh Department of Religious Studies of the University of Patiala complements one based upon his PhD entitled *Western Perspective on the Sikh Religion*, (Sehgal, New Delhi, 1991) ISBN 81-85477-02-7. In that study Dr Darshan Singh, who studied at Harvard under Cantwell Smith and is well aware of western approaches to Indian religions, skillfully analysed the contribution of western scholars who had shown an interest in the Sikh religion. Now, at the request of many friends and colleagues, he has assembled the material upon which his examination and assessment was based.

Many of the articles reproduced here are not easily accessible, and those which I do possess are located in several places on my shelves, some of them in learned journals, others in compilations of documents. It is helpful to have them now conveniently between two covers.

Dr. Singh's first stated purpose in writing this book was to preserve material which was in danger of being lost, which could happen when those publications which contain them go out of print. His second, explicitly achieved in his PhD, and implicitly here, was to demonstrate how major a role they played in the evolution of the western image of Sikhism. Their influence is still with us today in the received tradition upon which many scholars, usually non-specialists in Sikh studies base their views.

Twenty writings on the Sikh religion, not its history, have been assembled, ranging from Charles Wilkins to Dorothy Field. There are also valuable appendices, such as Father Jerome Xavier's account of the death of Guru Arjan in 1606, an eye witness description of the execution of Banda Singh and his followers just over a century later, and Charles Wilkins's record of an *amrit pahul* ceremony two hundred years ago, the first by a European. An important feature of the anthology is the inclusion of seven articles by Macauliffe, published before his monumental study *The Sikh Religion*, which may never have been out of print since it was first appeared over ninety years ago. They reveal something of the research which he undertook during his time in the Punjab. Macauliffe's will, which is included as one of several appendices, is interesting and relevant in two particulars, first it mentions the debt owed to him by the Maharaja of Patiala, which never seems to have been paid to his estate, and second, his bequest of the copyright of *The Sikh Religion* to the famous Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, his guide in much of his research.

A valuable introduction contextualises the documents. This will be especially useful to readers who do not possess a copy of *Western Perspective on the Sikh Religion*, though this reviewer would encourage them to obtain it. Scholarly references to the authors are provided. Apart from this Introduction Dr Darshan Singh is careful not to intrude upon the reader's direct engagement with these original documents.



The study of religions by outsiders colours, to a greater or lesser extent the on-going perception of the tradition. For example, Sikhism has often been portrayed erroneously as a militant offshoot of Hinduism because of misinformation provided by European writers, especially soldiers. Of course, Sikhs themselves have sometimes been responsible for conclusions drawn by westerners but now we are certain that nothing could be further from a balanced knowledge of the truth as a careful and thorough reading of these passages affirms.

In the summer of 1999, I made my first visit to Patna, armed with the Wilkins account mentioned above. Sad to say nothing identifiable remains of the narrow streets which he describes but something of the outward gate may still exist. We must not complain, however. Architects did terrible things to English churches in the nineteenth century. Why should anyone expect Sikhs to shun the temptation to enhance their gurdwaras to impress Hindu and other observers?

It is to be hoped that through a study of both books by Dr Singh, Sikh studies will be taken more seriously in the West and studied from its own perspective. It is still a neglected religion even though some two million Sikhs have now settled there, about 500,000 in the United Kingdom alone. References to multi-faith Britain usually mention Jews, Hindus, Muslims 'and others'. Rarely are Sikhs named even after the Tercentenary year of the Khalsa brought them to a public usually ignorant of their existence.

**W Owen Cole,**  
*University College, Chichester*

G. Bhatti, *Asian Children at Home and at School. An Ethnographic Study*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) ix and 275 pp. ISBN 0-415-17499-6 (pb), £14.99, 0-415-17498-8 (hb), £45.

This book gives a vivid description of everyday life for Asian working class children growing up in England. We are introduced to their Asian parents who came to Britain as immigrants some time ago and who still somehow live in two worlds: 'back home' and in Britain. When it comes to social, psychological and financial matters, their orientation is characterised as a collective, extended family issue. The book informs us how their educational background – or lack of education – has influenced their present job situation in Britain and how the employment or unemployment of parents influences the life of their children. However, the main focus of the book is on the children themselves and how they experience life at home and at school. Their life at home and at school are not seen as separate entities but as linked together. The book ends with emphasising the role of teachers in children's life, and schooling may be said to

be the main focus, not studied in isolation but contextualised.

Through long-term participant observation in the actual secondary school, the author has achieved a striking richness of material. She has not only attended classes, but joined the students in all kinds of informal gatherings. The interviews, formal and informal, with 50 students, their teachers and parents add to this richness by being really in-depth interviews. The researcher/author has obviously developed a very good rapport with her informants. And more important: she manages to transfer this good rapport to the reader, not least through the choice of quotations. Again and again I was struck by the richness of information and expression in the quotations. The voices of children came across clearly. My point is that it takes both a good researcher and a good writer to make this come true. The author's insider position, in the sense that she herself is Asian British, has without doubt been an advantage in reaching beneath the surface of rhetoric. The book gives a very solid impression of being written by a person who knows what she is writing about. Moreover, Bhatti's research position has not led to insider information of the kind that makes the reader feel like an outsider. On the contrary, the reader is drawn into the broad Asian British context. The author asks herself whether it is possible to make generalisations based on this ethnographic study of one school. From my perspective, as a researcher among Pakistani Norwegian families in the 1990s, I felt the descriptions to be very recognisable. Despite the rather old data (the book was published nine to eleven years after the fieldwork took place), the data seemed fresh and relevant, at least to a Norwegian reader.

Two more positive aspects of the book will be emphasised. First of all the fact that three perspectives are maintained throughout the book: a class, a gender and a racism perspective. Second, although the children are presented in a community perspective, they are not turned into passive victims of external processes. They are influenced by, sometimes suppressed and marginalised by other people and institutions, but they are also active actors in their own lives, full of initiative, competence and flexibility.

The descriptive richness of the book may also however be experienced from time to time as its weakness. Sometimes I feel that too much is described in detail, and that these details do not add to the general understanding of the situation. One may for example ask whether all the details about mothers' and fathers' educational background and employment are relevant to the theme of the book: making the voices of children heard. There is no doubt that contextualisation is necessary and that parents' work situation is relevant for the everyday life of children, but do we need to have all the sociological details? From time to time the book was about to turn into a book on parents, not on children.

Although a theoretical framework is presented in the introduction, it is only occasionally applied as an analytical tool in the discussion. There are also only a few references to other related research. This may have been done deliberately to make the original thesis more readable for a broader audience, but instead of

drowning in theory and references (which is often the case when reading a thesis), in this case it was the descriptions which proved tiring. However, every time a quotation was presented, it was like a revelation. In other words, there is nothing wrong with the approach itself, but the book should have been more carefully structured.

The fact that I personally missed other aspects of the children's lifeworld, such as their media habits, friendship relations, worldviews and religious practices, is not a critique of the book as such, since there are limitations to what it is possible to impart in one book, but this is more an expression of my desire to know more about them.

The book is to be highly recommended to any reader who is looking for a contextualised insight into the school life of Asian children. So much school based research is done by outsiders and it is often predominantly quantitative of character. This book offers a true qualitative study of how school life is experienced by marginalised children, not only by those of Asian origin.

**Sissel Østberg**

*Oslo University College*

Karen Isaksen Leonard, *The South Asian Americans*, (Westport, Connecticut/London: Greenwood Press, 1997), 193pp. £31.95. ISBN 0 – 313 – 29788 – 6.

Migration in the modern period from South Asia to other parts of the world has begun to receive proper attention only in recent years. The Punjabis were among the first to venture outside and establish their presence permanently. The book under review is part of a series called 'New Americans' written by experts on the subject. Karen Isaksen Leonard has in the past published interesting works on South Asian immigrants in the US. This latest contribution is an excellent introduction to that theme.

The first chapter deals with South Asian civilisations. It provides the necessary information about the cultural heritage of the South Asian immigrants. The contours of the various religions of South Asia - Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism and others – are furnished in a simple and non-controversial manner. The sections on medieval, colonial and recent history and the origins of the various states are also given in a clear, even-handed manner. There are also a number of very useful maps. It is interesting to note that the author has chosen to include Afghanistan in South Asia.

The second chapter covers the immigration which took place between 1900 and 1947. The pioneers were Punjabis, mostly from farming backgrounds. They settled in California and worked in the agricultural sector. In 1917 and again in

1924 the U.S. immigration laws were changed to discriminate against Asians. They were thus unable to bring spouses from back home but the laws of California did not allow marriages across racial lines. Under the system the Punjabis qualified only to marry Mexican women and many did. They came to be known as 'Mexican Hindus'. Some 85 per cent of these Punjabis were Sikhs, and among the rest Muslims were a significant group. In any case intermarriage with Mexican women created a biethnic community. Though confronted by many hardships and legal and social discriminations and prejudices the Punjabis did succeed in gradually improving their economic and social standing but mostly on the fringes of white society. Among themselves the biethnic community did not practice religion in a strict orthodox sense, but daughters were subjected to the traditional restrictions prevalent among Punjabis as well as Mexicans.

The third chapter looks at the immigration after 1947. In 1965 the U.S. laws on immigration were changed in favour of allowing skilled and qualified Asians to enter and settle in the country. A new category 'Asian Indian' has become current since 1980, which distinguishes immigrants from the Sub-continent from other Asians. It is also reflecting a growing South Asian presence in the US. The new South Asians come from all over South Asia and although a majority head towards California there are sizable presences in other parts of the country as well. They are better educated, many are highly qualified and hold responsible positions in various sectors of life. The number of South Asian working women is also increasing and some seek active careers and professional advancement.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide insights into the religious and cultural activities of South Asians. Although in the past, the South Asians maintained a low profile, from the early 1970s religious and cultural assertiveness has marked all the South Asian communities. Hindu and Buddhist temples, Muslim mosques, Sikh gurdawaras, and other places of worship of the smaller groups have been established. A significant part of the social and cultural life of the South Asians includes regular visits to the places of worship, which also serve as community centres. Preachers from South Asia visit their co-religionists and travel around. Problems of multiculturalism, inter-communal relations and purity of faith are subjects which are often debated within the community and sometimes between communities. Each community has its own peculiar way of dealing with these modern notions and the challenges they pose. Political tensions and conflicts in South Asia affect intercommunity relations in the US, and some, such as the Khalistan movement of the Sikhs, were echoed in the community circles here. Similarly political Islam has affected South Asian American Muslims.

Among the cultural expressions, music, dance and poetry figure prominently. Musicians, dancers, poets, writers and other types of artistes and intellectuals from South Asia are invited to entertain and stimulate eager, enthusiastic audiences. Both spiritual and sensual forms of the arts find patrons among the rather affluent South Asian Americans. A number of writers of South

Asian origin in the US are also publishing in their particular languages and in English. In this regard, diaspora networks and globalisation play a significant role in facilitating both universalistic and particularist trends.

The sixth and final chapter addresses some of the main concerns and apprehensions of the South Asians. Among them the most threatened seem to be traditional South Asian family values and traditions. The children grow up in an American environment and naturally imbibe many Western values and ideas. The parents are worried about their marriage outside the community, particularly in the case of the girls. A majority of marriages are still arranged by the parents and occur within the same community, but the young people are able to express their choice within the limited options. Matrimonial alliances are increasingly being sought from among other immigrant families in the US or in Europe. Wedding ceremonies are great occasions for celebration and reunion.

The book includes many tables, maps and pictures. Although written for the general reader it contains very valuable statistics and graphic presentations, and should prove an easy reference and source material for the researcher beginning his enquiry into the life conditions of South Asian Americans.

**Ishtiaq Ahmed**

*Stockholm University*

Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India: 1925 to the 1990s* (London: C.Hurst and Co., 1996) xxiii + 592 pp. £19.50 (pbk) ISBN 1850653011.

A leading Hindu nationalist politician is quoted in this book as warning that alliances formed with other political parties were bound to 'degenerate into a struggle for power by opportunist elements coming together in the interests of expediency' (p.153). Interestingly, this was not spoken through the gritted teeth of L.K. Advani or Kushabhau Thakre in the wake of the AIADMK's withdrawal from the ruling coalition in 1999. It was in fact a comment made by Deendayal Upadhyaya in 1962, explaining the Jan Sangh's continued policy of splendid isolation from other opposition parties in the face of the continued dominance of the Congress in national politics. Then, as now, the Hindu nationalist movement was driven by an apprehension that it was different; that it did not operate on the same plane as other political parties in India. And again, then as now, this apprehension of difference could not withstand the real possibilities of power presented by the shifting ground of Indian politics. From the sixties onwards, the Hindu nationalists have been thrown into the cyclical strategies of alliance building and breaking which characterise the multi-dimensional space of Indian democracy.

One of Jaffrelot's considerable achievements in this book is to provide some

working models which make sense of one particular approach to this space. He has unpicked the interface between Hindu nationalism and Indian politics, explaining carefully and consistently how the different threads weave into and across one another. At the broadest level, he presents us with militant and moderate sets of strategies which are judiciously deployed in an attempt to reconcile the ideological vision of a Hindu nationalist polity and society with the desire to have a meaningful political existence in a complex democratic framework. It is a tension, as is demonstrated by Upadhyaya's resonant comment, which runs right through the history of Hindu nationalist involvement in politics, and which still presents the movement with its most intractable problem. On one level, then, Jaffrelot's work is most significant because it demonstrates most graphically the persistence of this problem.

Indeed, even as it resides at the head of a ruling coalition in Delhi, Hindu nationalism is still not sure how to integrate itself with the framework of post-Independence politics. It cannot find a place, because it is persistently seeking to occupy a unifying position in a system which is fundamentally, hope-fully (as opposed to hopelessly) fragmented. In the nineteen eighties and nineties, as the aura of Congress nationalism - the nationalism of the Freedom movement - has fallen away, most political groupings have realised that their position can be located within the fragmented framework, establishing a position of power (or otherwise) through the construction of networks of alliances on a variety of levels of politics. For Hindu nationalism, locating a position within this framework has never been easy, because ultimately it is defined by a need to swallow the framework whole. In order to effect the ideology of Hindu nationalism, all aspects of social relations - including politics - must reflect the centrality of Hindu-ness.

This may seem outrageous, if not downright sinister, but in political terms it has at least in some sense been achieved before. The Congress party of the nineteen fifties and early sixties was, after a fashion, close to encompassing the whole of the political system. In the Lok Sabha, for example, Nehru found himself actively encouraging parliamentary debate between government and opposition, in order to counteract the inertia created by Congress dominance. The historical conditions of this period were of course very particular, and the later sixties revealed Congress to be hardly a party in the conventional political sense, so great was the variety of political interests and ideologies within it. What makes the comparison to the objectives of Hindu nationalism viable, however, is the central idea of national identity. Post-Independence Congress, though greatly variegated, was overlaid with a powerful sense of Indian-ness, drawn directly from the experience of the Freedom movement and Partition. Similarly, the Hindu nationalist movement has consistently been driven by a powerful sense of identity - in this case the identity of Hindu-ness. How is this Hindu-ness constructed, and how has it operated on the consciousness of Indians? These are key questions in the development of an understanding of this movement and its significance in Indian politics and culture.

Jaffrelot's approach to these key questions around the issue of identity needs to be examined. He attributes the ideology of Hindu nationalism to the development of socio-religious reform movements in the late nineteenth century. A pattern of identity formation is established, which he calls 'stigmatisation and emulation: "...a process of cultural reorganisation' which 'redefined Hindu nationalist identity in opposition to... "threatening Others" while...assimilating those cultural features of the Others which were regarded as prestigious and efficacious in order to regain self-esteem and resist the Others more effectively.'(p.6) It is a pattern which is referred to as elemental to Hindu nationalist mobilisation right up to the 1990s. Consistently, it is a process which enables the Hindu to define him or herself clearly through perceptible modes of organisation.

Jaffrelot describes the process as a cycle. In the late nineteenth century there was the cycle of Arya Samaj-led stigmatisation and emulation, with the colonial state and the Christian missions constituting the threatening Other. This cycle led to the development of 'Arya nationalism', or 'proto-Hindu nationalism' (pp.13-17). A second, critical, cycle occurred, Jaffrelot states, in the early twenties; this second cycle led to the development of 'fully-blown' Hindu nationalism and to the key idea of *sangathan*, Hindu organisation. The threatening Other in this case was a particular projection of Muslim culture - as Jaffrelot puts it, 'a mobilisation on the part of the Muslims' (p.19). This was the *Khilafat* movement. The Muslim mobilisation, he continues, 'degenerated in some instances into anti-Hindu riots,' an example being the Moplah or Mappila rebellion of 1921. The internal unity displayed by Muslims during this period forms the basis - through emulation - for the ideological development of *sangathan*.

Surprisingly, then, it is 'the Muslims' who bear a fair brunt of the responsibility for the emergence of Hindu nationalism in Jaffrelot's model. It is their mobilisation over *Khilafat*, and its degeneration into anti-Hindu riots, which constitute the threatening Other responsible for the cycle of stigmatisation and emulation amongst Hindu elites which produced the *sangathan* movement. This conclusion, I would say, illustrates the limitations of the 'stigmatise and emulate' model. In the first instance, it cannot accommodate the idea of *Khilafat* as an Indian nationalist concern. Several scholars have noted that the collaboration between the All-India Khilafat Committee and the Congress is indicative of a composite nationalism and fairly widespread feeling of co-operation during this period which cannot be dismissed (for details, see for example, Bose and Jalal, *Modern south Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (Routledge, London 1998) p.139-42). Secondly, some work has illustrated that the anti-Hindu character of the Moplah rebellion was a secondary feature, emerging only in the context of the institution of oppressive martial law, and in many ways attributable to this oppression (for details see for example, K.N. Panikkar, *Peasant Revolts in Malabar in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (in A.R. Desai, *Peasant*

*Struggles in India*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1979, pp. 601-630). Thirdly and most importantly, Jaffrelot himself has noted that 'the cohesion attributed to the Muslim community was grossly exaggerated.' The cycle of emulation is therefore related to stereotypes of Islamic unity which had 'taken shape between about 1890 and 1910.' (p.24) This introduces a new, highly ideological element into the cycle: the idea of Hindu nationalist *sangathan* built not so much on the emulation of threatening Islam symbolised by *Khilafat*, as on pre-formulated stereotypes of Muslim cohesion. Later, in relation to RSS *sangathan*, Jaffrelot takes a different line, splitting the process of stigmatisation and emulation between the two over-arching images of the British and the Muslims. 'From the Hindu nationalist point of view,' he says, 'Muslims fulfilled the role of "threatening Others" while the British colonialists represented the Other to be emulated.' (p.50) In this equation the model is particularly untenable, as it contradicts the fundamental idea that the ideology is built precisely by appropriating what it sees as threatening.

The problems associated with the stigmatise and emulate model derive, I would say, from the book's initially limited idea of ideology as a specifically appropriated facet of culture. This is an idea that Jaffrelot has developed from the work of Clifford Geertz, with supporting theory from A.D. Smith's idea of ethnic nationalism. Here, colonial elites are presented as constructing ideologies as an instrumentalist project, turning to and picking and choosing aspects of culture (their own and others') in support of their own class-based bids for power. It is a fairly straightforward case of instrumentalism, which leaves little room for the development of ideologies as independent historical entities. In order to understand ideological development in these terms, as a facet of history, it is critical to examine how ideologies operate within specific contexts, reacting with other forces to *produce* notions of what constitutes culture and cultural identity.

Contextual examination, then, increases our understanding of ideologies and how they become integrated as a feature of identities on a microcosmic level. Jaffrelot's work on Madhya Pradesh, and his consistent reference to oral accounts from participants in the movement, provide some excellent material which demonstrate this point. The idea of RSS expansion, for example, and the gradual spawning of affiliate organisations, is illustrated by consistent reference to localised contexts in MP. In terms of politics Jaffrelot charts what he calls the 'sangathanist' party-building strategy quite meticulously in the context of MP, and demonstrates with some fascinating examples how this strategy, derived from the structure of the RSS, was blended with a more conventional (in Indian terms) aggregationist strategy in electoral politics. This is a rich source indeed for anyone looking to understand the way Hindu nationalism has embedded itself in socio-political life over the past century or so. Nevertheless the focus on MP has, inevitably, led to some gaps occurring in the book's coverage. The most significant, and the most urgently in need of filling, is an extended examination of the RSS role in Partition and its aftermath. Here surely



was a critical point in the development of the sangathanist network, based on the activism of *swayamsevaks* both in the violent context of communal riots, and in an apparently sub-political role, working with refugees and riot victims. With the ageing of the partition population, the chance is fast disappearing to examine these issues with the vital aid of oral, first hand accounts.

It is often the sub-political role of the RSS and some of its less high profile affiliates which is overlooked in this book. This is perhaps not surprising; Jaffrelot is, after all, a political scientist, and his interest is in the way in which this form of identity has manifested itself in and reconciled itself with the structure of electoral politics in India. But to my mind the book is recurrently bound by the initial instrumentalist conception of Hindu nationalist ideology as a facet of identity, and subsequently there is something of a gap between this identity as it has been felt and lived by ordinary Indians, and the notion of Hindu nationalism as a form of politics played out by elites. Nothing illustrates this more clearly than the idea of 'ethno-religious mobilisation', which Jaffrelot in any case identifies as an instrumentalist strategy that capitalises on the 'stigmatised and emulated' identity of Hindu nationalism. In the eighties, he says, this strategy was implemented increasingly, as the conditions of Indian politics became progressively communalised. The period is presented as one in which the BJP and other Sangh Parivar organisations sought to find a fine balance between ethno-religious mobilisation and a more conventional integrationist policy in relation to other political parties. There is a tendency to view Indian politics here as a kind of intricate board game, in which the electorate play a somewhat incidental role. The 'Hindu vote' appears as a somewhat feckless bloc, just waiting to be mobilised whenever the BJP feels that it would suit their cause in terms of electoral politics. I am not suggesting that this is what Jaffrelot thinks; it is just that if ideologies are formulated in terms of an instrumentalist appropriation of cultural signifiers, as with the stigmatise and emulate model, it is difficult to avoid this kind of conclusion.

Jaffrelot's concentration on instrumentalist politics in the final two parts of this book, which focus on the eighties and nineties, leads him to formulate conclusions which point to the somewhat limited potential of Hindu nationalism as an immediate political force. The BJP, he says, has been able to make only limited headway, because it is ultimately bound by its high-caste, northern plains image. This book only stretches as far as 1996, so does not comment on the periods of office that the BJP has enjoyed, if that is the right word, at the Centre since then. One suspects that his conclusion would not be different, given the continued reliance of the Hindu nationalist bloc on non-Hindu nationalist alliance partners. Ironically, however, perhaps the most significant point he makes in his conclusion is that despite this limited success, the Sangh Parivar has quietly worked to develop its own special brand of Hindu identity in schools, welfare programmes and through the media. Here, Jaffrelot suggests, a culture is developing which might potentially reconcile the ideology of Hindu-ness with the demands of the political framework. This is an ominous scenario,

and one which begs the question as to how central the instrumentalist mobilisations on a political level - which form the focus of this book - really are to the Hindu nationalist project. Is it on this level that the uniquely fragmented political culture of India will be challenged by Hindu nationalism, or on that more subterranean level, where cultural signifiers develop political identities in the realm of personal consciousness? Despite the achievements of this book, work still needs to be done to understand the development of Hindu nationalism on this less overtly political level.

**John Zavos**

*University of Manchester*

Harry Ricketts, *The Unforgiving Minute. A Life of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999), xii + 434, £25(hb), ISBN 0-7011-3744-4.

Andrew Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1999), viii + 659, £25(hb), ISBN 0-297-81907-0.

Two new biographies, both published in 1999, testify to the continuing interest in analyzing and evaluating Kipling's literary output, and in coming to grips with a paradoxical and complex human being. Harry Ricketts, a poet as well as a scholar, who grew up reading and admiring Kipling's work, sees 'diverse Kiplings', often contradictory and existing 'in varying degrees of compatibility' (p. xi) with each other. Andrew Lycett, himself a journalist and writer, writes of a similarly complex Kipling, but also sees the writer's life as 'providing a panorama of Britain's intellectual, cultural, and social history' during the period in which Britain changed from Victorian to Edwardian England, and approached the mid-20th Century.

Even though he spent relatively few of his 70 years in the country, the subcontinent - especially Punjab and the hills - exerted a life-long influence on Kipling's life and writings. He was born in Bombay in 1865, to Alice and Lockwood Kipling, and spent the first six years of his life cossetted in the warmth of loving parents and a devoted *ayah*. Young Rudyard picked up Hindustani, and explored an exotic and outwardly-reaching childhood world until the age of six, when he was taken to England and deposited, along with his sister Trix, into an oppressive and spirit-chilling lodging house in Southsea. Emotionally scarred for life by a religiously zealous landlady and her bullying son, he went on to the United Services College, where he showed aptitude for journalism and began writing poetry. His father Lockwood, a talented artisan who had taken up an appointment as head of the Mayo School of Art in Lahore and Curator of the Lahore Museum, arranged for him to get a job as a reporter for the *Lahore Civil and Military Gazette*, and at the age of 17, Rudyard

returned to India in 1882 as a neophyte journalist.

Kipling began his career as a sub-editor during the controversy over the Ilbert Bill, which would have allowed Indian judges to try Europeans, and his political baptism of fire began when he was hissed at the Punjab Club because a piece supporting the unpopular measure--later modified--had just appeared in his paper. He was an industrious and highly successful reporter, filled with curiosity about the Anglo-Indian world of the Mall, both in Lahore and on assignment in Simla, and attracted also to the life of the walled city of Lahore, as well as the hills and plains of the country of his birth. He began writing stories and poems immediately, finding welcome space for them in the *Civil and Military Gazette* at first, then began reaching a wider audience in such collections as *Plain Tales from the Hills*, *Soldiers Three*, and *Wee Willie Winkie*. He had found his vocation, and seven years later returned to England to take up a career as a professional writer.

In the Punjab, Kipling was much taken with, and became a perceptive observer of, the paternalist administrative tradition that survived from the days of the Lawrences. Beginning with a poetic paean to 'the Queen's peace over all', *The Head of the District* recounts the death of a knowledgeable and devoted deputy commissioner of a frontier district who, in his last words, speaks of the tribal leaders gathered around him as his children, and evokes from them the classic reponse 'thou are our father and our mother.' In the ensuing action, a Muslim *mullah* incites an attack on lowland villages that is thwarted by the prompt military response of the acting deputy commissioner and the commander of the local cavalry unit. The consequent re-establishment of mutual respect between rulers and ruled is a theme the Lawrences would have applauded. In *The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes*, Kipling sees beneath the bravado and paternalism of British rule the persistent theme of the insecurity and vulnerability of the empire. Trapped together in a fantastical valley of the undead, the Brahmin Gunga Dass remarks to the civil engineer and 'representative of the dominant race' that 'we are now a republic, Mr. Jukes'. Jukes, the engineer, escapes, but the caution remains. Kipling's stories of social life at the top - geographically and administratively - in Simla reveal a keen and occasionally sardonic eye for the intrigues of ladies such as Mrs. Hauksbee, whose manipulation of her position as an influential wife make her a classic character of the *genre*. At the other end of the social scale, Kipling demonstrated his sympathy and understanding of the lowly private soldier in his stories of the often bleak world of Learoyd, Ortheris, and Mulvaney, and in his more well-known poetic celebration in *Tommy* of Thomas Atkins, who rates the title 'mister' only when he is required to put his life on the line.

Kipling also - in Ricketts' phrase - crossed boundaries in his exploration of the life around him, wandering the old city on hot, sultry nights, smoking opium, observing life in brothels, and earning himself a reputation among some Anglo-Indians as soft on keeping up the side. The literary fruits of this urban exploration were such stories as *The City of Dreadful Night* and *The Gate of the*

*Hundred Sorrows*, matched on the rural side by the story of the eponymous hill woman *Lispeth*, whose desertion by her putative husband and betrayal by a clergyman and his wife reflect Kipling's impatience with boorish and obtuse British behaviour towards those they ruled. In *Without Benefit of Clergy*, he was sympathetic to a Britisher's liaison with a native woman; in *The Miracle of Purun Bhagat* he wrote movingly of an old man's decision to become a holy man; and in *The Story of Muhammed Din* demonstrated his great empathy for children regardless of race.

Kipling continued to draw on his Indian experience after his return to England in 1889 and his interlude of residence in Vermont with his American wife Carrie, but his increasing obsession with a vision of imperial Britain and his concomitant jingoism took him away from his earlier themes of childhood and India--the coupling is again from Ricketts--and away, it would appear, from a world that had brought forth the best in him. However, the publication of *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892), the first and second *Jungle Books* (1894-95), and, most significantly, *Kim* (1900), allowed him to dip into a vein that once again enriched his poetry and fiction. As both biographers note, and Kipling himself acknowledged, there was a split between what Kipling himself called the East and West parts of him. However, in *Kim*, he was able to fuse both parts in his portrayal of Kim, who could be in the center of things, straddling both worlds; the Lama, whose Buddhist concept of law and merit touched Kipling deeply; and a British paternalism that nourished rather than oppressed. As Lycett observes, Kipling, seemingly diminished by 1900 into a 'political propagandiser', was able to produce a book that 'transcended the imperialist rhetoric that had blighted his writing on India over the previous decade' (p. 331). Childhood and India re-surfaced triumphantly.

India continued to play a role in Kipling's life and work, if sometimes only by its absence. Lycett suggests that Rudyard tried but failed to make South Africa a surrogate India under benevolent British rule, but could not see Africa 'as anything except part of a giant jigsaw puzzle that needed assembling for the furtherance of Empire' (pp.355-56). In one of his noteworthy late stories, *The Eye of Allah*, Lycett sees one of its two main characters as 'a medieval Kim moving stealthily between cultures, faiths and systems of belief' (p.524).

Much of Kipling's later work and life had little to do with India, of course, and both Ricketts and Lycett offer balanced and well-crafted overviews of the entire span of his life. Ricketts' book is the shorter of the two, and the essential themes of Kipling's life are set forth with economy. Lycett's book is considerably longer, but its bulk is justified by the success he attains in painting a comprehensive and intriguing backdrop of the cultural, intellectual, and social world that Kipling drew upon for his work, and which was at times influenced by him. Lycett is especially informative about matters such as Kipling's social connections in Simla as well as in Great Britain, and writes in welcome detail on Kipling's South Africa years, the loss of his son in World War I, and his personal relationships. Both writers offer perceptive readings of his work, and

Ricketts is especially interesting on Kipling's influence on modernist literature. Both books are to be welcomed as further contributions to our understanding and appreciation of an extraordinary man.

**Harold Lee**  
*Grinnell College*

Pervez Hoodbhoy, *Education and the State: Fifty Years of Pakistan*, (Karachi, Oxford University Press, 1988), 349pp. (hb) ISBN 0 19 5778251.

This book, edited by Quaid-e-Azam University physicist Pervez Hoodbhoy, is a collection of essays on the state of Pakistan's education in a fifty-year perspective. The essays concern different issues in education: policy making (Jalil), the structure of primary and secondary education (Bergman and Mohammad), the issues concerning the higher education in the university system (Hoodbhoy), the examination system (Graeney and Hasan), the economics of education (Kardar), community based schools (Khan). The book also explores the genesis of the *madrassah* education, the conventional Islamic tradition of teaching (Nayyar).

Despite all the numbers and tables the authors take the reader through to show how poor the system is, the book states little but the obvious, pointing at the already starkly visible symptoms of the problem, rather than examining deeper issues of the state and of education itself. The assumptions of the authors, both about their concept of education and of the state set in the larger development paradigm, pose theoretical questions that are banal and make recommendations that have been made in the numerous studies before.

The book begins with a puzzle: *Why does the public education system in Pakistan not work when other institutions of the society less essential do?* Hoodbhoy's thesis is that public education system fails because in its present form it is simply not important enough to the society. But this statement is neither an answer to the question he poses nor an explanation for the assumed failure of the system. Public education would obviously not be important to the society if it were not working, or if it has failed. The following analysis however does not tell us why the system is not working but rather presents a description of *how* it is not working and the authors outline what essentially are the symptoms of the 'dysfunctional' system rather than the structural and political layers that generate or produce such a system.

Most of the essays discuss problems that have been pointed out repeatedly: that there are severe distortions in the allocation of resources; that the girls' enrolment is the lowest in South Asia, that our teachers can barely pass the test of 3rd grade mathematics, that many schools are ghost schools, others are public meeting places of local chiefs; that the education department is an institution

where the politics of patronage is implemented, with jobs and construction contracts serving as key areas of patronage; and the drop out rate is very high, the curriculum is ideology driven and that madrassahs are hotbeds of crime, violence and sectarian strife.

Even though Hoodbhoy places education on a par with other service delivery institutions like airlines, roads and railways and telecommunications, which he argues are functioning while the education system is not, it may be pointed out that education is not simply a service delivery. It is not like transporting goods and people across distances, nor even like providing electricity and water. It is the fundamental system of imparting the ideas of how a society must live, the structures it must organise, and the rules it must adhere to. That indeed has been a fundamental dilemma of the Pakistani state: whether to organise the society along the Muslim identity pattern or along a Western one. Interestingly, Muslim identity politics is itself a new phenomenon, defining itself as an antithesis of the western lifestyle, which poses a dilemma within a dilemma. What indeed does it mean to be a Muslim today? Hence the authors should have gone down several layers deeper to relate the state of education to the crisis of the state itself, and its dualistic identity combining the secular and the religious and how this identity was constructed historically.

But Hoodbhoy argues that education is not perceived as a vital central need of Pakistani society and is therefore not accorded the protection enjoyed by other institutions. But, by implicating the society at large, the author is in fact leading us to an impasse, that the society, which is treated monolithically, does not want it and so it is rejecting education. Why then go any further and present the issues and problems of education in Pakistan today? Education today simply reflects the state and society, as do other institutions. In a structurally stratified society, with inequitable power distribution, and an elite capturing the resources, the education system institutionalises divisions and distortions in the society.

While the public education system is assumed to be a total failure, the book presents private education, and education managed by communities and NGOs, as workable alternatives. Kardar for instance argues for increasing the cost of higher education. He says private schools in Lahore were imparting education of a higher standard. But private schools driven by private entrepreneurs thrive on low wages and higher fees and only operate where there is a market – the urban areas. And privatisation still does not resolve the problem of the regulation of education in the private sphere. In the rural areas, the madrassahs, which have been shown to be the theoretical bases of sectarian strife, are one example of what unregulated, private non-governmental schools can be in modern Pakistan today. Education in Pakistan has become a vast field of experimentation: home schools, adopting government schools, mobile units, mosque schools, everything has been tried, often at the behest of the World Bank and other donors imposing their superficial solutions on the weak state. But eventually these piecemeal 'solutions' lack structures which would sustain

them, and therefore when assistance is stopped the projects come to a halt as well.

While the book compiles essays within the larger development paradigm of education as vital for progress and economic revival, the perception of education by the writers differs considerably. While some writers perceive education in terms of a fundamental necessity, others see it as a social good and still others as an economic good. However, no writer examines the debate of whether an education system in Pakistan simply serves the establishment or paves the way for a larger social change. Kardar argues against the social welfare approach to education. But the development economists' argument of converting people into resources that would serve the economy if you enhance their skills is obviously in itself a sociological issue, where education would condition people to serve the larger development model, which is problematic itself.

Similar confusion is evident in the use of the term modernity. Modernity is treated as a positive force and it is assumed that a functioning education system would make us into a modern society. However, the crisis of the state, and hence of its institutions, is not occurring in a timeless vacuum, but is indeed itself a sign of the contradictions of modernity. Modernity is a problem not a panacea and the third world countries' accumulation of problems shows us the dark side of modernity. Nayyar points out that the madrassahs are archaic institutions as though frozen in time. On the contrary madrassahs, created out of vicious poverty, violence, war and the consequent fragmentation of the society, are modern reinventions of old institutions, where ideological and theological politics is imparted in the backdrop of the world view that reacts to older conditions. Historically, madrassahs have only reflected the socio-political structures of their times. For instance, in India, the basis for the growth of madrassahs is attributed to the creation of Muslim, and for that matter Hindu, identity politics by the British Empire in redefining and structuring the Indian society. Earlier, in Baghdad, the origin of this institution – like the nature of state rule – was conceived to create functional knowledge both of theology and of administration which were the basis of the formal rule then.

I would also tend to disagree with the overly simplified statement running through most of the work: that the education system is not working. Within the paradigm the authors are analysing, the public education system may not be working to serve that particular paradigm. The education system is in fact working – to serve the particular social structure Pakistan has opted for, or has become. A structure built on dilemmas of power hierarchies, rural urban divisions, social divisions of class, language, ethnic, and gender categories and the system serves this structure. It, in fact, reinforces the bureaucratized and militarised nature of the state, by promoting recruitment for these institutions, and ensuring the status quo in the establishment of power. The education

system, both public and private, therefore, works by exclusion: of the poor, rural and marginal communities, and it works by serving the establishment of the ruling elite and policy makers.

**Nafisa Shah**

*Wolfson College, Oxford*

Ross Mallick, *Development, Ethnicity and Human Rights in South Asia*, (New Delhi/Thousand Oaks/London: Sage Publications, 1998), 375 pp. Rs 425 (hb). ISBN 81 – 7036 – 681 – X.

This is a work of erudite scholarship and profound humanism on the themes of development, ethnicity, tribal self-determination, human rights, regional cooperation, foreign aid and international order in the context of contemporary South Asia. Although the main focus is on India there are impressive chapters on Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh too. The author's point of departure is the negative role of indigenous culture and the dominant political elites, instead of colonialism and imperialism, for the present ills of that region.

Mallick draws attention to the faltering and increasingly repressive nature of the Indian democracy and the majoritarian tyrannies or autocratic military regimes elsewhere in South Asia. On the magnitude of the problems the author remarks:

As a fifth of humanity is South Asian, and a half of the world's poor live in the region, events there will have a profound effect on how problems of development and ethnic conflict are dealt with. Already India alone is the world's fifth largest contributor to global warming. Unless sustainable development can be achieved in the region, there will be a downward spiral of resource development and population growth that will leave large numbers without the minimal income they now have. To maintain democracy in such circumstances could be virtually impossible (p.7).

In the several chapters on India, the author alleges that top-down efforts to ameliorate the sad lot of the poor have been a failure. The upper-caste elites do not and cannot understand the sense of humiliation and despair experienced by the so-called untouchables (for some strange reason the author calls these people simply untouchables most of the time and only occasionally uses the term Dalit, which is their preferred self-description). He calls the Hindu caste order the historically most enduring system of apartheid and the Dalits the most degraded minority in the world. The upper caste politicians and state functionaries are too deeply imbued with traditional taboos and prejudices and, despite political and ideological rhetoric, continue to treat the Dalits with contempt. Therefore a fundamental and irreconcilable conflict of interest



between the upper castes and the Dalits is intrinsic to the Hindu social order.

As regards remedial measures, the author identifies as central and decisive drastic land reforms and the removal of other economic and social inequalities in the rural areas. The means to such an end will be Dalit-led governments elected through the democratic process. This part of the argument seems rather complacent but weak. He correctly describes the constituents of the caste order as three rather than two layers: the upper castes, the rather large but powerful Other Backward Castes (OBCs) comprising mainly peasant-proprietors, and the Dalits. Since the Dalits are a minority and the OBCs, as he points out, are often more brutal in their treatment of the latter than the upper caste urban politicians, how the Dalits can establish stable government which could implement a radical agenda is not properly analysed or theorised. If the Dalits are a minority, they cannot under a democratic system form a government by themselves either in the centre or in the states. However, the present system of democracy does enable them to claim a share in power and government, but only in a coalition with the other castes and their parties. It means that they will have to forgo their radical demands in order to remain in power. The recent experiences in Bihar and UP confirm this hypothesis. How this situation should be transcended is not explained.

Mallick rejects Marxian ideas of class struggle as the way out. The Left Front Government of West Bengal led by the CPI (M) is especially targeted for scathing criticism. He takes to task scholars in the West who portray the Communist-led regime as the most successful experiment in communal harmony, peace and social and economic uplift. He asserts that human rights violations have been extensive during the long stay of the Left Front Government in power. Corruption was rampant and use of violence was endemic. He provides details about an alleged massacre which took place from 14 to 16 May 1979 at Marichjhapi in the Sunderban area in which 236 refugee Dalit men, women and children from Bangladesh were killed by a combined assault of the police and Muslim gangs hired by the government. News of that atrocity was suppressed by the authorities, and scholars - both native and foreign - they kept quiet about it.

As regards ethnic conflict, the author observes that although different patterns of handling ethnic conflict exist in the various states, all have followed an anti-minority agenda. He dispels conspiracy theories suggesting that the colonial state simply fabricated ethnic divisions. Rather these were deeply embedded in those cultures and societies and the British only made use of them for their own purposes. Reviewing ethnic politics elsewhere in South Asia he deplores the fact that foreign development aid to Sri Lanka for the Mahaweli irrigation project led to the colonisation by the Sinhalese majority of areas in which the Tamil minority had previously been in a majority. In the case of Bangladesh, the persecution of the largely Dalit Hindu minority, which resulted in their constant migration to India, is taken up. As for the ethno-politics in Pakistan, religious fundamentalism and Punjabi domination combine to create a

majoritarian tyranny. The author does not have very many suggestions how to manage ethnic conflict peacefully. He wisely counsels greater ethnic accommodation as a means to peace and harmony.

The most interesting argument put forth, though only in a sketchy form, is an unambiguous rejection of cultural relativism as an apology and defence of 'true' Hinduism, Islam and the other religions as authentic sources for human rights. He insists that the promotion of human rights is impossible without westernisation, but then, strangely, rejects secularism describing it as a value shared only by narrow sections of the modern elite. If, now, the promotion of human rights is dependent on greater westernisation, then can it be achieved without secularism? A sustained discussion on this theme would have been highly desirable.

On the whole, the criticism of the existing situations and their indigenous origins is thorough and mostly convincing. The case against the Communist-led government in West Bengal is somewhat overstated, however. The author seems to suggest that apparent peace and harmony which prevail there are not the result of some good inputs by the government but that the Stalinists exercise repression more effectively and completely than is done elsewhere. Thus protest and opposition do not take place as often as they should. Few scholars will go along with such an extreme indictment of the Left Front Government.

Also, a more critical approach to the global economy and the asymmetrical power relations in the world order should have been adopted to provide a holistic picture of the staggering and seemingly insurmountable obstacles that confront any movement seeking the emancipation and empowerment of the oppressed, and communal and ethnic peace between groups in South Asia. Both deliberate political attempts to destabilise South Asia by the big powers and the more structural neo-liberal worldwide onslaught combined with indigenous factors in the immediate past, and they are likely to do so in the present and in the future, to aggravate the life conditions of the wretched of the earth. The faith the author places in the internet as a means for the oppressed to link up with Western human rights NGOs and to publicise their grievances and thus gain international clout is interesting, but its importance is undoubtedly exaggerated.

**Ishtiaq Ahmed**

*Stockholm University*

Apurba Kundu, *Militarism in India: The Army and Civil Society in Consensus*, (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1998) viii + 230 pp. £45.00 (hb). ISBN 1 86064 318 3.

In this book Dr Apurba Kundu, Lecturer in South Asia Area Studies at the University of Bradford, examines civil-military relations in India between 1918 and the late 1980s. In marked contrast to Pakistan, the 'man on horseback' has

largely been absent from Indian politics with a remarkable consensus existing between soldiers and civilian politicians despite at times often strained relations. Kundu asks why India has escaped a coup d'état in the post-Independence period with the objective of contributing to 'a general theory of the conditions which preclude military intervention in politics' (p.9).

This wide-ranging work begins by looking at the recruitment and professional development of Indian officers during the inter-war period, after 'Indianisation' was grudgingly started by the British military authorities. It then examines the stresses and strains imposed on officers by the Indian nationalist movement and the Indian National armies during the Second World War. The transfer of power and relations between soldiers and politicians during the first decade of independence, the stormy Menon-Kaul period, the disastrous Sino-Indian War, the period of Indira Gandhi's Emergency Rule and, finally, Operation Blue Star in June 1984, that provoked widespread military unrest, are then examined in successive chapters.

Kundu's thought-provoking analysis is based upon 'almost 20' (p.2) published autobiographies, 44 interviews (military and civilians) and 96 answers to two detailed questionnaires submitted by officers from all three services. These sources provide a fascinating new insight into the mindset and behaviour of Indian officers during the period under review. Although maintaining the anonymity of these contributors is understandable, given the sensitivity of the subject matter, this decision causes this reviewer some concern since it is impossible to follow up his sources. It would also have been interesting to have seen copies of the questionnaires. The author concludes that India benefited from a number of unique factors that have ensured the maintenance of good civil-military relations, including the professionalism of its armed forces, diversity of peoples, cultures and languages in India, initial political stability following independence, nationally representative personnel, the sheer size of India, a dominant Hindu culture and widespread belief in democracy.

This book is an important, well-written and insightful new addition to the literature dealing with civil-military relations and the development of military professionalism, but it does have some shortcomings. While admirable in many ways the wide-ranging overview adopted by the author has resulted in some over generalisation. Historians of the British-Indian Army will be disappointed with his sketchy treatment of Indianisation, as well as the comparatively narrow range of sources consulted, given that this subject has been the topic of several important new studies. Several careless errors - such as misspelling the name of Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, the last British Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, also detract from the book. While the example of Pakistan is mentioned on many occasions, the author shies away from any detailed comparative analysis of civil-military relations in that country. This is an important omission. As other reviewers have already noted, comparing and contrasting the experience of civil-military relations in India with Pakistan

would have been illuminating and added an important new dimension to this study. Both armies shared a common heritage yet in practice had a very different outlook towards the respective roles of the soldier and the civilian. Lastly, given the title of the book, the focus on the non-occurrence of coup d'état is a little misleading. It would have been interesting to know to what extent military ideas and values have permeated civil society and how this has affected the course of civil-military relations in India.

Militarism in India is recommended to readers interested in the development of military professionalism and civil-military relations in the subcontinent, despite these drawbacks. This reviewer is struck by the degree that the British legacy - in terms of standards of professional conduct and historical tradition - exerted an important influence on the development of Indian military professionalism in the post-colonial period. The Indian experience provides a convincing example of successful civil-military relations that sharply contrasts with that of many other developing countries. Perhaps the author is too optimistic, however, in concluding that 'Indian commissioned officers will never instigate a coup against the civilian government' (p.193). The maintenance of effective civil-military relations in any country cannot be taken for granted.

**Tim Moreman**

*King's College, London.*

Akmal Hussain, *Overcoming Poverty: The Report of the Task Force on Poverty Eradication*, (Karachi, 1999).

Overcoming poverty is a short document produced by a task force appointed by the government of Pakistan in 1997. Many state-sponsored studies in the past have been plagued by two characteristics, where the first may lead on to the second, though not always. The first is a lack of depth and workable suggestions, and expressing numerous ideas in the passive voice to try and avoid the responsibility of rigorously and convincingly specifying the exact pathways and agents through which the requisite developmental goals are to be achieved. The second relates to analysing the overall situation, or certain aspects of it, in what often approaches a theoretical vacuum; this implies that considerations of political economy which are acutely important can be conveniently ignored. This report is largely free of the first, though on occasion it strays into the realm of not paying enough attention to the latter. Nevertheless, it is an important study within the poverty literature on Pakistan, and contains a number of very useful policy prescriptions.

The study begins with a fairly detailed review of the trends and magnitude of poverty in Pakistan, till the present time. It is pointed out quite candidly that although Pakistan has achieved fairly high growth rates of the Gross Domestic

Product (GDP) as compared to other developing countries (such as Indonesia), the incidence of poverty measured as calorie intake deprivation remains quite high at the figure of 22 percent. In absolute terms, poverty has risen once again in the 1990s, after being on the decline in the 1970s and 1980s. The true extent of poverty is even more widespread if one considers that public access to some of the most basic social services and amenities that reflect the standard of living is still limited. Thus around 60 percent of the population do not have access to safe drinking water, or sanitation, and a similar percentage of the population is illiterate.

The authors argue convincingly that there are two reasons for this; firstly, the structure of economic growth within Pakistan has certain characteristics that hamper the capability of the growth process to reduce poverty. Broadly speaking, these are a highly skewed distribution of productive assets in both agriculture and industry, a low average value-added component of output, and shortage of skilled labour. Second, it is contended that the existing macroeconomic policies and the incentive structure that these give rise to also impact adversely upon poverty. The situation has been exacerbated by a sharp reduction in overseas remittances, which have since the 1970s onwards helped in a major way to lower poverty.

The poverty alleviation programmes in operation at the time are also looked at. These include various social safety nets, work done by various NGOs and rural support programmes. A persuasive argument advanced by the study is that the structural adjustment programme (SAP) has also contributed to an increase in poverty on its own, keeping all other things constant. Numerous causes for this are advanced, most of which relate to certain institutional weaknesses and political economy factors. A combination of high interest rates, high inflation, and slow growth in manufacturing have resulted in a substantial fall in real wages, and a consequent increase in poverty and inequality. Thus the reasons provided to explain the increase in poverty are quite convincing.

In order to reduce poverty, the study regards a number of changes as being necessary at the macro level, which are related to the earlier diagnosed economic problems that are seen as the main causes of poverty. These are rather optimistic in certain regards. Firstly, the objective of raising the growth rate from 3 percent to 7 percent in only 2 years is perhaps in need of realistic revision. Certainly the mechanisms specified that would enable this to happen are difficult to envisage as they have been laid out. For example a reduction in the fiscal deficit to 4 percent by selling off or privatising 20 of the main public sector firms, and then totally abolishing 12 other public sector concerns is bound to cause substantial unemployment and economic hardship. There would be slim chances of re-employment for most of those laid-off in the short run, and not unlikely in the medium run. The proposed strict ceiling on government borrowing from the state bank is again not very probable; there is no new incentive or external supervision that should cause the government to change its previous pattern of overspending. Next, keeping in mind that the proposition of

controlling the fiscal deficit in the first year through the earlier specified mechanisms is not very straightforward, the suggestion then of a massive injection of public funds into new projects albeit in certain chosen sectors of the economy will not be consistent with keeping a tight rein on the government's fiscal situation. The time frame of one year for controlling the fiscal deficit seems to be unrealistically short. While the proposed initiative of encouraging the private sector's investment in infrastructure is good in theory, the method of achieving the same contains the usual obstacles related to political economy.

It must be said, however, that a number of the suggestions provided are very useful and particularly suited to the Pakistani rural context. The idea of participatory development is especially attractive and viable, and has been very successful as operationalised by rural development agencies such as the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, and other rural support agencies. Participatory development is founded on the principle of inculcating self-reliance and is a very constructive notion with long-term benefits, and constitutes one of the main tools for achieving the specified developmental goals. Another central thrust of the study is to combat poverty by growth strategies aimed at promoting the small-scale labour intensive sector, which is seen to have a major positive impact on employment. This is intended to be effected through supportive macroeconomic policies and the disbursement of micro-credit to poor households in order to improve their asset base and productive hence income-earning potential.

Among the many propositions is the establishment of a National Reconstruction Corps with the objectives of helping people gain employment, and managing the disbursement of credit. This organisation is meant to be a major building block of the poverty alleviation programme, though it is not clear how some of the functions that it is responsible for are meant to be carried out; e.g. no tangible mechanism is specified for the task of mobilising the unemployed, and neither for pro-actively seeking contracts for semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The idea of a national institution for imparting skills of various kinds is very constructive. However it has not been made clear where the substantial funding that is required for running this body would come from. Undoubtedly if established and run successfully and necessarily on a large scale, such an organisation would play a key role in the growth process, by linking the demand for various kinds of labour with its supply. In particular, training social organisers, middle level professionals and village specialists would have very substantial and widespread benefits. The proposed industry-based technical guild would be rather more difficult to run effectively because it requires the imparting of a relatively high level of technical skills, and hence a more rigorous system of examinations and assessments before the diplomas or qualifications can be handed out; also, because industrial jobs are more lucrative, the incentive for the assessors to engage in rent-seeking activities could endanger the principle of merit, and thus the danger of this institution falling into the same sort of disrepute which most state educational

organisations in the country have done cannot be ruled out. It is perhaps only in the case that impartial donor organisations are properly involved in the assessment procedure that such an organisation can be satisfactorily run.

The report contains a large section on the issue of child labour, and how to phase it out, and eventually eradicate it. Again, the problems stem mainly from aspects relating to the implementation of this endeavour (including the same factors of political economy and vested interests), and not its formulation. For instance, the requirement of shutting down non-compliant work units is not any less difficult now than it may have been earlier on, and there is no new variable introduced in the equation that would make this any easier to do. Next, no pathway has been specified either for replacing children with adults, as suggested. It must also be recognised that most children work because their families are poor and need them to work to contribute towards household income. Therefore the subsequent proposal of providing working children with both alternative non-hazardous occupations as well as arranging for their education seems to be too simple a solution; how this is to be actualised has not been made very clear, except to say that the responsibility for this lies at the doorstep of the District Support Organisations (DSOs). Some suggestions in this regard e.g. avenues of alternative employment, would be of much use.

The idea of DSOs in alliance with Community Organisations (COs) that is pivotal to the study, is in itself very productive, and seems to be the way forward on many fronts. It has indeed been proven to work well in the case of other successful development organisations in Pakistan. They are meant to play a leading role in the disbursement of micro-credit to the poor for development projects and to improve their asset base; hence they can quite competently play a central role in the development initiative, as envisaged by this study. Building on past successful developmental ventures, participatory development is a very useful method to adopt where the creative potential of the poor is used positively. The idea of NGOs and COs working together closely, and yet there a being a separation between their responsibilities so that the COs can strengthen their own personality and functional capabilities, can form part of an effective plan to take the initiative forward.

**Salman Khan**

*Wadham College, Oxford*

S. Akbar Zaidi, *The New Development Paradigm: Papers on Institutions, NGOs, Gender and Local Government* (Karachi: Oxford Uni. Press, 1999), 321pp. US\$ 18.50 (hb). ISBN 0-19-579041-3.

This book critically examines the propositions of the New Development Paradigm (NDP) and its relevance to development strategies and economic reforms in Pakistan. While Pakistan has been one of the more open South

Asian economies since the 1970s, it has performed poorly with respect to major development indicators. To address these issues, Zaidi's book considers certain aspects of the NDP together with a descriptive analysis of different institutions and sectors within Pakistan. Four of the eleven chapters present broader issues, while others provide detailed case studies and illustrations of these topics.

The NDP has gained more prominence in recent years as it has become clear that certain economic and social reforms have not achieved the goals of poverty reduction and equitable growth in all developing countries. There has been particular criticism of policies that have predominantly focused on the development of markets, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, trade liberalisation, reduced government spending and government size. Multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF had relied on this paradigm, known as the "Washington consensus", in its delivery of structural adjustment and stabilisation policies and other reform packages to developing countries. In this book, Zaidi criticises this paradigm for its failure to consider the necessary institutional structures required for the successful implementation of development strategies in a country like Pakistan.

Departing from the 'Washington consensus', the NDP considers the importance of institutional structures in achieving poverty alleviation and economic and social development. The key issues considered by Zaidi in this book are the role of local government, decentralisation, non-government organisations (NGOs), and gender. In relation to these aspects of the NDP, this book presents an analysis and critique of various sectors and issues in Pakistan.

The NDP argues that local-level institutions are more effective at delivering the basic services and amenities required for the population of a developing country. Evidently this level of government in Pakistan has been severely constrained by a lack of support from the central government, technical and financial capabilities and corruption. Chapter 1 describes in some length the nature of the administrative, financial, and legislative structures in local government in Pakistan. Zaidi illustrates in the second chapter how urban local governments in the Sindh Province have consistently failed to deliver basic services to the people. He proposes that while local government in Pakistan is in a dismal state, the other tiers of government are largely responsible for its past performance and current weaknesses. Following this proposition, reforms that are initiated at the local-government level will fail in Pakistan because the higher tiers of government are not willing or able to support such a process. Citing evidence from the attempted reforms in the rural water supply and sanitation sector, Zaidi considers that reform at the provincial level is also likely to be unsuccessful. Considering these constraints, Zaidi suggests that the only solution is organised collective action. Zaidi believes that institutional reform must start with at the community level and in this process, there is a role for NGOs to organise the lobbying of politicians on behalf of the urban residents.

The failure of local government to deliver basic development services is further explored in the next chapter, 'Politics, Institutions, Poverty'. Karachi is



Pakistan's largest city and has suffered from consistent problems of politicised violence. In this chapter, Zaidi outlines the previous attempts to address poverty in Pakistan's largest and most violent city. The NDP argues that a range of institutions is necessary if policies are to successfully target poverty. In this respect, Zaidi rightly explores that role of politics in the persistence of poverty in Karachi at both the macro and institutional level. This chapter concludes with the statement: 'powerful, effective, autonomous, and representative government may be the partial answer to the problems of poverty and lack of development. Perhaps it is time to test this model in Karachi'. If politics are the source of entrenched poverty, then Zaidi is accurate in his call for the establishment of an effective urban government. However, the criminal-political nexus is so well entrenched in Karachi and the strategies to establish such a government in Karachi have not been clearly established in this book.

In Chapters 5, Zaidi continues his criticism of the imposition of policy by external agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF with reference to the implementation of the Social Action Programme (SAP) and the rural water supply and sanitation sector in Pakistan. The objective of the SAP was to improve the delivery of social services and development to the country through a more participatory approach rather than the traditional 'top-down' policies. SAP has received considerable financial and policy support from the World Bank and, generally, this has been perceived as a successful strategy by the Bank in improving social services in Pakistan. Under the umbrella of SAP, the objective of the Pakistan government's Uniform Policy for the rural water supply sector was to shift the management of water schemes over from Public Health Engineering Departments (PHEDs) to local communities. NGOs were expected to take a major role in this reform agenda.

With reference to a number of provinces, Zaidi proposes in Chapter 6 that the attempt to reform this sector has largely been a failure. In particular, SAP has not provided the necessary preconditions for reform since the NGOs have not been in a position to undertake the operations and management of rural water schemes. Therefore, a reliance on these groups to deliver such a service will not be successful. Zaidi is critical of NGOs as an answer to governmental failure and furthermore, he states that the influence of donor aid has seriously distorted the priorities and policies of domestic NGOs within Pakistan. He goes on to suggest that institutional reform and a reliance on NGOs will not provide any solutions to the problems of the rural water supply and sanitation sector in Pakistan. In Chapter 3, NGOs were considered to have role in organising collective action. In the case of the rural water sector, such groups are seen as being poorly equipped to achieve the provision of rural water and sanitation services at a local level. Zaidi is correct to assert that there is a role for NGOs in certain sectors and situations; however, their success in achieving the delivery of complex infrastructure is clearly limited.

According to Zaidi, it would be far more effective to keep the schemes with the PHED and commence reform from within this bureaucratic structure. Since

a lack of revenue has severely constrained the development of this sector, Zaidi rightly suggests that greater revenue will provide funds for reform. However, his proposal of higher user charges and improved revenue collection is not entirely consistent with his criticism of the 'Washington consensus', which rely on such policies to improve the fiscal deficits of a country.

The remainder of the book focuses on the health sector in Pakistan. Zaidi argues that policies adopted by Pakistan under the rubric of structural adjustment have led to a worsening of the health status of Pakistanis. The removal of food subsidies and privatisation of the health sector has meant that the provision of health services has increasingly favoured the wealthy and elite. Zaidi lays a fair proportion of the blame for the failure of the health sector in Pakistan to deliver essential services to the poor with the policies as prescribed by the IMF and the World Bank. While, it can be argued that such policies have forced the Pakistan government to adopt policies that have an adverse impact on the poor, it is also necessary to consider the domestic political influences on policy-making in Pakistan. Clearly, the problems of health standards, particularly for women, remain a severe problem in Pakistan and a constraint on future development. Zaidi proposes that local government must take on a greater role improve the delivery of health services and while the private sector must also be active in this sector, there needs to be the appropriate scrutiny from the government to ensure that the health services are accessible by the majority of the population and not just for the elite.

In this book it clear that Zaidi is not a supporter of policies that have been imposed by external agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF. Zaidi also perceives the some of the NDP agenda is driven by similar external forces. It seems that what Zaidi really desires is an endogenous reform that is orchestrated by a stronger government and governance structures, something more akin to the experience of certain East Asian countries. One weakness of this book is its lack of coherence on some of the issues and this is no doubt due to the book being made up of a collection of unrelated articles written at different times and for various audiences. It would be useful if the propositions made in the book lead to a more general hypothesis regarding future reform strategies for Pakistan. The book does provide a useful and detailed analysis of the development status in certain sectors in Pakistan and it is a timely publication considering the current political instability. The strategies for future reform in Pakistan must be further discussed and debated and Zaidi's book makes a considerable contribution to this discourse.

**Sher Singh Verick**  
*University of Manchester*

## NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

1. Articles submitted to the JPs should be original contributions and should not be under consideration for any other publication at the same time; if an article is under such consideration, authors should indicate this on submission. Articles should be submitted in triplicate, typewritten on one side only and double-spaced throughout (including footnotes) with 1/2" margins. Contributors are required to provide an abstract of approximately 100 words which should be indented and located at the top of page 1 of the submission but below the title and name of the author of the article. Typewritten copies should preferably be accompanied by IBM-compatible wordprocessor discs on Word Perfect or Microsoft Word or equivalent. Discs should be labelled with the article, the author's name and software (including version) used. All submissions should be sent to: Shinder Thandi, Coventry Business School, Coventry University, Priory Street, Coventry CV1 5FB, United Kingdom.
  2. Notes and references are not to be treated separately and should be consecutively numbered and presented at the end of the article, not at the foot of each page. The system of bracketed references embedded in the text or in the notes such as (Tinker 1967, 147) is to be completely avoided.
  3. **Referencing Style**
    - A For Published Sources the following examples illustrate the style to be followed:

On first reference

      - (a) *Books*: Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj, 1847-1947* (Delhi; Manohar, 1989), 130-45.
      - (b) *Edited Volumes*: Richard Barret (ed.), *International Dimensions of the Environmentalist Crisis* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1982).
      - (c) *Articles in Journals*: Stephen Oren, 'The Sikhs, Congress, and the Unionists in British Punjab, 1937-45', in *Modern Asian Studies* (hereafter MAS), 8, 3 (1974), 397-419.  
(Note: As illustrated in this example, the names of journals need to be cited in full only on first occurrence. In all subsequent references to articles from the same journal, only the initials or known short forms of the journals are to be used.
      - (d) *Articles in Edited Volumes*: N. Buchinani and D. M. Indra, 'Key Issues in Canadian-Sikh Ethnic Relations', in N. Gerald Barrier and V.A. Dusenbery (eds). *The Sikh Diaspora: Migration and Experience beyond Punjab* (New Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1990).
      - (e) *Dissertations*: Jeffrey Key, 'Nongovernmental Organisations as Strategic Organising: The Politics of Voluntarism in Pakistan', unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Department of Political Science, University of Texas at Austin, August 1990.

On subsequent reference (unless immediately following the first reference in which case 'ibid' will be used) the example at (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) will become:

      - (a) Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, 131.
      - (b) Barret, *International Dimensions*.
      - (c) Oren, 'The Sikhs, Congress, and the Unionists', 413-14.
      - (d) Buchinani and Indra, 'Key Issues'.
      - (e) Key, 'Nongovernmental Organisations'.
      - (f) References to newspapers: *The Tribune* (Chandigarh), 7 July 1992
      - (g) References to parliamentary debates: HC Debates, 13 July 1959, 42 (UK).
      - (h) References to government documents or Parliamentary papers: Economic Advisor to Punjab Government, Statistical Abstract, Chandigarh: 1989.
    - B *Primary Source Citations*. These must include the archival location including the town and, if necessary, the country where an archive is located, at first use. In case materials are in a private collection, the name and location of the collection should be mentioned. In case recorded oral materials stored in audio archives are being used, the location of the recordings should be specified. In other cases, the name and location of the oral informant should be clearly stated if possible.
  4. *Italics*: Italicise words in Punjabi and other Indian languages (not in common English usage) only on first occurrence, giving the English translation in parentheses. Proper names in a foreign language should always be set in roman.
  5. *Book reviews*: Author(s), or editor(s), Title (italic), place of publication, publisher, no. of pages, price, ISBN number.
- Write to the Editors of the journal for a detailed style sheet.



The Punjab has been one of the most important regions of the Indian subcontinent and has played a pivotal role in its political and economic development from ancient times. The *International Journal of Punjab Studies* provides interdisciplinary and comparative research on the historical pre-1947 Punjab, the Indian and Pakistani Punjab after 1947, and the Punjabi Diaspora. The Journal carries articles from an international list of contributors, with an interdisciplinary base that includes history, language and linguistics, literature, political science, economics, social anthropology, geography and theology.