International Journal of

Punjab Studies

INTERNATIONAL JOUNRAL OF PUNJAB STUDIES

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Guru Nanak and the 'Sants': A Reappraisal

Nirvikar Singh
University of California, Santa Cruz

Was Guru Nanak a 'Sant'? What does the term 'Sant' mean in this context? This paper surveys the state of academic responses to these questions. We make the case that both the concept of a 'Sant tradition' and the membership of Guru Nanak in that tradition are quite problematic. In doing so, we argue that previous attempts to frame disagreements on these issues in terms of 'historical scholarship' versus 'faith' are flawed, and sometimes ahistorical themselves. Instead, alternative answers emerge from within standard scholarly inquiry, depending on varying interpretations and combinations of fragmentary historical facts. We show how this process of interpretation and selection occurs particularly in W.H. McLeod's writings on the subject. We also discuss the nature of the sources used by scholars, and the biases that may thereby be introduced.

I   Introduction

Was Guru Nanak a 'Sant'? What does the term 'Sant' mean in this context? This paper surveys the state of academic responses to these questions, and provides cautionary lessons, if not definitive answers. The questions and answers to them are important at several levels. The first question is obviously important to Sikhs and to scholars of Sikh history and doctrine. The second question is of wider significance, since the idea of a historical 'Sant tradition' has become widely accepted among scholars of Indian history and religion. The answers to these questions are therefore of direct interest. However, perhaps the greatest significance lies in understanding the process whereby the conventional wisdom in answering these questions has been achieved. This understanding has broad implications for evaluating future scholarship in the area of Indian religious history. It is also important in the context of the politics of religion in India, and we will acknowledge this link more explicitly than is commonly done by scholars working on these topics.

We begin in Section II by describing different answers to the two central questions, and how they have been arrived at. We comment on previous assessments of debate on differences in scholarly positions, and define our own approach. Briefly, we note that debate on these questions has sometimes been

inappropriately framed as one of 'belief vs. scholarship'. On the other hand, we argue that there are important differences in conclusions among scholars using similar methodologies. These differences are typically the result of interpretation, extrapolation from the scholar's thinking on related issues, or even differences in expertise on various facets of the problem.

In Section III, we discuss the answer to the question 'What is a "Sant"?', focusing on analyzing the positions of the foremost scholars in this area, explicating their differences, and offering our own assessment. Briefly, we argue that the term 'Sant' is much more problematic than is acknowledged by some scholars working in this area. While it provides a useful categorization that sharpens some strands of the much broader Bhakti tradition of 'medieval' India, the use of the term can create confusion and a false certainty. In this context, it is important to comprehend that the 'Sant tradition' is a relatively modern construction, and *not* an understanding that was contemporary to the period of Guru Nanak.

The analysis of Section III naturally informs our discussion in Section IV of the question, 'Was Guru Nanak a "Sant"?', and the problems of defining the historical 'Sant tradition' make one cautious in answering the question affirmatively. Further doubts are raised when one compares the details of Guru Nanak's teachings with those of the 'Sant tradition'. There are clearly key similarities, but also important differences. Some scholars take the view that Guru Nanak was a very special 'Sant', and this might be considered the conventional wisdom. One might also decide that the category does not quite fit, as some scholars have argued. These scholars are typically Sikhs, leading to the suggestion by some that the disagreement is one of 'belief vs. scholarship', a view we challenge in Section II. Section V therefore concludes the paper by returning to the broader issues of methodology, and of the politics of religion.

II   Framing the Debate

The recognition of a 'medieval Sant tradition' is widely accepted among scholars of Indian history, religion and literature. The origins of this construction go back to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Here is how Schomer (1987a) summarizes the evolution of the concept:

> The idea that there is a coherent body of Sant teachings (*sant mat*) and that individual Sants belong to a common spiritual line of descent (*sant parampara*) distinct from that of sectarian Vaishnavas did not become fully crystallized until the mid-nineteenth century. Originating in certain late esoteric Sant circles more self-conscious about belonging to a tradition than were the earlier Sants, it has however gained general acceptance among the

> members of Sant panths (communities of shared belief and
> practice)....The pioneering works in this regard were Pitamber D.
> Barthwal's *The Nirguna School of Hindi Poetry* (1936) and
> Parashuram Chaturvedi's historical study published in 1952, *Uttari
> Bharat ki sant-parampara*....The more recent work of Charlotte
> Vaudeville and W.H. McLeod also reflects this point of view, as
> does the present volume. (pp. 3-4)

It may be noted, however, that the earliest quoted published reference to the term
dates back to 1911, rather than the mid-nineteenth century. According to
Juergensmeyer (1987), Tulsi Sahib uses the term in his *Ghat Ramayana* (1911), and
the notion that he originated the term is implied by Chaturvedi (1952, p. 783).
Furthermore, Juergensmeyer explicitly credits a specific group, the Radhasoamis,
with 'crystallizing' and broadcasting the concept in the nineteenth century.

We will return to the origins and meaning of the term 'Sant tradition' in the
next section. Here we outline the basic scholarly positions. As Schomer notes,
McLeod is a proponent of the existence of a 'Sant tradition'. Moreover, as the
foremost Western scholar of Sikhism, he was the chief popularizer[1] of the position
that Guru Nanak can be considered a 'Sant', and therefore his work merits particular
attention. In his original work on the subject (McLeod, 1968), he states:

> The pattern evolved by Guru Nanak is a reworking of the Sant
> synthesis, one which does not depart from Sant sources as far as its
> fundamental components are concerned. (p. 161)

We will discuss McLeod's position in more detail in the next two sections. Here,
however, we note how he restates his case almost thirty years later (McLeod, 1997):

> Must we conclude that Nanak was a Sant?

> For devout Sikhs the answer must be a firm no. For them Nanak
> received direct enlightenment from Akal Purakh and, as the direct
> mediator of the divine message of liberation, there can be no
> possibility of antecedents....

> Others, however, do not share that commitment and are required to
> give a different answer....If it is a strictly neutral question of
> antecedents and influences, the answer must be in the affirmative.
> Because he represents the essential concerns of the Sants, it
> follows that Guru Nanak must be located within the Sant tradition.
> (pp. 101-102)

In the period between his two appraisals, McLeod's views had, of course, been
challenged by many 'devout Sikhs'. His response is to frame any disagreement with
him as one of 'belief vs. scholarship'. The believers do not use scholarly

methodology, and therefore their position is not supported by 'neutral' facts. Here we seek to challenge McLeod's constructed opposition. Certainly many 'devout Sikhs', while being diametrically opposed to McLeod's analysis and conclusions, would agree with him that scholarship and belief are incompatible. But that position is as problematical as McLeod's. McLeod seems to imply that a scholar cannot be devout; the devout explicitly assert that scholarly enquiry is antithetical to devotion. For both sides, a 'believing scholar' seems to be an oxymoron, at least for a particular range of inquiry. This puts a Sikh who wants to examine such issues in an intolerable position[2], where he or she is either in danger of being dismissed as a scholar, or as a believer.

Grewal (1998) has written a whole book on precisely the problem illustrated by the example of the question, 'Was Guru Nanak a 'Sant'?' The title, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*, suggests that it is not a simple question of fact versus belief, as McLeod would have it. Yet on the point of Guru Nanak as a 'Sant', Grewal seems to draw similar lines. He provides a detailed comparison of McLeod's analysis with that of Daljeet Singh, who argues against the view that Guru Nanak was a 'Sant', based on his reading of the ideas and implicit or explicit guides for social practice found in Guru Nanak's writings. Grewal concludes as follows:

> McLeod ... does not attach much importance to the verses which are generally quoted in support of the revelatory status of his utterances. Daljeet Singh underlines the uniqueness of Guru Nanak's ideology; McLeod attaches importance to antecedents for his ideas in the context of his times. (p. 146)

> McLeod virtually excludes God from his view of the universe. Daljeet Singh places God at the centre of the universe....McLeod approaches religion as a historian. Daljeet Singh approaches history as a theologian. Paradoxically, their contrast forbids a choice in favour of one to the exclusion of the other because their positions are complementary. (p. 147)

This is subtler than McLeod's own position, because the contrast drawn is between the historian and the theologian, rather than scholar and believer. Yet we will argue in this paper that Grewal does not go far enough in his analysis. 'The *nirguna sampradaya* ['Sant' tradition] of McLeod's conception' (Grewal, 1998, p. 147) is a construct that does not necessarily match with that of other scholars, who approach these issues with methodologies and training no different than McLeod's.

We shall make this argument precisely by examining the statements and analysis of various scholars, including those who are quoted by McLeod as sources. In our view, this examination is overdue. The reasons for this may be adduced: the infancy of this field of study, the counterproductive effect of shrill attacks on

McLeod's genuine scholarship, and McLeod's strong reputation as a Western pioneer and expert on the study of Sikhs. We do not question this reputation, but scholarly inquiry is precisely meant to transcend reliance on what one person says - one of the dangers that arises in such inquiry is when assertions are repeated uncritically.

Finally, our analysis is not restricted to McLeod's work, since we critically examine what several other Western scholars have written. This aspect has broader significance, since these scholars typically rely on McLeod for situating Guru Nanak as a 'Sant', but provide their own original analyses and interpretations of the 'Sant tradition'. The differences in these interpretations are illuminating in terms of understanding the process of scholarly inquiry. Ultimately, we shall argue, they lead one to question the category itself.

Before we turn to our main line of argument, it is useful to relate our approach to the broader academic writing on the 'insider/outsider' debate in the study of religion. McCutcheon (1999) provides a comprehensive survey and collection of analyses of this debate. He identifies four theoretical approaches to the general problem of understanding and analyzing human behavior, the problem of getting inside another person's skin. The first approach says that this can and should be done, through tools that:

> allow researchers to enter into the experiences and meanings of
> another, to access the private moments of human perception, thereby
> enabling one to bridge the gulf between subject and object...Such
> empathy allows the researcher to develop...a deep understanding of
> the actors' intentions and meanings. (McCutcheon, p. 3)

A second approach judges the 'desires of the other to be opaque to the researcher' (*ibid.* p. 4). The methodological emphasis then shifts away from non-critical, empathetic descriptions of behavior to explaining and predicting human behavior using tools similar to the natural sciences. Naturalism and reductionism are two labels associated with this approach, and it is clearly the closest description of the tack taken by scholars such as McLeod. In this view, the understanding of insiders is limited by incomplete information, unlike the understanding of the outsider scholar.

A third option attempts to adopt an intermediate position between the first two. McCutcheon terms this 'methodological agnosticism'. While both the empathetic and the explanatory observer adopt different privileged positions of supposed certainty, the agnostic avoids 'arbitrating and evaluating' in favor of 'describing, cataloging, and comparing' various claims in a 'neutral' manner.

The final approach rejects the possibility of neutrality, and focuses on the reflexivity of scholarship. In this view, all scholarship has an autobiographical element. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) famously elucidates this case in the

context of European scholarship on Islam.[3]   More generally, even 'objective' scholars bring their personalities and biases to their work.

Where does the methodological approach of this paper fit in with the above taxonomy? McLeod, and to some extent Grewal, may be viewed as empiricists who strongly support a methodology of naturalism. They are very firmly in the tradition of David Hume, in his *The Natural History of Religion* (1755). Many of the other scholars we quote below fit more or less into this approach, though there are varying shades of the other three views in several of the scholars' writings. McLeod is categorical in dismissing insider views (those of 'believers') as less than scholarly, though some might simply categorize them as taking a different methodological approach. The latter appears to be Grewal's perspective. Our view in this paper is substantially different.

We attempt to make the case that, accepting the empirical approach to the greatest extent possible, the analysis of McLeod and others falls short on its own terms of reference. Furthermore, scholars who uncritically quote McLeod compound this methodological shortcoming. Hence, to a large extent we seek to sidestep the broader insider/outsider debate entirely, by adopting the 'objective outsider' position as much as possible. In our view, doing so provides the clearest and most useful perspective on the status of the answers to the central questions posed here.

At the same time, taking an empirical or naturalistic perspective does not necessarily imply total rejection of other approaches. In fact, we are more conscious than most of the writers on this topic of the problem of reflexivity, particularly with respect to some of the key sources used. The criticism of Sikh writers as non-scholarly believers, while the constructs of writers such as Barthwal and Chaturvedi are accepted as relatively objective, displays a striking inconsistency. The Orientalist problem is more general than just one of Westerners writing on the East!

III   What is a 'Sant'?

We answer the question that heads this section from several perspectives, looking first at the basic construct of the historical 'Sant tradition' by Indian and Western scholars, then its relationship to the broader currents of medieval Bhakti and the concurrent Sufi tradition. We then examine the transformations in meaning attached to the term 'Sant', and finally tie together and appraise these different perspectives.

The 'Sant tradition' as construct

Mark Juergensmeyer (1987) provides a summary of the 'central Sant motifs', based on the work of P. D. Barthwal (1936). Barthwal is acknowledged as a pioneer in attempting to identify 'the major themes of Kabir, Nanak, Dadu and others of the *'nirguna* school', whose effort 'has not been superseded'. Briefly, these themes are:

1. The Absolute as *Nirguna*

2. The Interior Path of Spirituality

3. The Necessity of a Guru

4. The Fellowship of *Satsang*

Much of Juergensmeyer's elucidation of these themes draws on the modern Radhasoami example, though he also discusses Kabir and Guru Nanak. Certainly, these four broad themes can be found in the teachings of Guru Nanak, and we return to this concordance later in the paper.

Juergensmeyer, while acknowledging a medieval 'Sant tradition', is cautious on two counts: the definitiveness of the idea, and the Radhasoami claim that, 'Radhasoami Mat and Sant Mat are the same thing'. Juergensmeyer lists the Radhasoami genealogy of Sants, and notes the similarities and differences with Barthwal's own list. His assessment is revealing:

> The differences between the lists indicate the imprecision of the term. Are such revered figures as Sur Das, Tulsi Das, and Ravi Das to be regarded as Sants or not? It depends upon one's starting point and one's standard. *If Kabir, Nanak and Dadu set the standard*, and that standard is devotion to a formless divinity (nirguna) rather than to one with definable attributes (saguna), Ravi Das is near their number, and Tulsi Das and Sur Das are progressively less so. *This suggests, perhaps, that there is a Sant - or rather* nirguna - *dimension to many medieval Hindi religious poets, rather than a specific, separate lineage of* nirguna *Sants.* (pp. 336-337, emphases added).

In the end, though, Juergensmeyer accepts the construct, albeit with caveats on the antecedents and analytical sharpness of the construct:

> Yet the idea there are Sants, a Sant tradition, and specifically Sant teachings (*sant mat*) persists. *It is obviously to the benefit of movements such as the Radhasoami which rely upon connections to the Sant tradition for their legitimacy that such a tradition in fact existed. Indeed, there is some evidence that the term* sant mat *originated in movements that immediately preceded the origins of Radhasoami in the mid-nineteenth century, and that the concept was crystallized and broadcast by the Radhasoami movement itself.* But Radhasoami certainly did not create Kabir, Nanak, Dadu or Ravi Das....there are similarities among their teachings. The attempts to collect together the Sant writings is itself an important facet of the tradition, going back as far as the sacred Sant anthologies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries - the *Granth Sahib* of the Sikhs

and the *Sarvangi* of the Dadu-panthis - and continuing to the present century with the attempts by Radhasoamis and scholars of literature to present syntheses of Sant ideas....There is something there. Call it *sant mat*, the Sant tradition, the *nirguna* school - a common *albeit tenuous and sometimes fuzzy thread exists* and ties the major figures together. (p. 337, emphases added.)

Note that Juergensmeyer accepts Guru Nanak as a standard-setter of this fuzzy 'Sant tradition', and this, along with the inclusion of the verses of other Sants, makes the Guru Granth Sahib of the Sikhs a sacred Sant anthology. We shall further examine these assumptions below, and in Section IV.

Whereas Juergensmeyer accepts a fuzzy Sant tradition (with Guru Nanak firmly in it), McLeod (1968) is much more certain of the clarity of the construct:

The Sant tradition was essentially a synthesis of the three principal dissenting movements, a compound of elements drawn mainly from Vaisnava bhakti and the hatha-yoga of the Nath yogis, with a marginal contribution from Sufism. (p. 152)

McLeod is also categorical in tracing a historical evolution of the tradition:

[B]hakti elements provided the principal contribution to the Sant synthesis, particularly during the earlier stages of its development. Traces of Nath influence are by no means absent during these earlier stages, but nor are they prominent and in some cases they may represent subsequent additions. It is not until the time of Kabir that Nath concepts assume a significant role. In the thought of Kabir such concepts are both prominent and integral, and *it is accordingly at this point that we encounter the developed synthesis.* (pp. 152-153, emphasis added).

McLeod thus clearly asserts that Kabir is a seminal figure in the 'Sant tradition'. However, he continues with his historical picture in a slightly different manner:

The first of the great Sants was Namdev (A.D. 1270-1350) who lived in Maharashtra and whose name is closely linked with the Varkari sect of Pandharpur. The Varkari sect was well within the bhakti tradition and its worship centred on the famous idol of Vitthal which is located in Pandharpur. Elements of traditional Vaisnava bhakti are evident in Namdev's work, but his primary emphases are clearly in accord with Sant concepts. His influence extended into northern India as a result of his Hindi works and possibly as a result also of an extended visit to the Panjab. (pp. 153-154)

Here we may note that, in this construction, McLeod has already distinguished the two Sant traditions that are acknowledged by scholars:

> The North India tradition should not be confused with the Varkari sect of Pandharpur in Maharashtra, the exponents of which have been commonly referred to as sants. It seems highly probable, however, that Namdev provides a direct link between the two Sant traditions. (p. 151, footnote 2.)

McLeod next places Raidas [or Ravidas], as the 'second of the important Sants', who chronologically follows Kabir, but whose 'work corresponds more closely to that of Namdev', before discussing Kabir in detail:

> With Kabir the Sant tradition moves into a more complicated phase. (p. 155)

> The basis of Kabir's belief was not, as has been commonly supposed, Vaisnava bhakti or Sufism, but tantric yoga. (p. 156)

> The works of Kabir represent the highly personal record of an individual experience, but they nevertheless place him well within the framework of Sant beliefs. (p. 157)

Almost thirty years later, McLeod (1997) summarizes his initial positions with similar certainty, taking the construct as well-established, 'though little known among Western scholars' (p. 89):

> The Sant tradition of northern India can be viewed both as a sadhan, or method of spiritual liberation, and as a form of social protest. Both elements are inextricably linked. Most of the tradition's leading exponents....[reject] the relevance of caste status in matters pertaining to the soul's deliverance from the bondage of transmigration. (p. 91)

> This [devotional] discipline was emphatically and exclusively interior, at least as preached by the more significant of the Sants. (p. 91)

In contrast to McLeod's certainty, Vaudeville, the best-known Western scholar of Kabir, and the source for some of McLeod's own analysis, is more cautious. In writing on one of the Maharashtrian 'Sants', (Vaudeville, 1996) she begins her piece by saying:

> *Sant mat* (the teachings of the sants) and *sant parampara* (the tradition of the sants) are modern concepts. *The term* sant *actually has no precise meaning.* Parashuram Chaturvedi defines a sant as

one who observes *satya* (truth) or *suddha astiva* (a pure way of being). The characteristic quality of a sant is often said to be *ekarasa*, the state of being immersed in one emotion, i.e. *bhakti*....But such a definition only refers to a moral ideal - not to membership in any particular group....Historically, however, the term sant has came to refer to the early non-sectarian poet-saints of northern India and Maharashtra... (p. 241, emphasis added)

In writing more broadly on the 'Sant Mat' (Vaudeville, 1987), she is equally circumspect:

Mostly Hindu, some of them Muslim-born, the Sants cannot be easily classified from a metaphysical or religious point of view. (p. 21)

The Sants are non-sectarian and do not hold a body of doctrine in common. (p. 22)

Having admitted these qualifications, however, Vaudeville does accept the category:

Yet ... they have certain characteristics in common which mark them as distinct from 'learned' poets on the one hand and sectarian religious poets on the other. (p. 21)

Vaudeville then applies the category particularly in situating Kabir, her subject of expertise, and the perceived leader of the northern Sants. What emerges from her view of the 'Sant tradition' is again the fuzziness of the category:

The monistic view of salvation as a total merging of the finite soul into the One Being, however, does not represent the prevailing view of the Sant poets as a whole. Kabir himself, the most *nirguni* of them all, is far from being consistent in this matter. (p. 27)

With the exception of Kabir himself, who sometimes refers to the ultimate State or Reality as 'the Void' (*sunya*), a view inherited from Tantric Buddhism, the prevailing attitude of the Sants is monotheistic. (p. 28)

In the final analysis, though, Vaudeville's view of the Sant tradition's building blocks is close to that of McLeod:

The Sant *sadhana* or the Sant ideal of sanctity therefore may be viewed as a subtle blending of two main traditions of Hindu mysticism, apparently antagonistic to each other: Vaishnava bhakti and an esoteric Tantric tradition, whose most popular representatives are Gorakhnath and the Nath Yogis, often referred to by Kabir and his followers. (p. 36)

Thus Vaudeville accepts the 'Sant tradition' construct, while recognizing its limitations more than does McLeod. This cautious acceptance seems to be the summary position of other scholars:

> Considering the vast popularity of the Sant movement, the number of important figures which it has produced, and the lives of countless devotees (both Hindu and Muslim) whom it affected, one must marvel that so little can be said with assurance about the origin, early development and geographical provenance of the Sants. (Lawrence, 1987, p. 359)

> Sharing almost as few conventions with each other as with the adherents of the orthodoxies they sometimes mocked, the North Indian Sants appear more as a diverse collection of spiritual personalities than as a distinct religious tradition. Such a tradition was, nevertheless, recognized by the Sants themselves (Gold, 1987, p. 305) ...they often make specific references to other Sants. (ibid., p. 307)

> The Sant tradition of the North presents a more fragmented picture. Instead of a single panth there are many, each with its separate history going back to a particular founding figure....What binds the North Indian Sants together is neither an historical connection nor an institutional focus, but the similarity in their teachings. That they themselves perceived this commonality is clear from the numerous references in their poetry to both 'the Sants' as a spiritual fellowship and to specific historical Sants. (Schomer, 1987a, p. 4)

An important idea in these statements is that the commonality of the Sants was recognized by them: certainly there are specific references in Kabir to Namdev, in Dhanna to Kabir, Raidas and Namdev, and so on. However, the references to 'the Sants' as a spiritual fellowship seem to be a more problematic interpretation. We shall return to these issues in discussing the various meanings of 'sant', and in the next section, where we specifically consider Guru Nanak's position.

Sants, Bhakts, and Sufis

Some of the difficulties with the construct of the 'Sant tradition' emerge when one explores its connections to the wider Bhakti movement and the parallel Islamic Sufi tradition. Again, scholars differ on these matters, though there is broad agreement in some respects, particularly the broad connections to Vaishnava and Nath traditions. There is greater difference on the influence of Sufism.

To examine the connections among concepts, we must first describe Bhakti and Sufism. We begin with Bhakti. McLeod (1968) gives the following succinct characterization:

> For bhakti the essential religious response was love, and in Vaisnava bhakti this love was directed to one of the *avatars* of Visnu. (p. 151)

Grewal (1969) offers the following additional observations:

> Though the *bhakti* cult cannot be regarded as a break from older Vaishnavism, the introduction of some new elements and certain differences of emphases distinguish the new cult from the older system of belief and practice....However, the *bhakti* movement cannot be said to have come into its own before we come upon a development in which the path of *bhakti* is emphasized to the exclusion of the path of *jnana* (knowledge) or the path of *karma* (action). (p. 120)

> But whereas his [Ramanuja's] *bhakti* was directed towards Vishnu as Narayana, in the later *bhakti* cult it is the human incarnation of Vishnu as Krishna or Rama which becomes the object of *bhakti*. (p. 122)

> Important differences are glossed over by using the general label of *bhakti* on the basis of superficial similarities. A more sophisticated, and also more valid, way of keeping the label has been to distinguish between the *saguna* and *nirguna* 'schools' of *bhakti*. Dealing with the Vaishnav *bhakti* of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, one is invariably confronted by the first 'school'. But to identify the *nirguna* school of Vaishnava *bhakti* is not easy.

> At any rate, all those who did not belong to the *saguna* school were not necessarily the exponents of Vaishnav *bhakti*. (pp. 125-126)

Rawlinson (1987) provides a general conceptual framework for Bhakti along two dimensions, image and path. He offers the following structural scheme (adapted from Rawlinson, 1987, p. 54):

	LOVE Stress on relationship with God	MEDITATION Stress on God as a state of being
UNSTRUCTURED PATHS	ECSTATIC God as Beloved World from God's view: • grace • spontaneity	NIRGUNA God as *lila* God and the soul are identical World from God's view: • effortlessness • purposelessness
STRUCTURED PATHS	NUMINOUS Obedience to the Lord Everything is God's doing God as King Relationship always separate; distance, awe, fear World from man's view • effort • purpose	SAGUNA Disciplined practice The Universe as God's attribute God as Ordainer The soul is a mode of the Lord World from man's view • *samucchaya* • *prapatti*

The idea of '*nirguna* bhakti' becomes an important one, albeit a recent innovation, for mapping the Sant tradition, and distinguishing it from Vaishnava Bhakti:

> The concept of '*nirguna bhakti*' as a distinct devotional mode contrasting with '*saguna bhakti*', and of the Sants constituting a separate devotional tradition, is relatively new. (Schomer, 1987a, p. 3)

> In Indian tradition, *sant mat* has been equated with '*nirguna* bhakti'...This notion of the absolute as *nirguna* coincides with the Upanishadic concept of the Brahman-Atman and the *advaita* (monistic) interpretation of the Vedantic tradition....The northern Sants, led by Kabir, mostly seem to adopt this stance...(Vaudeville, 1987, p. 26)

However, the concept of '*nirguna* bhakti' is itself problematic:

> Actually, if we admit that there can be no real bhakti...without some distinction between the Lord (Bhagvan) and the devotee (bhakta), the very notion of '*nirguna* bhakti' seems to be a contradiction in terms. (Vaudeville, 1987, p. 27)

> For *nirguna* bhakti is an Irish bull...It is a concoction of monistic scholars, artificially imposed upon Sant traditions. Indeed, one might even go farther and say that the idea of a *nirguna* deity itself was imposed by monistic Hindu philosophers upon a *saguna* bhakti tradition that managed, somehow, to absorb it. (O'Flaherty, 1987, p. 46)

McLeod avoids some of the semantic difficulty raised by Vaudeville by dispensing with the term 'bhakti' in describing the 'northern Sant tradition':

> The term [Sant] is not used as a group or sectarian appellation until much later [than Kabir]. It is to some extent an unsuitable designation, for it involves the risk of confusion with the Varakari sect. The alternative appellation, *Nirguna Sampradaya*, or *Nirguna* tradition, avoids the risk of confusion in this respect, but the term *nirguna* ('attributeless') is not a wholly accurate description of the Sants' understanding of the nature of God, except insofar as they explicitly rejected its antithesis, the *saguna* concept of divine *avatars*. (McLeod, 1968, p. 245).

In fact, the suitability of the *nirguna* appellation for 'Sants' is perhaps even less than McLeod suggests:

> According to Indian literary tradition, the Sants are supposed to be adepts of the *nirguna* aspect and the Vaishnavas adepts of the *saguna* aspect of the supreme Being. In practice, however, it is difficult to draw a hard and fast line between the two groups, at least up to the beginning of the sixteenth century , which saw the development of the two main modern Krishnaite sects in northern India...(Vaudeville, 1987, p. 37)

> ...the *nirguna* philosophy is expounded at great length from time to time in the Puranas,...they are manipulated by Brahmans to inculcate people with ideas that Brahmans think people should have. The Sants, on the other hand, *choose* to mix *nirguna* and *saguna*; theirs is a free choice, as they have no canon or priesthood. (O'Flaherty, 1987, p. 49-50)

> The relevance of this [model of the bhakti tradition] to the Sant tradition is two-fold. First, *this tradition partakes of all four dimensions of bhakti*; in other words, it is a rich tradition. Second, the four traditions that preceded and, from the historical point of view, helped to form the Sant tradition - namely, Vaishnavism,

> Shaivism, Tantra and Sufism - are also rich traditions. (Rawlinson, p. 58, emphasis added)

In fact, Rawlinson, besides challenging McLeod's simple characterization of the 'Sant tradition', also questions the neat picture of evolution and synthesis painted by McLeod (and sometimes by Vaudeville):

> Looked at purely from the point of view of its religious dimensions, the Sant tradition is not so different from the other four traditions we have mentioned. The real difference is that these four traditions have developed a considerable variety of peripheral trappings which the Sants assiduously reject. It is therefore misleading to see the Sants as syncretists - i.e. as deliberately fusing diverse traditions - or as being unconsciously influenced by those traditions and producing a distinctive combination by a sort of religious genius analogous to artistic genius. The traditions that preceded the Sants were their raw materials, but the guiding force that enabled them to unite the disparate terminologies and teachings was an understanding of the dimensions of bhakti based on their personal experience. (Rawlinson, p. 58)

Finally, Vaudeville (1987) draws out important ethical commonalities between the Sants and Vaishnavas:

> If we give priority to Kabir and the northern Sants...we must admit that the hard core of Sant teaching is not assimilable by true Vaishnavas, even by the most liberal among them. This is true on the doctrinal or metaphysical plane, but on that plane only. In their religious sensibility, as well as in their ethical views, Sants and Vaishnava remain very close to each other....They share a pessimistic view of mundane life and of family ties...They cordially despise and fear women...(p. 38)

Our conclusion is that the picture of the 'Sant tradition' is much more complex than some scholars would wish. It is not a fairly homogeneous, well-defined category that fits neatly into a more diverse, broader, Bhakti tradition. The reality is closer to Juergensmeyer's depiction of a fuzzy and tenuous common thread, described at the beginning of this section. A further aspect of complexity emerges when one examines Sufism in relation to the Sants.

Grewal (1969) provides some background on the Sufis in the time of Guru Nanak:

> However, the most important forms of Muslim religious life in the Punjab, as elsewhere by this time, were embodied in the beliefs and practices of the *Sufis*, the mystics of Islam. (p. 71)

> Already before the mid-sixteenth century the influence of the *Sufis* had penetrated nearly all strata of Indo-Muslim society. (p. 72)

> But the idea of union with God as the mystic's goal, with the associated ideas of *fana* (annihilation to self) and *baqa* (subsistence in God), was never discarded by any *Sufi* worth the name. (p. 84)

> The Sufis believed that theirs were the true ethics of Islam. They inculcated a whole-hearted devotion to God alone. Devotion or piety in women was as much acceptable as in men. (p. 103)

McLeod is categorical in asserting that Sufism had a marginal impact on the Sants.

> Sufi influence may also have contributed to the development of Sant doctrine, though if this is indeed the case its results are much harder to detect in the terminology of the Sants than are features which derive from Vaishnava and Nath sources. (McLeod, 1997, p. 93)

However, this is not the only scholarly view:

> McLeod has recently adopted an extreme position...he minimizes the influence of Sufi thought on the emergent Sants....But the accumulation of such affinities [of thought], especially in a time period markedly different from the period preceding it, cannot be lightly dismissed. Indeed, the conceptual overlap between Sant and Sufi poetry is so pervasive that it is difficult to agree with McLeod that 'Muslim beliefs, both Sufi and orthodox, had at most a marginal effect.' Vaudeville, by contrast, has noted that 'Sufi preachings had already spread all over Northern India in Kabir's... time, and ...Sufi mysticism had impregnated the religious sensibility of the elite as well as the whole composite culture of the time.' (Lawrence, 1987, pp. 367-368)

> While McLeod goes to great lengths to show that concepts of unity, interiority and mystical ascent from the Nath tradition combined with the practice of loving devotion in the Vaishnava community to produce the Sant synthesis of interior devotion to a formless, immanent, non-incarnated God, i.e., *nirguna* bhakti, it is evident that both elements were already present in, and widely known through, the Sufi movement of northern India. (Lawrence, p. 368)

In the context of this cross-fertilization, and the issue of language, Grewal notes:

> According to Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus, the Jogis related the truths
> of gnosis only in a different 'language' from that of the *Sufis*. (1969,
> P. 102)

Lawrence (1987) also notes that language is not a definite indicator of antecedents
(see Section IV for more detail). He goes on to describe linguistic parallels between
Sants and Sufis, and then notes:

> But the major thematic equivalence between Sants and Sufis
> concerns the love relationship. It is fundamental to both groups...the
> theme of love as intense suffering is not common to all religious
> traditions of the subcontinent: it is absent from the Nath tradition,
> and cannot be traced in Vaishnava bhakti poetry prior to the Sant
> movement. (p. 369)

Vaudeville (1987) agrees with Lawrence on this important point:

> If love symbolism, especially on the viraha [separation] theme finds
> its roots in Hindu tradition, more precisely in the tradition of folk
> songs, the place given by Kabir and his followers to the viraha then,
> with its suggestion of martyrdom, is in keeping with the great Sufi
> tradition, very much alive in India as the time of Kabir. (p. 31)

> The resemblance is even more striking in the description of the
> torments of the soul yearning for union with god. There is hardly
> any doubt that in this Kabir was influenced by Indo-Persian poetry.
> (p. 31, footnote 12)

These scholars therefore suggest once more that the 'Sant tradition' is a more
complicated and fuzzier beast than McLeod, in particular, is willing to admit.
Further complications arise when one examines the usages of the term 'Sant',
including its capitalization as a descriptor of a particular tradition. We turn to this
next.

Altered meanings

We have earlier given Vaudeville's comment on the meaning of *'sant'*, including
Chaturvedi's definition. Schomer (1987a) provides a similar perspective:

> The difficulty begins with the term *sant* itself, which has several
> overlapping usages. Derived from Sanskrit, its root meaning is...a
> person who has achieved a state of spiritual enlightenment or

mystical self-realization; by extension it is also used to refer to all those who sincerely seek enlightenment. ...'*sant*' has also taken on the more general ethical meaning of the 'good person' whose life is a spiritual and moral exemplar, and is therefore found attached to a wide variety of gurus, 'holy men' and other religious teachers. (pp. 2-3)

McLeod (1987) recognizes the importance and commonness of this usage of '*sant*':

For the [Sikh] Gurus, the term '*sant*' thus designates any seeker after truth and salvation who pursues his objective by means of a particular range of activities....In the works of the Gurus, '*sikh*' and '*sant*' are normally interchangeable, and the meaning which they express is also covered by several other terms [*gurmukh, sadh, sadhu, bhagat, sevak, gursikh*]. (p. 255)

However, McLeod muddies the waters by simultaneously asserting that:

When he [Guru Nanak] uses it (and he does so with considerable frequency) he employs it in a sense corresponding precisely with the usage and understanding of the wider *parampara.*

Bhat re santa jana ki renu
Santa sabha guru paiai mukti padarathu dhenu

Be as the dust beneath the feet of Sants, brother
It is in an assembly of Sants that one finds the Guru; like the *kamadhenu*, [a gathering of Sants] confers the blessing of salvation

The Sant is thus identified as the pious devotee, he who in consort with others of like mind and commitment gathers in the *satsang* to sing the praises of God and seek the guidance of the eternal Guru within. (p. 254)

Here McLeod repeatedly capitalizes '*sant*' where it is completely unjustified. Indeed, McLeod has himself agreed with all scholars that the idea of a 'Sant tradition' is a much later construct. Furthermore, the implication of an organized group meeting implied in McLeod's presentation is completely out of place with the general sense of such verses. McLeod is thus subtly using language to support his general line of reasoning on the Sant tradition. McLeod repeats this unfortunate ploy with other verses in the same article.

A similar problem mars McLeod's discussion of the use of the term '*bhagat*' in the *Adi Granth*[4]:

> Guru Arjan...chose it as the term to be used when designating works
> which were not by one of the Gurus. These were hymns attributed to
> people *whom most would probably call Sants*, notably Kabir,
> Namdev, and Ravidas. (p. 255, emphasis added)

This is a remarkable statement, because it is completely ahistorical: a nineteenth
century construct is being applied to a sixteenth century context. While other
scholars of the 'Sants' avoid these pitfalls, it is worthwhile to note that members of
the 'Sant tradition' do refer to others perceived to be in the same tradition. Guru
Nanak, however, does not fall into that category, and we shall return to this issue in
Section IV.

McLeod's main concern in the article quoted above is really to describe the
modern usage of the term 'Sant' in Punjab. Here he provides some insight, though
Juergensmeyer's (1987) analysis of the Radhasoami usage of the term is probably
more relevant here than McLeod seems to acknowledge. It is the nineteenth century
Radhasoami revival (or perhaps creation) of the *'sant mat'* that lies behind the
modern Punjabi usage, which is somewhere between the 'special good person'
(capitalized) and the general seeker after truth (uncapitalized), but closer to the
former, although in a somewhat debased form. McLeod's linguistic effort therefore
fails to convince. This is important to realize, because several other scholars seem
to have relied on McLeod's analysis on points such as this.

Appraisal

Our appraisal of the 'Sant tradition' is a cautious one at this juncture. The chief
scholarly (as opposed to political - an issue we postpone till the paper's conclusion)
motivation for defining such a tradition is greater clarity of understanding. Bhakti is
much too broad a category, in this view, and a sharper subset of devotional figures
can be identified. The problem, of course, is that sharpness requires more criteria,
and that makes it harder for the grouping to hold together as a conceptual construct.
If we recall Barthwal's four main themes, as summarized by Juergensmeyer
(absolute as *nirguna*, interior path, necessity of guru and fellowship of *satsang*),
only the first stands out as a truly distinguishing feature from the broader Bhakti
tradition, with the others playing supporting roles. However, the 'Sant tradition' is
not just *nirguna* bhakti, as we have discussed. It seems to draw on Nath and Sufi
traditions (the latter more than McLeod is willing to acknowledge, but his position
on this does appear 'extreme') more than does the Bhakti tradition in general.
However, it does not seem to be a conscious or homogeneous synthesis, as McLeod
wishes to claim. All the other scholars on this subject, while accepting the
construct, acknowledge in varying degrees its fuzziness. Like the Bhakti tradition
itself, the modern appellation 'Sant tradition' applied to religious currents of

medieval northern India, remains imprecise, and somewhat problematic (as perhaps all such appellations must).

A key issue to bear in mind is that the construct is one that emerges from the nineteenth century or later. 'Sants' do refer to other 'Sants' in their work, but they do not go beyond general respect and recognition of those with similar expressions of spirituality. The medieval 'Sants' do not create organized groupings, and the attempt to read this into their writings by devices such as capitalization of '*sant*' in translations is illogical at best. The characterization that the Sikh Adi Granth is also self-consciously a 'Sant' collection suffers from the same problem of taking the nineteenth century construct and imposing it on a very different sixteenth century context. Hence the case that the 'Sant tradition' is anything more than a modern academic construct remains doubtful.

IV   Was Guru Nanak a 'Sant'?

Some of the problems with the construct of the 'Sant tradition' become apparent when one critically examines a commonly accepted idea, that Guru Nanak was a 'Sant'. While Barthwal and Chaturvedi, no doubt building on Radhasoami and pre-Radhasoami characterizations, confidently put Guru Nanak in this category, it is McLeod who has made the case most forcefully. The result is that most non-Sikh scholars take the case as proven, and the categorization for granted. Sikh scholars who have questioned this categorization are essentially dismissed by McLeod as non-scholarly. The position of Guru Nanak in the 'Sant tradition' indeed becomes so firm in this view that he helps set the standard for judging the inclusion of others (Juergensmeyer, *op cit.*).

McLeod's position is characteristically clear and forthright:

> The system developed by Guru Nanak is essentially a reworking of the Sant pattern, a reinterpretation which compounded experience and profound insight with a quality of coherence and a power of effective expression. (McLeod, 1968, p. 151)

At the same time, McLeod is ungrudging in recognizing the distinctiveness of Guru Nanak's teachings at another level:

> Plainly there is much that is profoundly original in the hymns we find recorded under his [Guru Nanak's] distinctive symbol in the Adi Granth. There is in them an integrated and coherent system no other Sant has produced; there is a clarity no other Sant has equalled; and there is a beauty no other Sant has matched.

This kind of qualification leads one to reexamine from a scholarly perspective the basic premise of Guru Nanak's membership in the 'Sant' category. We do so by examining theology, language and ethics in turn.

Theology

The theological case for Guru Nanak as a 'Sant' is built on the four themes already mentioned in Section III. McLeod (1968) provides a detailed analysis of the teachings of Guru Nanak. Here we draw out some of the 'Sant' influences or commonalities that McLeod identifies.

On the nature of God:

> As in the case of Kabir monistic language does indeed occur, but the structure of monistic thought can provide no place for Guru Nanak's concept of God. (p. 165)

> As in the works of Kabir this emphasis upon the unity of God emerges in the names which Guru Nanak uses. (p. 166)

> For Guru Nanak, as for Namdev, Kabir, Raidas, and other Sants, there is certainly a revelation of God, partial no doubt but commensurate with the understanding and experience of man and accordingly sufficient for salvation. (pp. 173-174)

> Wherever I look there I see Thy light...They are familiar words, both in the works of Guru Nanak and in those of the Sants who preceded him. (p. 174)

> ...Guru Nanak, in common with other Sants, goes further. The Nirankar who is immanent in all creation is specifically immanent in one particular part of creation...God who dwells in all creation has His particular abode within the human heart. (pp. 174-175)

On the nature of humans:

> The word *man* [pronounced 'mun' as in 'mundane'] as used by Guru Nanak has no satisfactory English translation. It is usually rendered 'mind', but the translation is unsatisfactory as the English word lacks the breadth of meaning and association which *man* possesses in Sant literature and Sikh scripture. (p. 178)

> It comes much closer to the Yoga notion of the *manas* as 'the inner sense'. Even here, however, the marked divergence from Yoga as a developed and integrated philosophy makes comparison risky,

although there seems to be no doubt that in this, as in so much else, the Sant concept has roots in Nath doctrine. (p. 179)

In laying this stress upon the role of *man* Guru Nanak stands within a well-developed tradition.   Dr. Vaudeville has described the importance which the *man* held for the Siddhs and the Naths. (p. 180)

Guru Nanak's understanding of the *man* is essentially that of Kabir. (p. 181)

In unregenerate man the dominant impulse is that of haumai, a concept which is to be found in the works of Kabir and those of other Sants, but which receives appreciably more emphasis in those of Guru Nanak. (p. 182)

On divine self-expression:

It is when we proceed from this point to inquire precisely how God communicates with man that we encounter the specific contribution of Guru Nanak, a contribution which offers the most significant example of his positive originality.   This is not to imply that his work is wholly original, for this can never be the case...There may have been earlier Sants who had arrived at similar conclusions concerning the medium of divine communication. In many there is silence at this point...(p. 189)

For Guru Nanak, as for Kabir, the Word of the *Satguru* is the true revelation...(p. 190)

Sabad is one of the terms which evidently descended to Guru Nanak through Sant channels from Nath sources. (p. 191)

The difference between the thought of Guru Nanak and that of Kabir emerges not so much in their understanding of the ultimate experience of union, not so much in their conceptions of the condition of *sahaj*, as in their differing notions of how that condition is to be attained. (pp. 193-194)

It is within the Sant tradition, however, that we encounter a major modification of the traditional doctrine [of the *guru*]...In Guru Nanak's case we must first note the characteristic emphasis upon the absolute necessity of the *Guru*. (p. 197)

On practice:

Guru Nanak...too lived in an environment which set great store by birth, scriptures, ceremonies, and ascetic practices, and like Kabir

and other Sants he inevitably denounced them as entirely alien to true religion. (p. 208)

The rejection of such notions [of caste and impurity of birth] was common among the Sants and was particularly strong in the case of Kabir. (p. 210)

Truth consists, in this respect [of disciplined worldliness], of living in the world yet unaffected by the attractions of the world. It is a common emphasis among the Sants and Guru Nanak uses the conventional figure of the lotus to illustrate it. (p. 211)

It is at this point [loving devotion] that Guru Nanak shares with the Sants a particular debt to Vaisnava bhakti. (p. 213)

The above extracts represent a fairly complete picture of the connections that McLeod draws between the teachings of Guru Nanak and those of the Sants. Taken together, they may be conclusive for many. However, it is when one turns to Guru Nanak's original contributions that doubt can set in. Note that we are not framing the argument in terms of divine revelation. Originality can presumably occur without appealing to that explanation (though McLeod does not seem to believe in total originality at all - see his quote above, from p. 189).

As we have noted, McLeod pinpoints the communication between God and humans as Guru Nanak's most significantly original contribution. Accordingly,

Guru Nanak's concepts of the *Sabad*, the *Nam*, the *Guru*, and the *Hukam* carry us beyond anything that the works of the earlier Sants offer in any explicit form. (p. 161)

...we find in Guru Nanak's doctrine of the divine Order (*Hukam*) and in his emphasis upon divine grace elements which carry him beyond Kabir. (p. 190)

...it is in Guru Nanak's use of this word [*Hukam*] that his development beyond the thought of Kabir and other *bhagats* is most obvious...(p. 191)

The fundamental importance of the *Hukam* in the thought of Guru Nanak is emphasized by its exposition at the very beginning of *Japji*. (p. 200)

McLeod goes on to discuss the concept of *Hukam* in Guru Nanak's teachings. As is indicated by the quotes above, this is the point at which appeals to 'Sant' antecedents fail him - there is no reference to any parallels with Sants in this discussion. McLeod does consider Islamic influence:

> This regularity and this consistency distinguish it from the Islamic
> concept. In Islam the divine Will, if not actually capricious is at least
> 'unpledged', whereas the Hukam of Guru Nanak's usage is definitely
> pledged and dependable. (p. 201)

Here McLeod is using a definition provided to him by 'Canon Kenneth Cragg', who is otherwise unidentified. Hence it might seem that he is too quick to dismiss the Islamic parallel. However, his opinion is shared by Lawrence (1987), who has a deeper knowledge of Islam:

> ....the one term that claims conspicuous attention because of its centrality
> in Guru Nanak's thought, namely, *hukam*, can only be fitted into the Sufi
> technical lexicon by imputing a far-fetched and uncharacteristic emphasis
> to the Perso-Arabic word *hukm*, meaning 'regulation, belief, wisdom'. (p.
> 367)

This fails, however, to clear up the mystery. Lawrence's definition of the Perso-Arabic word as 'regulation' does have the right connotation, rather different from McLeod's own interpretation of the divine Will in Islam, and there can be no question that the word comes from Arabic. Other scholars, such as Grewal (1969), seem to be silent on this point, though Grewal discusses the meaning of the concept in Guru Nanak's teachings at some length. Of course, Grewal does emphasize that 'The concept of *Hukam* is basic to the thought of Guru Nanak.' (p. 245) Thus, we seem to have a central concept in Guru Nanak's doctrine that does not appear to have Sant roots, that is etymologically a borrowing from Islam, but with a distinct meaning. In other words, Guru Nanak is being quite original!

In general tone, also, Guru Nanak seems to depart from Kabir and the other 'Sants'. It is well known that Kabir is quite scornful of much around him in many of his verses - his tone and his language are rough (Vaudeville, 1987, Hess, 1987b). His worldview seems quite different from that of Guru Nanak. The selection from his verses in the Sikh scriptures is somewhat distinct in nature from his overall work, with shades of devotion being more prominent in the Sikh collection (Hess, 1987a).

The idea of a divine Order, the laying out of a method to understand this Order (McLeod, 1968, p. 194), and a generally 'positive' emphasis therefore serve to distinguish Guru Nanak from Kabir and the other 'Sants'. Rather than Guru Nanak being a standard setter for the 'Sant tradition', he begins to emerge more as an outlier, and perhaps even as not a real member of the grouping at all. This view is positively reinforced when one examines Guru Nanak's ethics. Before doing so, we briefly examine the issue of use of language, where commonality with the 'Sants' is used to support the argument that Guru Nanak was a 'Sant'.

Language

Grewal (1969) offers a summary of the view that the language used by Guru Nanak provides a clear connection with the 'Sant tradition':

> This verbal correspondence [between Guru Nanak and Kabir] may best be explained in terms of the *sant-bhasha*, a specialized terminology developed by the *sants* of northern India, which was accessible to both Kabir and Guru Nanak. (p. 127)

It turns out, however, that Grewal is relying on McLeod in this statement. So we are back to a detailed look at McLeod's (1968) statements:

> These beliefs the Sants expressed not in the traditional Sanskrit, but in a language which was closely related to that of the common people to whom they addressed their teachings. Within the tradition and amongst other *sadhus* there evolved a language which, with minor modifications, was used by Sants all over northern India. This language has been called *Sadhukkari*. Its basis was Khari Boli, the dialect spoken around Delhi, and to this were added elements drawn from Old Rajasthani, Apabhramsa, Panjabi, and Persian. (p. 153)

Here McLeod is referencing an older work of Vaudeville, *Kabir Granthavali (Doha)*. Vaudeville herself, however, is much less ready to pin down the language of Kabir or the Sants. At the same time, she is much more explicit in tracing the term *Sadhukkari*, which also turns out to be one person's modern construct.

Here is how Vaudeville (1993) herself views the language issue in the context of Kabir:

> Besides Old Avadhi, the ubiquitous Nath-panthis ...made use of various dialects: especially the Dingal (old Rajasthani) and the Pingal impregnated with Braj-Bhasha. It seems that, in Kabir's time, Dingal was dominant, as the language of the Buddhist Siddhas. On the other hand, before Kabir, many Sufis had made use of the old Hindui dialect, mixed with Panjabi and Arabo-Persian vocabulary. It is certain that Kabir used more than one of these languages, according to the audience and to his own fancy. (p. 113)

> Kabir's own language and the languages in which his 'Sayings' were originally composed have long been a matter of controversy. According to Ahmed Shah...Kabir composed his poetry in the language spoken in his own area, i.e., in Benares and its neighbourhood...For Grierson, the basic language of the Bijak is Old Avadhi. (p. 118)

> Following R.C. Shukla, most Indian scholars have stressed the heterogeneous character of Kabir's language, which seems to borrow freely from a variety of dialects. Shukla, however, draws the conclusion that Kabir's nondescript idiom is essentially based on the idiom used before him by the Nath-panthi Yogis and other itinerant preachers, and he proposed to call it *sadhukkari bhasha*, lit. Sadhu's jargon. (p. 119)

Several points emerge from these observations by Vaudeville: the non-exclusivity of the language to so-called 'Sants', its heterogeneity and regional variation, and the fact that this *pot pourri* of languages and dialects is simply *'sadhukkari'* is, like the 'Sant tradition' itself, a modern academic construct on which there are multiple points of view. The simple certainty that McLeod attempts to convey is thus undermined.

Vaudeville goes on to provide still more varied opinions on Kabir's language from other scholars. She also notes, based on P. Chaturvedi's analysis, that recorded versions of the same composition differ in different collections. She goes on to analyze linguistic differences in Kabir's *pads, dohas* and *sakhis*. Here she notes:

> As to the Rajasthani and Panjabi forms in the *sakhis*, Barthwal, like Shukla, is of the opinion that they reflect 'the language of renunciates' discourse *(sadhukkari bhasha)*, prevalent at the time. Actually the language of Kabir's sakhis resembles the language of the Gorakh-banis...(p. 121)

> Though agreeing with Shukla and Barthwal about the influence of the Nath-panthi language and style on the language of Kabir's *sakhis*, Chaturvedi remarks that many such *sakhis* appear directly influenced by folk-songs and ballads in dohas. (p. 122)

Thus, contrary to McLeod's argument, it is not clear that similarity of language helps pins down Guru Nanak as part of the 'Sant tradition'. Indeed, in addition to the Sufi usage of such language, and its heterogeneity, its very prevalence leads one to question that line of reasoning:

> It may not be too much to presume that the *sant-bani*, like the *bhakti* cult, was in the air in the Punjab of our period. (Grewal, 1969, p. 128)

> ...the spiritual evolution of the latter [the Sants] was almost entirely shaped within a predominantly Hindu-oriented, Hindi speaking environment, no matter how drastic the changes to which that environment was subject in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. And the religious/poetical language of the Sants reflects their environment. (Lawrence, 1987, pp. 368-369)

During the course of the fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries, old Hindui or Khari Boli had become to be recognized as a lingua franca fit for the propagation of popular religious teaching - mostly unorthodox and anti-Brahmanical: one may say that Hindui was the language of the Indian 'Reformation'. (Vaudeville, 1993, pp. 123-124)

We conclude by noting how the Sikh Adi Granth fits into this scheme of language. The conclusion that emerges is that further doubt is cast on language as a tool to locate Guru Nanak in the 'Sant tradition'. There are, of course, similarities, but these are consistent with the wider currency of the language that has already been discussed:

> ...the language used by the Sant poets, whose works are preserved in the [Adi]Granth...are composed in a very similar language. (Vaudeville, 1993, p. 122)

> The language of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, as taught here, is of very mixed character, since it draws upon a variety of local languages and dialects, as well as incorporating a good many archaic forms and words. In these respects, it is entirely typical of the written languages in which the religious literatures of medieval India are mostly recorded....the language has been referred to here as 'the sacred language of the Sikhs', abbreviated to SLS. (Shackle, 1983, Preface, p. ii)

> Although the language of the other saint-poets, such as Kabir and Namdev, whose compositions were included by Guru Arjan in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, is generally very similar in character to that employed by the Sikh Gurus, no special attempt has been made to include a full description of the distinctive local grammatical forms encountered in their verses. (Shackle, 1983, Preface, p. ii)

In particular, Shackle is McLeod's (1997, p. 174) source on the language of the Sikh scriptures, and he is rather obscure in his only comments on the language. If one abandons the notion that the Sikh scriptures are necessarily 'Sant' writings, then one avoids the circular reasoning and puzzlement illustrated in turn in these quotes:

> The attempts to collect together the Sant writings is itself an important facet of the tradition, going back as far as the sacred Sant anthologies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries - the *Granth Sahib* of the Sikhs... (Juergensmeyer, 1987, p. 337)

> It is a striking fact that most medieval texts inspired by non-sectarian Bhagvatism or Vaishnava bhakti do not seem to distinguish between

> the terms *bhakta* (*bhagat*), *sant* and *Vaisnava*. In the Guru Granth of
> the Sikhs, the Sant poets are referred to as *bhagats*...(Vaudeville,
> 1987, p. 37)

Guru Nanak certainly did not refer to any other 'Sants', and the idea that the Adi
Granth was a self-consciously 'Sant' collection seems unsupported.[5]

Ethics

Some of the differences in Guru Nanak's position on practical matters follow from
his different, more positive worldview.   We have quoted Vaudeville's (1987)
summary of the 'Sant' and Vaishnava positions: 'They share a pessimistic view of
mundane life and of family ties...They cordially despise and fear women...(p. 38)'.
This is quite different from Guru Nanak's views on women, as McLeod (1997)
admits:

> Guru Nanak's words carry us well beyond the conventional view of
> his time, or, for that matter, the present time as well. Without a
> woman, man is nothing, so why should she be called weak and why
> should she ever be regarded as unclean? (p. 242)

Similarly, Guru Nanak, while recognizing the snares of family attachments,
'approves of the life of a householder who can cultivate detachment and devotion.'
(Grewal, 1969) While much of Guru Nanak's ethical teaching is incidental to his
central religious message of how humans can connect with God, his work is filled
with examples of positive ethical guidance. While McLeod tends to downplay these
examples, Grewal (1969) is more explicit:

> Naturally Guru Nanak lays a good deal of stress upon the
> individual's actions. He exhorts men to adopt good speech...he
> emphasizes the need of helping oneself...[but not] for one's
> mundane activity...The thief, the gambler, and the slanderer shall
> inevitably receive punishment; so shall be punished those who
> indulge in illicit sexual intercourse...one must earn one's livelihood
> honestly. One should cultivate true humility and be of service to
> others. (pp. 184-185)

Thus Guru Nanak's teachings do seem to imply a clear, stern moral code, far
beyond, and different in temper than, anything one can perhaps find in the 'Sant
tradition'. Guru Nanak is not a social critic in the modern sense, and Sikh ideals
may involve considerable extrapolation in some cases, but as Grewal (1969)
concludes:

> Guru Nanak's compositions may not 'prove' a radical departure from
> the existing [social] order, but a radical departure would be justified
> by his compositions. (p. 196)

We turn to an overall appraisal of the different strands of the argument.

Was Guru Nanak a 'Sant'? If one is unwilling to accept the 'Sant tradition' as a historically valid category, then of course the answer is 'no'. However, despite all its problems, the 'Sant tradition' may have a role as a relatively modern academic construct, applied to a complex historical situation. Then the question of Guru Nanak's membership remains a valid one. McLeod takes the most forceful position in answering 'yes', though many other scholars accept the categorization without question. Yet McLeod's own most-detailed analysis leads him to hedge: Guru Nanak was a unique member of the category, both because of his teachings and because of what grew out of them. The distinctiveness of Guru Nanak leads McLeod to overreach somewhat, when he tries to downplay originality by appealing to unknown, unrecorded Sant precursors as antecedents of the original facets of Guru Nanak's theological conception. It also leads him to oversimplify the issue of language, and to downplay social dimensions that emerge from Guru Nanak's writing.

Previous critics of McLeod have erred grievously by unnecessarily ascribing improper motives to him. That is not only wrong, but it has obscured the argument that we have developed here: that the placing of Guru Nanak in the 'Sant tradition' is not without problems, beyond the problems of clearly defining the tradition itself. Guru Nanak himself gives no hint of belonging to such a tradition. His writings clearly demonstrate familiarity with the broad religious currents swirling around him, but that is all. As Grewal (1969) notes:

> The closest he [Guru Nanak] comes to an explicit appreciation for
> any kind of individuals, it is for the *sadhs* and *sants*. But he does not
> refer to any particular *sadh* or *sant*; he does not refer to Kabir. For
> him, 'the true believer does not adopt a *marga*; he does not belong to
> a *panth*; he is concerned with true religion alone'. (p. 233)

This can be interpreted in a 'Sant' way of course. Yet Guru Nanak cared enough about his message to permit a community to grow up around him, and to appoint a spiritual successor, who explicitly carried the 'spirit' of Nanak within him.[6] The main point here is that, unlike other 'Sants', Guru Nanak makes no reference to individuals of this tradition. There is no evidence that he saw himself as 'reworking and expanding' the 'Sant synthesis'. It may still be appealing to put him in the category. But disagreement on this score is not necessarily a matter of 'belief versus

scholarship' or 'history versus theology'. There are open issues that can be explored with continued historical scholarship.

V   Conclusions

In this paper, we have made the case that both the concept of a 'Sant tradition' and the membership of Guru Nanak in that tradition can be questioned as problematic. We have attempted to do this in terms of scholarship only, by laying out at length the positions of various scholars writing on these topics. In doing so, we have been conscious of previous attempts to frame disagreements on these issues in terms of 'historical scholarship' versus 'faith'. In our view, such a framing is inappropriate, though to some extent it has been made more salient by those who write from the perspective of faith. Our suggestion here is that alternative answers can emerge from within standard scholarly inquiry, depending on varying interpretations and combinations of fragmentary historical facts. We have tried to show how this process of interpretation and selection occurs in the writings of one of the most forceful proponents of a particular perspective on the questions at hand.

We offer one additional perspective on the debate. Ultimately, the scholarly questions at hand are about matters of cultural identity. Of course this is why they generate so much heat for those whose identity is being questioned and, in the work of some scholars, implicitly downgraded. This problem is, perhaps, inevitable: subjective perceptions are bound to differ. What is interesting to note here, in that it has scarcely been remarked on by Western scholars writing in this area (though Juergensmeyer is a perceptive exception), is that the implicit politics of the sources used is important. Western scholars here rely heavily on Hindi/Hindu sources, treating them as neutral scholars, while Sikh scholars with alternative perspectives are portrayed (especially by McLeod) as tainted by their faith.

It is not at all clear that scholars such as Barthwal, Chaturvedi and R.C. Shukla, in defining the 'Sant tradition', its language, and Guru Nanak's membership in it, do not bring their own biases and preconceptions to the issues at hand. For example, Barthwal (1936, p. 255) asserts that Guru Nanak accepted the Hindu *trimurti*, a claim that does not stand up to detailed contextual analysis (McLeod, 1968, p. 166). Barthwal is in fact replete with such examples, in which he defends either orthodox Hinduism, as he perceives it, against 'heterodox' challenges, or holds up Kabir as the epitome of the 'Nirguna School', which he equates with the 'Sant School':

> ...the Nirgunis have used the Avatara theory to the advantage of the Sadhus in general and the Gurus in particular...And the criticism that it causes a loophole for hypocrisy to enter in, can more aptly be levelled against this use of the Avatara theory than against the Hindu Avatara theory...(p. 67, 1978 ed.)

> The Nirguna Panth *as devised by Kabir* thus fulfils the need both of philosophy and religion, of head and heart. Some of the later saints like Nanak and Sibadayal[7] who admittedly owe their inspiration to Kabir made a departure from his philosophy but they faithfully followed the path chalked out by the great deliverer of souls. (p. 89, emphasis added)

> Macauliffe's assertion that Nanak allowed meat is not warranted by the Guru's teachings. Though he did not make it a crucial point, he distinctly discouraged it. [The actual quote from the Guru Granth Sahib, p. 69, is ambiguous] (p. 184)

> Within the fold of the Nirguna School we have thus a host of sects. *Kabir-panth, Dadu-panth, Nanak-panth Jagga-panth..., Satnami-panth..., Dariya-Panth,...Sahib-panth* (by followers of Tulasi Sahib at Hathras) and *Radhaswami-panth* (by Sibadayal), to name some of them. The last two are very recent developments of the *Nirguna-panth.* (pp. 214-215)

> But to deny Nanak the greatness due to a reformer within [i.e., within Hinduism], is unjust. He did not make a greater departure from the popular faith, than was necessary in the interests of truth. (p. 255)

> Dr. Trumpp may be an unreliable translator, *which I don't think he was,* but incidentally or otherwise his estimate of Nanak's views is nearer truth than that of Mr. Fredric Pincott. The said Doctor says – 'Nanak remained a thorough Hindu'...(p. 256, emphasis added)

Barthwal's book is permeated with the attitudes illustrated by the above quotes. His entire introductory chapter, in fact, frames the 'Nirguna School' as something like a purification of traditional Hinduism in the face of an antagonistic cultural invader, but one that did not reject all the essence of Hinduism. In his view, even the Sufis' 'monistic pantheism was a gift from the Hindu philosophy' (p. 9)!

To summarize, Barthwal and Chaturvedi are used as authorities by Western scholars seeking to construct *a posteriori* a medieval 'Sant tradition', and to situate Guru Nanak within it. Aside from the direct shortcomings in the arguments used, the sources are also problematic.[8] This is especially so in light of attempts to respond to criticism by constructing false oppositions between 'scholars' and 'believers' or 'historians' and 'theologians', when the sources used by Western scholars are themselves subject to the same potential criticism.

In the light of our understanding of the politics of religion in India from the nineteenth century to the present, this issue deserves a fresh and more detailed look. The nineteenth century in Punjab saw a major attempt at clarifying and even

reshaping identities, spurred by the presence of a new external power - the British. The politics of identity have been well recognized in histories of that period in Punjab, including the emergence of conflict between Hindus and Sikhs. What seems not to have been understood is how those same currents have played out in twentieth century academic writing on Sikh identity. While Juergensmeyer's (1987) comments on the Radhasoami Revival, and their reconstruction of older traditions to support their worldview, are a notable exception, scholars such as McLeod, and even Grewal, seem to have failed either to realize or to acknowledge the full significance of this issue. While we have concentrated in this paper on directly questioning the 'Sant' construct and its application to Guru Nanak, looking at sources has pointed toward these larger issues that need to be addressed in more detail elsewhere.

Notes

1. He is not the originator of this idea, which, along with the overall concept of a 'Sant tradition', can also be traced back to Chaturvedi and Barthwal.

2. Here, of course, the author must acknowledge his self-perceived membership in both groups, scholars and believers.

3. This summary of the four methodological approaches barely introduces the range of issues and arguments that can be considered. The reader is referred to McCutcheon (1999) for more detail.

4. This is called the Guru Granth Sahib by Sikhs. Scholars use both appellations and variants.

5. In general, scholars of medieval Hindi literature are not very familiar with the Sikh scriptures. Vaudeville (1996, p. 139) alludes to the difficulties that face the 'non-initiate'. Schomer (1987b) makes an outright error when she states, 'For Sikhs, thus, the ultimate "witness" to spiritual truth is not the authoritative utterances...of the Sikh gurus, but the person and life of Guru Nanak.' (83)

6. All the successors of Guru Nanak very explicitly considered themselves as imbued with his spirit, in a way that is quite distinct from any of the other 'panths' included in the 'Sant tradition'.

7. Sibadayal was the founder of the Radhasoamis, and this clubbing of Guru Nanak with him is revealing. There are strong differences in the writings of Sibadayal and Guru Nanak: for example, see Barthwal's quote from Sibadayal on how a disciple must serve a Guru. (1978 ed., 116)

8. It may also be noted that Barthwal's own account of the history of Sikhism (1978 ed., 254-258) contains at least one serious factual error. This certainly raises concern about his grasp of the subject on which he is writing.

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Murids of the Saint: Migration, Diaspora and Redemptive Sociality in Sufi Regional and Global Cults

Pnina Werbner
Keele University

The bonds of spirit between disciples of a single Sufi saint often consolidate and mediate *biradari* or village ties; but they may also form the basis, this paper shows, for new friendships forged away from home, in the absence of family or neighbourhood, and they may introduce parochial villagers to the glories of shrines located well beyond their district and even province. In such cases, being a disciple comes to acquire many new and complex meanings. This is true for the devotees of Zindapir's[1] regional cult, the living saint at the centre of this paper. Zindapir began his saintly career as an army saint in Abbotabad, and his lodge is located near another large army base, Kohat. As a result, many of his followers were initiated into the cult during their army service, and along with their retirement, the cult has extended throughout Pakistan, as well as to the Gulf and to Britain; anywhere, in fact, where prior soldiers settle or work as migrant labourers. Zindapir's senior *khalifa*, a prior officer in the Pakistan army, has set up an autonomous regional cult in Britain, centred on the West Midlands. This forms the basis for the diasporic extension of the cult. Hence, to understand the cult's vast national and transnational catchment area, we need to look to its genesis in relations between soldiers, migrants and city dwellers living away from home, and their continued ties to their rural communities. It is thus the intersection between labour migration and village or urban roots which explains, I argue, the spatial patterning of the Shaikh's sacred dominion and the reach of his cult. The paper considers some of the moral dilemmas of murids who live in close proximity to a living saint, and the moral relations between *pir*-brothers in the army or large government department. This 'redemptive sociality', I argue, forms the basis for the continued attraction of saints such as Zindapir even in the face of modernity in South Asia. Second, I attempt to explain how it is that despite the fact that discipleship often runs in families, disciples continue to regard their relation to the saint as personal and voluntary.

Introduction

Sufi saints in South Asia have long been associated with movement. Not only did famous saints embark on long pilgrimage journeys (Saheb 1998), but they also

settled in remote parts of the interior (Eaton 1993), colonizing new territories for Islam. Similarly, saints' shrines have become the focus of annual pilgrimages during '*urs* festivals, and in the case of the more important shrines, these attract devotees or supplicants seeking healing or blessing who often travel great distances. In general, then, long distance bonds and trans-regional or transnational movements are the hallmarks of most large-scale Sufi organisations.

Little, however, has been written about the connection between Sufi cults in South Asia and modern-day labour migration or other forms of employment in the modern and state sector. A further omission has been an examination of the role of the army in modern-day India and Pakistan as a key state employer, especially in the Punjab, and hence of internal national labour migration. Nor has account been taken of the substantial migration of ex-soldiers from the Punjab both to Britain and, more recently, to the Gulf.

In the present paper I consider the intersection between the organisation Sufi cults and, first, internal labour migration in Pakistan; second, circulatory labour migration to the Gulf; and finally, permanent migration and settlement in Britain, and the formation of a new Pakistani diaspora organised around Sufi cults.

There is a substantial Pakistani settler presence in Britain today, at the last census, in 1991, around half a million migrant settlers and their children. Of these the vast majority originate either from the Punjab or Mirpur and Azad Kashmir, and most are Barelwi followers, that is, believers in saintly traditions and *piri-muridi* relations. In the early years of migration to Britain many mosques, such as the Central Jami'a mosque in Manchester, were dominated by Deobandi and Jamaat-i-Islami '*ulama*', and the 1980s were marked by attempts to replace these with Barelwi '*ulama*'. This process is now more or less complete, and has resulted in an efflorescence of small mosques of different Sufi orders, as well as *khanqhahs* (Sufi centres) and *zikr* circles. In a sense, this has reproduced patterns of Sufi organisation prevalent in Pakistan as well, as the paper demonstrates. The paper opens with a description of the arrival of convoys to the 'urs at Ghamkol Sharif, the darbar of a living saint, Zindapir, located near the town of Kohat in the North West Frontier Province. The convoys highlight the link between army service and discipleship in this particular Sufi regional cult. I then go on to review a literature detailing the organisation of Sufi disciples in Punjabi villages and towns. Following this I describe the adventures of a disciple of Zindapir who went as a labour migrant to the Gulf. Finally, I discuss the emergence of a diasporic extension of the cult in Britain.

A Sufi Regional Cult

All night long the *qaflas* kept arriving, churning up clouds of dust in the darkened valley. They came from all over the North West Frontier Province and the Punjab, from Azad Kashmir and even beyond, trucks, vans, lorries, buses, minibuses, each elaborately decorated with intricate colourful drawings and patterns, the vast majority bearing the name of Zindapir in bold letters. As many as 23 had come from the Wan (arms) factory near Rawalpindi; there were four from Azad Kashmir, four from Tarbela dam, 25 from Haripur, four from Abbottabad, 60 from Bannu, Peshawar, Nusheira and Shikr Dera, more than 100 from the towns and villages of the Punjab. Three separate groups had come from Rawalpindi alone, four from Lahore. Altogether I counted on the first day of the 1989 'urs 220 buses and trucks, each with a 60-passenger carrying capacity, as well as some 30 vans. They had travelled long distances to attend the festival. Throughout the three days, a perpetual stream of local vehicles continued to move back and forth down the narrow, winding road leading to the darbar, ferrying individual passengers and families from Kohat. Many had arrived by aeroplane, train or bus. And as the moment of the *du'a* on the third day approached, it seemed that the whole town had descended onto the little lodge, packing the narrow valley with vehicles of all shape, colour and description.

Each truck or convoy carried *pir-bhais*, brother-disciples, and *pir-bhens*, sister-disciples. Their relations are defined as deeper and more enduring than those between kinsmen. Saeed, khalifa and utterly loyal right-hand man of the Shaikh until his untimely death at the age of 35 in 1996, told me:

> The Shaikh always tells us that whenever murids meet, you must
> think that I am between you. Between real brothers there is
> marriage, there is land and there is wealth (*rishta, zamin, dolat*), but
> not between murids [i.e., between disciples there is nothing but
> love].

In his study of the Nunari of the Punjab, Richard Kurin makes a similar observation when he distinguishes between cultural notions of collective solidarity based on turbans (agnation and descent), skirts (marriage and alliance) and spirit (allegiance to a single saint):

> In this model of the *qaum*, the spiritual ties which bind members are
> thought to be everlasting and eternal with especially great relevance
> to the afterlife. They are ties that occasion not the alluring heat of
> blood ties but the cooling shadows of blessedness. Such ties are
> generally associated with kindness, tranquillity and peacefulness...
> (Kurin 1990, p.108)

As Philip Lewis (1984, p. 12) points out, piri-muridi relations are

> deeply rooted in traditional Pakistani society. Parents often expect
> their children to follow a pir, preferably their own. In village society
> someone without a pir may well court ostracism since 'it is believed
> that he does not have a source of spiritual guidance and his sins
> cannot be written off on the day of judgement' (cited from Chaudhry
> 1979, p. 68) In Urdu the adjective 'be-pir' - literally 'without pir' -
> means vicious, pitiless, cruel, without sympathy, etc. (taken from
> Platt's dictionary).

How do you recognise your murids? I asked Zindapir, since he claimed repeatedly never to ask their name or where they came from. 'If a man is thirsty, will he not find the well of water?' he replied. 'A pir takes care of his murids. The murids are like goats, they nibble grass wherever they find it, but he won't leave them unprotected and unfed.' In other words, a pir does not keep lists of his disciples but when they need him he is there, he knows when they are in trouble wherever they are.

The Sufi shaikh is a shepherd to his scattered flock and his sacred dominion, his regional cult reaches wherever they are. Evidence from South Asia shows that Sufi regional cults often extend widely beyond the central shrine's immediate locality, and interpenetrate into one another. In a study reported by Adrian Mayer (1967, p. 164)[2], 100 Multani city respondents acknowledged 56 pirs between them, while the same number of villagers acknowledged 27 pirs. Among the Nunari, Kurin reports (ibid.), villagers followed two key local saints in the Sahiwal region. Discipleship runs in families but, as Kurin reminds us, it can also cut across families if and when disputes arise between brothers (1990, p.108). Eaton shows the wide distribution in 1654 of disciples of a single saint, Hajji Muhammad Naushah, whose shrine is located in Gujrat District. By 1965, however, 97% of all followers were concentrated in three adjacent districts (Gujrat, Gujranwala and Shekhupura). Yet a few years later small numbers of murids were surfacing in Faislabad, Multan, Muzaffargarh and Peshawar, extending once again the reach of the cult's sacred dominion (Eaton 1978, pp. 79-81).

Eaton makes the further point that although disciples clustered by zat and biradari, no single group or category dominated the cult's following. Indeed, he argues, 'the Naushani shrine and order serves to knit together a wide number of endogamous cultivating groups, giving them a common religious focus at the popular level' (p. 85). This integrative function stands in marked contrast to potential village cleavages and class antagonisms (p. 87).

The mediation of cross-ethnic, intercaste and cross-regional divisions is a central feature in regional cult theory (R. Werbner 1976, 1989). There are cases, as

Gaborieau documents, in which saints become patron saints of a particular occupational group (1983, pp. 302-303), but these are relatively rare. Against that exclusivity, Saiyed echoes other scholars when he contends that it is through Sufi shrines that 'the subcontinent saw the best part of Hindu-Muslim integration,' and that it was 'the personal and spiritual influence of various saints that... allowed for the peaceful coexistence of the two communities for several centuries on the Indian subcontinent (Saiyed, 1989, p. 242). Although van der Veer has argued that current antagonisms between Hindus and Muslims in contemporary India have diminished and politicised the spirit of Hindu-Muslim fraternity at Sufi saints' shrines (van der Veer 1994), there are parts of India where even today Hindus and Muslims participate harmoniously in joint celebration, as at the 'urs of the saint of Nagore-e Sharif in Tamil Nadu (Saheb, 1998; see Werbner and Basu 1998, pp. 19-20). It is certainly very common for occupational, biradari or village clusters and confraternities to join together as disciples of a single saint, often over great distances.

The catchment areas - the sacred dominions - of Sufi regional cults are thus marked by their instability and by the fluctuating range of devotees drawn to them. Elizabeth Mann reports on a minor shrine which emerged in Aligarh in the 1940s and, over a short period, challenged and greatly exceeded in popularity the shrine of Shah Jamal, a long established Chishti saint. The Sufi saint and world renouncer who revitalised the minor shrine lived, she argues, 'within living memory, [and] stories of miraculous events are fresh in the minds of devotees who witnessed them at first hand' (Mann 1989, p.163). Since his death in the 1960s, intensive building activities have greatly expanded the shrine. Quite distinct from the fluctuating fortunes of medium-level shrines of this type are the universally venerated great shrines of the subcontinent such as those of Mu'inuddin Chishti of Ajmer or Data Ganj Baksh of Lahore. At the other extreme are shrines of minor pirs with restricted local village followings, some of whom may even be nameless (Werth, 1998).

The bonds of spirit between disciples of a single Sufi saint often consolidate and mediate biradari or village ties; but they may also form the basis for new friendships forged away from home, in the absence of family or neighbourhood, and they may introduce parochial villagers to the glories of shrines located well beyond their district and even province. In such cases, being a disciple comes to acquire many new and complex meanings. This is true for the devotees of Zindapir's regional cult. To explain the cult's vast catchment area, we need to look to its genesis in relations between soldiers, migrants and city dwellers living away from home, and their continued ties to their rural communities. It is thus the intersection between labour migration and village or urban roots which explains, as we shall see, the spatial patterning of the Shaikh's sacred dominion and the reach of his cult.

An Army Saint

Zindapir is, above all, an army saint. His career started as a tailor-contractor in the army where his early circle of companions was forged. Sufi Sahib, who created his own regional cult centred in the West Midlands, was one of these companions. Rab Nawaz, one of his trusted khalifas, told me that until his white hairs appeared in his beard, he and all the *khulfa* wore khaki. It was only when his beard turned white that they began to wear white gowns. Even after becoming a practising *faqir*, Zindapir spent time in Abbottabad not far from the army base where he had worked, and he continued to recruit army followers. Ghamkol Sharif, the lodge he founded when he left Abbottabad, is located only a few miles from Kohat, a large British army base which was taken over by the Pakistan army at Independence. The lodge's reputation as a place of local beauty attracts a constant stream of curious visitors. Many of his murids told me how they first visited the lodge while stationed in Kohat. On seeing the lodge, they were overwhelmed by its gloriousness and the spirituality (*ruhaniyat*) of its Shaikh. Later they became his murids.

The story told me by one murid exemplifies this intersection between army, labour migration and village roots:

> I took *bai'at* in 1969. I come from near Tarbela Dam in the Frontier.
> Many people had told me about the Shaikh and a friend suggested that I take bai'at. Since then I have brought many murids here, and I come here for the 'urs with three or four lorries every year. I am a *qafla* leader, the leader on the Tarbela side. *When I did bai'at I was in the army.* Now I am a pensioner, I retired in 1976. *Today I am a farmer.* I have performed the *hajj* five times, because *after I retired from the army I went to Dubai* with Ibrahim [another murid] and then to Saudi Arabia [as a labour migrant]. My name is Hajji Ghulam Muhammad and I am a stone mason. I am the person who built the perimeter wall around the Darbar.

What is remarkable about Zindapir's cult is that it attracts 'modern' men - soldiers, factory workers, civil servants, bureaucrats, politicians. I propose that being a pir-bhai, a saint-brother, endows the lives of such men with a redemptive sociality. As we have seen, most disciples are introduced to the saint by friends, co-workers or kinsmen. It is this which creates the pattern of interconnected communities - biradaris, occupational guilds and neighbourhoods - which typifies the organisation of Sufi regional cults.

Ordinary disciples usually see the saint intermittently, either annually on the 'urs festival, the commemoration-celebration of a saint's death believed to be the moment of unification with God, and sometimes more frequently, for weekly zikr

prayers which are usually held on Thursday evenings in saints' lodges in South Asia, or in army bases, factories and villages - indeed, wherever a zikr circle emerges. Second are his khalifas who have been 'sent' by the saint to remote places to found local branches of the order, and are thus located most of the time beyond the lodge. Among them, Sufi Sahib, the khalifa originally sent to England by Zindapir, was the most powerful and independent, a pir in his own right. Although a very close companion of the Shaikh during his rise to sainthood in Pakistan, for more than twenty years after he first came to England Sufi Sahib never set foot in the lodge. He developed, as we shall, his own close circle of murids in Britain. Finally, there are the disciples who live in the lodge itself and who have dedicated themselves, either permanently or temporarily, to serving the saint. Some of these are also described as 'khalifa'. These are the disciples who live in closest daily proximity to their Shaikh.

The story of a distant khalifa is instructive. Living in deep Sind he has become, like Sufi Sahib, a pir in his own right. The khalifa, a very dark, chunky, solid man with a large belly and a bright face, told me he had been a tax collector, a *potidar*, in deep Multan, on the edge of Sind. In 1965 he had a dream in which he saw the Shaikh. Then, in 1974, a friend brought him here (to the darbar) and he found the man in his dream. In 1976 he was made a khalifa, given the khulfat (an initiation ceremony in which a *juba*, gown, worn by the saint is given to the initiate) and told to go and find a site to practise in Sind. He visited three places and eventually chose a place in a village or area where there were both Muslims and Hindus. The village already had a murid of the Shaikh living there. He travelled there by train, with no money, so he travelled third class, and the train was packed so he sat on his haunches for 13 hours, from midnight until 1 p.m. the following day. When he arrived a man from Lahore whom he had got friendly with helped him to carry his suitcase. In the village the murid of the Shaikh had vacated his house for him, but he met with a lot of opposition in the village.

By this time he was married. He had married a girl from the village. Initially, he went to see the Shaikh and ask permission to marry a girl from his own family but the Shaikh said, no, you won't be able to be a khalifa there if your wife is from the Punjab. Then, while he was still in Ghamkol Sharif, at the darbar, he saw in his mind's eye a vision of a Sindhi girl he knew back at the village. She was a daughter of a murid. So he asked the Shaikh and the Shaikh said, yes, she is the one you should marry.

When he was having trouble in the village he had a dream one night. In his dream he saw a place, outside the village, some way away. He went and found that place and built a hut there. Gradually, he expanded the place and now they are building a mosque there. He has many murids and is a pir in his own right.

There are other such stories about Zindapir's khalifas who struck out on their

own and, like Zindapir himself, became the hub of new subcentres. Such Khalifas living at a distance are treated with immense respect. Some, among them several still serving in the army, fulfil important roles in the preparations for the 'urs, responsible for the building work, the electrical extensions and the clearing of the extensive grounds serving as camping sites which take place annually in the weeks preceding the 'urs.

The Global Power of the Saint

The experiences of one migrant labourer to the Gulf, Hajji Ibrahim, reflect on the global spread of transnational Sufi cults and the impact this has on the careers of individual devotee labour migrants. Hajji Ibrahim was a villager with relatively little education who had served in the Pakistani army before retiring on a pension in 1974. He had taken bai'at while still in the army, in 1964, and used to work at the *darbar* for six weeks during his annual two-month leave from the army. Between 1974 and 1979 he lived in the darbar, first working as the *darban* (gatekeeper) of the Shaikh for three years, and then as a driver for Badshah Sahib, the saint's son.

On my visit to the darbar in 1991, Hajji Ibrahim was a key informant. His command of English, although ungrammatical, was quite impressive. To my query, since I knew he was relatively uneducated, of where he had learnt to speak English, he explained: 'I learnt it,' he told me, 'while I was working in the Gulf.' 'In the Gulf?' I wondered. 'But didn't you tell me that you were working for a Japanese firm there?' 'Yes', he answered, 'of course.' 'Well, how did you learn English then?' 'I learnt it from the Japanese' he replied. 'The Japanese? But they also don't speak English. How did you manage?' 'We used dictionaries,' he explained, as though this should have been quite obvious.

On another occasion we were chatting about the saint and the large number of foreign visitors he hosted at the darbar. 'The saint', he explained, 'likes to entertain each person according to what he is accustomed to. In your case, for example, he has given you a comfortable bed to sleep in. The Japanese are very interested in Sufism. Once there was a Japanese delegation that came here to talk about Sufism. At that time I was the Shaikh's darban, his gatekeeper. I served the visitors green tea without sugar, exactly as I knew they liked it. They were delighted and amazed. Once in the Gulf', he added, 'I cured a Japanese of a very bad headache by blowing *dam* on him' (he is referring here to the Sufi custom of 'blowing' Koranic verses as a healing device).

Despite his humble origins Hajji Ibrahim is a cosmopolitan traveller with a good deal of international experience. His first labour migration trip followed an instruction by the Shaikh to go to Dubai to earn money for his family. This instruction was issued, it seems, after Hajji Ibrahim's wife had been to see the

Shaikh to ask advice about her financial difficulties, since her husband was working at the lodge in a voluntary capacity, without earning any wages.

While in the Gulf, Hajji Ibrahim not only learnt to speak English. He also learnt to speak Arabic and even a little Japanese. When he started working in the Gulf, he told me, he was not competent as a builder or an electrician but by mustering the *tasawwar* (image) of the Shaikh before his eyes, he acquired the skills needed to do these things. His encounters with the Japanese were complex. At one point he left the firm he was working for in Dubai at short notice after he had obtained a valuable visa permitting him to go on hajj. His application to the firm for leave was refused. At the time, he was a supervisor, and both site engineers were away in Japan on leave so he was responsible for 250 men. The manager told him: 'If I let you go all the Muslims working here will want to go too.' Hajji Ibrahim, so he told me, consulted a Pakistani friend who was working for another company. The friend advised him to forget the money and go on the pilgrimage anyway. 'This is a great opportunity for you to go on hajj', he said, 'you may never get another one!' So Hajji Ibrahim went off on hajj without handing in his notice, for fear that the company might take away his passport. He just left, 20 days before the hajj. In Mecca he stayed with a Pakistani khalifa the Shaikh based permanently in the Holy city.

When the Shaikh arrived in Mecca for the annual pilgrimage, Hajji Ibrahim was terrified he would be angry with him for deserting his job. He did not come forward to greet the Shaikh but the latter noticed him hiding behind the door and called him in. Even though the saint knew nothing of his desertion he said to him: 'Ibrahim, you have done the right thing. You preferred God to money. Do not worry. God will look after you.'

Hajji Ibrahim was afraid to go back to his company. He spent a whole month searching for another job in Dubai, staying with a fellow cult member, but to no avail. Then, one night, at the end of the month, the Saint appeared to him in a dream. He told him to go back to his old company, to go there at 2.30 p.m. sharp, just after lunch. He found out later, he told me, that the company was about to strike him off the books the following day, and to have him deported. He arrived at 2.30 and all the workers - Hindus, Bangladeshis, Japanese, etc. greeted him - 'Hello, Hajji Ibrahim' (stressing the 'Hajji' bit, since he'd been on the Pilgrimage to Mecca). At the office all the Japanese were there except the manager, who was late. They were pleased to see him but they advised him to wait in the meeting room so that the manager wouldn't encounter him straight away when he returned, since the manager was, they said, very angry with him. They promised to warn the manager that he was waiting for him in the meeting room. Finally the manager arrived. He told Ibrahim: 'I cannot employ you any longer. You were solely responsible for 250 men, and you abandoned them.' 'But,' Hajji Ibrahim explained to me, 'I had the

tasawwar, the picture, image, of the Shaikh in front of me (in my inner vision) and this gave me courage so I answered: 'You refused me permission to go on hajj when I already had a visa, and all the Muslim workers were laughing at me.' 'The manager thought for a while,' Hajji Ibrahim said, 'and told me to wait. Eventually he called me to him and told me his company had just started a new project in Baghdad. He promised to send me there. I knew the Japanese manager of the new site, Mr. Cato, who was away for a few days in Japan. When he came back I met him to discuss the move to Iraq. He wanted to put me in a lower position than I had before, under an ex-gang leader of mine who had in the meanwhile been promoted. But I still had the tasawwar of the Shaikh before my eyes, so I refused. In the end, they gave in. They promoted someone else to assistant engineer and made me a supervisor instead of that man. Then the company paid my wages and sent me back to Pakistan for a month. I came straight here, to the darbar, to see the Shaikh, even before going home.

When I first came in to see him, the Shaikh said to me: 'Now you are going to Baghdad - first Mecca, now Baghdad. You are are a very lucky man. Your company is located close to Abdul Qadr Gilani's tomb, just one stop by minibus. You will work in the company in the daytime and clean the tomb at night'. You see, the Shaikh knew everything, even though he has never been to Iraq. As Iqbal [the great nationalist Punjabi poet] says, 'God's Wali can take two and a half steps and see the whole world'.

While he was in Baghdad, Hajji Ibrahim's wife joined him there for a while, and the two of them both worked as volunteers cleaning the shrine of Abdul Qadr Gilani, the revered founder of South Asian Sufism.

Hajji Ibrahim does not belong to a landowning caste. One of his sons is a watchmaker in a small Punjabi town. But two of his sons have recently married cousins (wife's sister's daughters) in Amsterdam and have moved to the Netherlands. In 1991, when these conversations took place, they were waiting for their passports to be released, and then they would be allowed to bring their parents over to Holland. Hajji Ibrahim regarded these marriages as a blessing granted him by the saint as reward for his labours. One day, discussing the issue of 'promotions' on the Sufi path, I asked Hajji Ibrahim whether he did not resent his position as a mere murid, disciple, despite the long years of unpaid service he had put in at the lodge since he retired from the Pakistan army. 'No', he said, 'I *have* been promoted', and he explained that the saint had given him permission to blow dam, the healing breath of Qur'anic verses, for all illnesses, including snake bites. 'But could you not become a khalifa, a vicegerent or deputy of the saint?' I persisted. 'After all, you know Arabic and can even lead the prayers.' Hajji Ibrahim then revealed to me a secret dream. 'Perhaps the Shaikh will send me to Holland', he said, 'to found a branch of his order there. He did have a khalifa there before who

was sent over from England, I think, but the man proved to be a failure, and has now left. So Amsterdam is the only place which is now "empty'" he said, (that is, has no branch of the order, despite the large number of Pakistanis living there). In addition to Pakistanis, you know, there are lots of Turks and Arabs in Amsterdam. 'The other khalifa did not speak Dutch or Arabic', he told me. 'But what about you? You don't speak Dutch either,' I said. 'Dutch is very easy', Hajji Ibrahim replied, 'it's just like Punjabi'. At this unexpected reply, I burst out laughing, but I had to admit to myself that for a man who had learnt English from the Japanese, as well as fluent Arabic, while working on a building site, learning to speak Dutch was likely to be a relatively small challenge.

Hajji Ibrahim is a devoted Sufi and an evidently pious Muslim. He would not have been given his job back had his piety and sincerity not been recognised by his Japanese employers. But his story is also a tale of transnational Sufi religious empowerment. He is locked into a transnational network, not of relatives and family but of pir-bhai, Sufi brothers. A Sufi-brother advises him to seize the opportunity and go on hajj. He stays in Mecca with the khalifa of the order. He meets the saint he left behind in Pakistan at a recognised meeting point of the cult in Mecca, when the saint comes for the annual pilgrimage. He then lives with another saint-brother while seeking alternative employment. Finally, in Baghdad, along with his wife, he spends the days working for wages and the nights working for the love of God at a saint's shrine. Away from the saint's lodge the Shaikh's presence becomes for disciples a source of courage and companionship, mutual loyalty and solidarity.

For Hajji Ibrahim, 'home' is condensed in the image of the saint whom he musters before his inner eye whenever he needs courage to confront superiors and foreigners or to learn new tasks. That image is always with him, wherever he is. His experience of overseas travel is thus not one of alienation but of triumphant mastery, rooted in his localised faith in his saint - which is, simultaneously, very much also a faith in Islam as a world religion. Hence, one of the most exhilarating aspects of his migration experience for him was the sense of Islam as a boundary-crossing global faith. His work at the tomb of Abdul Qadr Gilani in pious service to God confirms his identity in his own eyes as a cosmopolitan who is at home everywhere just as God is everywhere. So too, the Pilgrimage to Mecca, which he performed subsequently several more times during his stay in the Middle East, provides him with an experience of membership in a global community. He is determined to share in that experience, even at the risk of losing a valuable job.

Although he is a simple man from a poor background and with little formal education, Hajji Ibrahim clearly feels that the experiences both as a Sufi and a labour migrant have transformed him. He is competent now in the traditions of others. He knows the Japanese intimately, has observed their minutest customs. By

the same token, he has also observed the customs, habits and idiosyncrasies of Hindus, Bangladeshis, Arabs and Iraqis. He appears to have had close cross-cultural friendships. His confidence is such that learning Dutch is regarded by him as a small matter, almost like knowing Punjabi - which is his mother tongue. But when he considers moving to Holland, it is nevertheless from the vantage point of his most valued identity as a Sufi. If he moves to Holland, it will be with the mission to found a branch of his order there. He will utilise the Arabic picked up in the Gulf to create a cross-national Sufi community of Pakistanis, Turks and Arabs. He knows he can do that, since he has lived with Muslims from other countries already. The world is mapped by him in terms of his Sufi order. Holland is an empty place, a void, since there is no branch there. His perspective as a Sufi member of Zindapir's transnational regional cult shapes his cosmopolitanism and provides it with a sense of order.

The Emergence of a Global Sufi Cult

Migrants to the Gulf ultimately return home. But in Britain Zindapir's cult has become highly entrenched institutionally as a global cult. Sufi Sahib, the head of the order in Britain is based in the West Midlands. A very large, powerful man, he had accompanied Zindapir on his journey to the lodge. He left the Pakistani army as a sergeant to come to Britain, where he worked for many years as a labourer in a foundry. Sufi Sahib is a talented organisation man, and he has succeeded in establishing branches of the order in 14 British towns and cities. This was achieved through hard work and dedication and his reputation as an honest man until the early 1980s was quite impeccable. In his own city, he had bought a piece of property in the inner city, and had gradually established his dominion over a whole tract of land, as he purchased house after adjacent house. Part of this land was the site of a smallish mosque housed in a wooden structure. This is where he and his closest disciples performed regular zikr, and where these disciples, the majority young men born in Pakistan who had grown up in Britain, discussed tasawwuf, Islamic mysticism, endlessly among themselves, sometimes consulting him, at other times reading voraciously in books on mysticism available in English or Urdu. Hajji Karim was one such disciple, later sent to the North West to set up a branch of the order there. Although initiated directly to Zindapir he was dedicated to Sufi Sahib who had rescued him and brought him into the sanctuary of his circle when Karim's family turned against him as a young teenager, following his father's death.

In building up his empire Sufi Sahib relied on the Chair of his mosque management committee, a charming and highly intelligent accountant with excellent links to the Labour Party and the City Council, which for some years has had a large number of Pakistani councillors.

It was in the early 1980s, one of Sufi Sahib's murids told me, that the idea of building a purpose-built mosque was first mooted. And it was the mosque that revealed the saint to his followers in a new light. Until that time he had been the object of great devotion, a charismatic figure who was always greeted with adulation. This continued to be the case for more distant disciples. But for those closest to him, Sufi Sahib's willingness to raise money, as they saw it, by unethical means[3], caused an irredeemable rift. As one of his close murids at the time told me (I paraphrase our conversation):

> I became aware of things, as did the other murids, since I sat on the Management Committee of the mosque and was involved in putting together various applications to the Council. By 1986 things had begun to come to a head for me. There were discussions among us about whether Sufi Sahib was aware of what was going on around him. Because he was much admired, it was generally thought that he didn't know. Eventually Shaikh Yusuf, a very knowledgeable murid who had studied Islamic studies, approached him to ask whether he knew that there was cheating going on. He was greeted with an angry response. Sufi Sahib told him that this was a *kufr* (infidel) government and the cause was a good one, the building of a mosque.
> We then approached the Maulana, like Sufi Sahib one of the earliest of Zindapir's murids. We asked him if this was right according to the Shari'a? He replied that it was. But we murids could not accept that the Shari'a could just be infringed in this way.

Far from being a world renouncer, the saint was said by this ex-disciple to have revealed himself as a man all too firmly entrenched in the world with its dirty politics and corrupt practices. One by one, he told me, the closest circle of disciples began to leave the order. They had been happy in the old hut with their small zikr circle, the murid told me. The envisaged mosque, rather than glorifying the order, had corrupted it for them. Some joined or set up branches of other Sufi orders in the West Midlands. Perhaps the last to leave was Hajji Karim himself, who quarrelled with Sufi Sahib some time in 1994 over the educational policy of the *dar ul-aloom* in the North West. Only one murid, much disliked by the others according to my interlocutor, remained and colluded with the various money-making schemes. But he too suffered an emotional breakdown. For all the other murids, the decision to leave was traumatic.

There are several ironies in this tale. The first is that Sufi Sahib, like Zindapir a reformist saint, had taught his young disciples to respect the morality of the Shari'a all too well. He no longer held absolute charismatic authority over them. They were, in the end, unwilling to believe that skirting on the edge of the law or - as they

saw it - cheating the state was permissible. These were young men who had gone to school in Britain. Clearly, they could not treat the state as merely an alien presence. They had become too English, in a sense, as well as being very devout Muslims, and could not simply embrace the view that the usual yardsticks of morality did not apply to the British state because it was not Islamic.

The third irony was that in the long run, the departure of this loyal circle of early disciples mattered rather little. Sufi Sahib built a magnificent mosque, an architecturally designed building in Barelwi style, beautifully inlaid with white and green marble, glittering chandeliers, and wonderfully decorated red and green gilded domes. Much of the building work was done with voluntary labour, just as it always had been in Ghamkol Sharif, Zindapir's lodge. The early publicity about the scam mattered rather little. Instead, Sufi Sahib's order has prospered. I was told that during Friday *jumaa* prayers the mosque is packed and that the zikr circle, which once used to include at most 20 men, now included more than 100.

Redemptive Success

One might expect educated, second generation, British Pakistanis to reject Sufism as superstitious and irrelevant. This has not been the case. Sufi Sahib has continued to attract young British Pakistani disciples. One of the least understood features of Sufism in South Asia is why it remains attractive to apparently Westernised, high ranking civil servants, army officers, politicians, businessmen and professionals, as well as to large numbers of relatively uneducated villagers. Zindapir himself had begun his religious charismatic career in the army where he had recruited a large army following, including many brigadiers and generals. Among his disciples and supplicants were also politicians and high ranking civil servants. Sufism, or at least Reform Sufism, appeared thus to appeal to the relatively educated and powerful, as well as the vast mass of low ranking followers.

This continued elite attraction to Sufi orders stems, I found, from a peculiar understanding of worldly success and predestination in popular Islam. A key role of the saint is believed to be his ability to act as mediator for his disciples with God on the Day of Judgement, asking forgiveness for them and thus assuring that they go to *jannat*, paradise. Disciples are, in other words, dependent upon the saint not only for grace *in* the world, but for eternal salvation. This leads to the further belief that worldly achievements are divine rewards for obeying the edicts and instructions of the saint regarding religious observance and daily practice, which includes the multiple repetition of specific religious litanies (*wazifa*) allocated by him alone. As bringer of divine blessing (*faiz*, or *baraka*), he is believed to be able to change the course of nature, to sway the will of God, and thus to affect the predestined movement of the universe. This assumption is at the root of the repeated stories by

disciples about the miracles (*karamat*) performed by the Shaikh.

Hence if, after their initiation, disciples succeed in their businesses, in arranging marriages for their children, in obtaining job promotions, in passing examinations or tests, in finding work as labour migrants - in short, in any of their endeavours, they interpret this as a sign of God's blessing conferred upon them via their saint. The saint's own vast accumulation of wealth is similarly regarded. The beauty of the mosque he had built made Sufi Sahib a great man for most disciples. Discipleship thus constitutes a *legitimation* of personal worldly success. The gloriousness of Ghamkol Sharif proved Zindapir's spirituality and chosen status as wali of Allah.

For low caste peasants or urban workers too membership in the cult is a source of status. They derive their personal standing vis-a-vis others from their connection with an illustrious, important and famous saint, and regard themselves otherwise as social nonentities. In this sense the respect accorded to Zindapir by high level politicians and civil servants or army officers is not only useful for pragmatic purposes, but perhaps even more significantly, it confirms the saint's elevated status in the eyes of the many villagers who form the main body of his disciples, and brings together the high and the low in a single 'family' of 'disciple-brothers'. The vicarious status derived from membership in an 'important' order of this type was seen by these disciples, I found, to confer a meaningful and dignified gloss upon their lives. They were proud of their saint and proud to be associated with him, while the cult's daily, weekly, monthly and annual rituals imbued the routines of their daily life with a transcendent significance.

In general, then, autonomous religious individuality-cum-knowledge -- the direct personal access to God valorised by the Protestant Puritan sects, is regarded as a rare achievement by Sufi disciples. Nor do they share a notion of predestination which Weber argued was so fundamental in Calvinism. As in Calvinism, however, worldly rewards and achievements are believed to be signs of divine approval and blessing, and thus also guarantors of election and salvation. This goes along, I found, with instructions by the saint to his disciples to practice self-denial and self discipline in their worldly activities - in other words, to observe worldly asceticism - and with an affirmation of the value of hard work, obedience and respect for authority, all of which tend, of course, to lead, as in the Puritan case, to worldly success. In sum, then, non-individuality and self-denial *do not entail a diminution of the will to succeed in worldly matters*, and indeed, have an elective affinity with it - they facilitate and legitimise this success.

Conclusion: the Camaraderie of Disciplehood

Ultimately, I want to argue here, Sufism is a fundamentally voluntary relationship. We cannot understand the subjectivity of Sufi disciples unless we recognise the

voluntarism inherent both in the dyadic relation with a saint, and in the relations between saintly disciples. Being a murid is liberating to global migrants far from home who can muster the image of their saint in their inner eye, but it is also liberating through the relations between pir-bhai, the fraternity (and sorority) of saintly disciples. Zindapir's followers are drawn mainly from three types of organisation: the army and the police, large government works departments, and villages or factories. It seems quite rare for people as isolated individuals to become disciples. Although I did meet a number of such people, the story of initiation followed, as we have seen, predictable lines: a person dreams of seeing an old man or a beautiful place, or passes by chance near the darbar. The encounter is one of almost accidental good luck or 'discovery'. Either way, on reaching the lodge or encountering the Shaikh, he or she realises that this is the place he or she has always been seeking. After some hesitation, perhaps going away and coming back a second or third time, the person decides to take bai'at, the saintly vow of allegiance. But then, when one probes further, one discovers that close relatives - a father, a brother, members of the village, co-workers, colleagues or fellow soldiers, are all disciples as well. Discipleship, in other words, runs in families or occupational guilds.

The significance of this journey which turns out not to be a journey on closer look, is the voluntarism it implies. Even though whole villages, arms factories, public works departments, police units, army regiments, may follow a particular saint, nevertheless the relationship is an elective one. You choose to become a disciple; your relationship to a saint is conceived to be dyadic. What the stories of epiphanies and dreams come true show, above all, is the sense that disciples have that their relationship with the saint is not only unique but voluntaristic, an expression of their deepest subjectivist desire and hence a sign of freedom par excellence. Rather than being enslaved, then, to the saint in a relationship that extinguishes their persona, the relationship is experienced as liberating, just as the voluntary work performed by disciples in the darbar, or the food they donate to the *langar* (Werbner 1998) are experienced as crucibles, tests of personal capacity which are thus empowering.

The story of one murid who I encountered hard at work with a team of builders building new modern flush toilets for the women's quarters, exemplifies this process. Mr. Saghir had had a dream *khuab* in which he dreamt that he was building a stone wall in a place surrounded by hills, with a very beautiful mosque and garden. A Shaikh came by while he was working and praised him. He did not know where the place was or who the Shaikh was. He recounted the dream to his friend and the friend, already a murid, suggested that the person in his dream might be Zindapir, the Shaikh of Ghamkol Sharif. So, the disciple told me, he came here and met the Shaikh, and the first thing the Shaikh asked him to do was to start building a wall. He realised then that this was the Shaikh of his dream. So he

became a murid and his whole village, located about 30km south of 'Pindi, all became murids, 500 strong. He was the first murid in his family.

At the time of his dream he was working on a building site and he was only a mason. Now he is a contractor with a truck and car, he has built offices and big houses, his company puts in tenders for major building projects. He and his brother, who are partners, built Badshah Sahab's house free of charge and they have done a good deal of the other building work in the darbar, including the courtyard wall of the house where I am currently staying. Recently, they brought all the tenting for Badshah Sahib's son's wedding in the darbar.

For men away from the saint, and often working away from their families, the support networks of other disciples enable them to resist arbitrary authority, as Ewing too has argued (Ewing 1993). The saint is an (absent) source of moral strength, as we saw in the case of Hajji Ibrahim. But this absence is strengthened by the co-presence of other disciples who often meet, usually in the evenings, to recite zikr together, as several disciples in public works department and the army told me. 'We sit around in the evenings and I give them tea and sweets, and we chat and do zikr and it creates friendship between us, all the pir-bhai are very close. I make all the arrangements for the zikr meetings,' a murid who is a recruiting officer in the army told me.

Another murid, an officer in the army, claimed that there were lots of other disciples of Zindapir in the army -- fifty per cent of his unit are disciples, he said, and since he retired with a pension he has recruited followers from his village. He started by doing zikr in the mosque on his own, and now there are 42 disciples in the zikr circle. 'When the Shaikh tells someone to start zikr in the mosque then many people join if they see that it is good,' he said. What benefit do disciples in the army get by following Zindapir, I asked, with Ewing in mind. He replied that the Shaikh instructs people to tell the truth and be dutiful and hard-working so this is a great help (in performing one's duties as a soldier). What would happen if one had a bad commander who gave a wrong order? He replied that if there is a bad officer who gives a bad command, his command should not be followed because God is watching.

Hajji Ibrahim, himself an ex-soldier, also stressed that the Shaikh teaches obedience and hard work but he seemed less certain as to whether one should disobey a wrong order. Especially in the army, he argued, orders should be obeyed, good or bad. But our interlocutor, himself an officer, viewed the matter differently. Bad commands, he felt, should not just be obeyed blindly.

I asked another murid working as a plumber in the Ministry of Works in Islamabad if there were any other murids at his place of work? He told me that two or three buses come from his Government offices to the 'urs each year. Pir-bhais, he said, help each other and visit each other and do zikr together. In Islamabad

there are five mosques where they meet regularly in turn and do zikr and *gyarvi sharif*, each time in another place. In Pindi there are possibly as many as eight different mosques. They get together, do zikr and eat together after work, and there is a feeling of muhibbat (love). Even some of the murids of other darbars come to their zikr sessions, because they don't have their own sessions, but they never go to theirs.

Disciples of the Shaikh thus set themselves apart as morally superior, and their ascetic values endow their physically difficult jobs with a moral gloss. Just as medieval guilds were attached to Sufi saintly orders in the Ottoman Empire, we find in modern Pakistan a rather similar phenomenon, surprising perhaps in the context of a capitalist, modern nation-state, and relatively submerged and invisible to the public eye (since there are quite a number of diverse types of collectivities from which Zindapir draws his disciples). The complex subjectivity generated by voluntarism, submission, an 'imagined' dyadic relationship and real collective camaraderie, are some of the defining features of Sufism in South Asia today. One may find an echo of this mixture in the literature on the Murids and Hausa traders in West Africa. Only further comparative research on contemporary Sufi cults in other Muslim societies, such as Turkey or North Africa, will tell how widespread this phenomenon still is.

So too in Britain men working in the same factory or living in a single neighbourhood may become devotees of a particular saint. They meet in zikr and meditation circles, go together on hajj or *umra*, march together in processions on *eid-milad-un-nabi* or the annual 'urs, help cook the langar for special occasions and in general participate in a world of voluntarism beyond the mundane drudgery of daily life.

Hence we see that, paradoxically, voluntarism and submission, liberation and total obedience, self-denial and worldly success, are combined in shaping the subjectivities of both Sufi saints and their disciples. Obedience to the saint is not in the end unconditional; so too the saint, while preaching obedience and respect for hierarchy, empowers his disciples to disobey superiors if they feel moved by what they regard as a higher moral imperative. Becoming a disciple is the result of personal voluntarism, even if a person is simply following a family tradition. How far on the Sufi path an individual will choose to journey is ultimately up to him or her. But in all these matters, as I have tried to show here, close physical proximity to a saint shapes the quality of relations between disciples as well as their understanding of the saint himself.

Anthropological Association Meetings in Chicago in 1999 and at the conference on 'Demographic Change, Migration and Urbanisation in Punjab 1980s to 1990s' at Coventry University. I wish to thank the participants at these conferences for their comments.]

Notes

1. Apart from the saint's title, all other names are pseudonyms.

2. Based on Turk (1959). On regional cults see Richard Werbner (1976 and 1989), also P. Werbner (1996).

3. The Chair of the Management Committee of the order, in his capacity as chair of an affiliate organisation, along with three other Muslim groups, was accused by the press of attempts to defraud the Further Education Funding Council of the West Midlands of over a million pounds by claiming fees for 'phantom' evening classes which never took place (*The Observer*, 5/3/95, 1-2; *Birmingham Evening Mail* 5/12/95; see also the *Birmingham Daily* and *Express* 4/5/95, and *Times Educational Supplement* 14/2/97). The Chair defended his innocence to the press and cooperated in the police investigation. No charges were ever brought against him, I was told by the detective constable handling the case for the Crown Court with whom I spoke in January 2000, and he continues to chair the *tariqa*'s Management Committee.

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Why Less Communalism in the Indian Princely States?
A Discussion of their Unsecular Mode of Governance

Dick Kooiman
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

The problem of communal animosity is still haunting Indian public life. So it does modern historiography that grapples with its causes. Much of the debate has centered on British India and the effects of colonial intervention on the emergence of religious conflict. The historian is not equipped to deal with the question which turn the development of communal relations might have taken in case the British influence had been absent. However, the Indian situation offers an unparalleled field of comparison by the co-existence of British India and the Indian states. According to contemporary sources, in the Indian states the harmful impact of communalism was much less pronounced. In a recent contribution to this journal, Ian Copland has suggested that in the states the unbroken chord between the sacred and the secular sustained an institutionalised religious hierarchy, which kept the different religious communities in their 'rightful', that is, subordinate, place. His argument was framed mainly in the context of the northern states. In this article, Copland's ideas will be applied to two southern states as compared with adjacent British Madras. A first foray in this still largely unexplored field of comparative study does not seem to confirm his tentative argument.

I

Communal riots seem to have been more widespread in the directly ruled British provinces than in the Indian princely states. In the princely states there was serious militancy from time to time, but conflicts between members of different religious groups were not so frequent and much less violent in nature. People from the states, backed by British political officers, stressed the harmonious character of their society and attributed communalism, if it showed any sign at all, to pernicious influences from outside. This picture of social harmony in the states is too good to be true. Yet, there can be no doubt that the states compared favourably to the British provinces as far as religious relations were concerned. Several reasons have been given to explain that difference.

Sen has argued that with the gradual introduction of divisive electoral and confrontational systems of government based on simple majority rule, communal conflicts have become progressively more frequent, also in the Indian states.[1] Thus, the explanation for the comparative absence of communal strife in the Indian states might then be sought in political retardation: virtually no elections or devolution of power had taken place before Independence. In this respect, Sen more or less echoes the Indian Statutory Commission which in 1930 observed that so long as

people had no part in the conduct of their own government, there was little for members of one community to fear from the predominance of the other.[2]

Elaborating on that argument I have tried to examine to what extent the policy of the British Indian government to provide religious communities with separate electorates has served as an explanatory factor in the emergence of communalism. These separate electorates, instituted from 1909 onwards, distributed political privilege along lines of religion and are alleged to have divided people in mutually exclusive, often hostile social groups, culminating in the creation of imagined religious communities, confronting each other instead of their common oppressor. My resulting study of Travancore and Baroda did not confirm that hypothesis. In neither of the two states were separate electorates ever introduced. But whereas relations within Baroda remained relatively peaceful before 1947, Travancore was plagued by fierce communal rivalries from an early date.[3] Other explanations dwell on the level of modernisation, industrialisation and urbanisation but verge on determinism, and generally tend to underrate the modern developments that took place in several important states.

In a recent contribution to this journal, Ian Copland has reopened and enriched this debate by putting forward a new line of argument. Framing his argument mainly in the context of the major states of the Punjab, he makes the point that in the princely states no separation had taken place between state polity and religious establishment. British India was a foreign bureaucracy based on the rule of law, but the states were autocratic monarchies ruled in consonance with received notions of traditional kingship which implied that no distinction was made between the sacred and the secular. Thus, subjects belonging to a religion different from that of their ruler were used to acquiescing in an institutionalised subordination which allowed their religious community to exist though not on equal terms. This very unsecular mode of governance proved remarkably effective in keeping the lid on the rise of communalism, which Copland defines as 'structured rivalry between groups designated by their religious affiliation'.[4] This conclusion is of great relevance also to the recent discussion among social scientists in India, whether secularism may be the cause of, rather than the solution to, India's communal problems. But Copland refrains from entering that discussion and confines himself to the history of the states.

In this paper, I will first give a brief summary of Copland's argument. Next, starting from his perspective, I will take a closer look at the communal situation in two states in particular. As Copland has referred mainly to northern states, I thought it worthwhile to test his ideas by applying them to two southern states. For that purpose, Travancore and Hyderabad were an obvious choice in view of their importance, their respective Hindu and Muslim character and my relative acquaintance with their recent history because of earlier research. In order to ascertain any significant differences with the situation in British India, I will also discuss developments in Madras. British India is much too large for a comparative discussion but the Madras Presidency, bordering both on Travancore and Hyderabad, is geographically and culturally quite close.

This problematic is much too complex for a single article. Yet, the least that can be done here is to make some explorations into this wide and still largely unknown field. These explorations tend to question the importance of unsecular governance in explaining the relative absence of communal strife in the princely states. In mid-19th century, the British in Madras had severed all direct connections with Indian religious establishments, thus depriving the religious hierarchy of its political protection. Nevertheless, the first communal stirrings in this part of British India were registered not before the 1930s. In Travancore, on the other hand, the Hindu character of the state did not prevent non-Hindus, especially Christians, from challenging their political subordination from an early date. In Hyderabad, communalism was indeed late in coming, but in the end the long Muslim dominance in this state resulted in an explosion of violence along religious lines.

<center>II</center>

Exploring the nature of princely rule, Copland observes that religion was the most important prop of royal authority. Kingship had religious sanction, both in Brahminical scriptures and in the writings of Islamic commentators. It was bolstered, too, by ritual. A Hindu 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. The accession rites were designed to prepare him for the onerous task that lay ahead by connecting him to the power of the goddess (*shakti*) that resided in the throne.[5]

The princes generally controlled enormous wealth and a large part of it was used for religious purposes. As their legitimacy was intimately tied to religion, Hindu princes were expected to honour the gods with sacrifices, gifts to Brahmins, the upkeep of temples, festivals and charitable institutions, and the patronage of scholars and artists. The daily running of temples, mosques and gurudwaras was generally left to management committees elected by their congregations, but *darbari* sanction was required for all appointments to clerical or priestly office. Likewise, places of worship were closely scrutinised by officials for evidence of neglect or corruption. Thus, princely rule, in contrast to British rule, was not at all neutral about religion.[6]

How did the princes reconcile their personal identity as Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs with their public role as rulers? According to Copland, *rajadharma*, the divine duties of a Hindu ruler, did not make Hindu kings intolerant of Muslims, nor were Muslim kings averse to communal cooperation. There was much in their states' tradition that valorised tolerance and pluralism, not only because it was morally righteous, but also because it meant sound politics. This message of inter-communal tolerance was propagated by numerous symbolic actions of the princes and their governments to demonstrate their commitment to religious cooperation. Several princes personally attended festivals of the other religious communities, financed their religious buildings and used the machinery of their governments to spread the gospel of mutual understanding. Last but not least, a number of *darbars*

committed themselves formally to a policy of equal treatment for minorities like Bikaner which enshrined the principle of religious tolerance in official legislation (1929).[7]

Coercion was not altogether absent in these darbari politics and could be used more freely than in the British provinces. Public expressions of religious belief which might harm the sentiments of other communities were strictly forbidden: processions were restricted, the playing of music in the vicinity of mosques was not allowed, and in most Hindu states the slaughter of domestic animals, especially cows, was banned. These sanctions did not provoke organised communal agitation, as the autocratic milieu did not allow for protest and gave short shrift to political troublemakers. Nothing like these sanctions applied anywhere in British India where officials had to account for their actions to the courts, and a less pliable judiciary played into the hands of agitators.[8]

The princes might declare to have no favourites, but Copland reminds us that their co-religionists tended to view the ruler-subject relationship in a much more proprietorial manner. Muslim subjects of a Muslim prince were inclined to see the ruler as the protector of their religion and judged the performance of his government accordingly. The same held true for Hindus and Sikhs. Generally, public opinion put a lot of pressure on the darbars to privilege the dominant religious group among their subjects and to restrict the rights of minorities. Governments were not insensible to that kind of pressure, but even without it princely spending would have favoured the ruler's community. A Muslim *dewan* might serve a Hindu state (and vice versa), but at the lower levels of the bureaucracy there was a strong preference to recruit Hindus. Therefore, in spite of all darbari rhetoric, institutionalised discrimination was rampant, not only in official patronage and public service but also in educational opportunities and the use of language.[9]

Therefore, Copland concludes, the interesting thing was not that a religious hierarchy existed in the states, but that it was, to a large extent, accepted and even condoned by the subordinate party. By keeping their heads down the subordinated communities bought themselves the freedom to live and worship in their local neighbourhoods free from harassment. However, as already indicated by Governor-General Lansdowne in 1893, the condition of inferiority imposed on members of one religion by those of another was always liable to result in a fight for power in which - I would like to add - the very differences in religious outlook and cultural symbolism might assume a prominent part. And that suggests that communal conflict might be put off for some time, but was always lurking in the background and could explode, even with increased force, if only an opportunity arose to change the existing religious subordination.[10]

Thus, the institutionalised religious hierarchy which kept the different religious communities in their 'rightful' place was closely connected to the unbroken chord between the sacred and the secular. The legitimacy of the Indian princes was derived not only from their duties in securing peace, justice and prosperity, but also and most importantly from their taking care of the spiritual needs of the people and

the protection of the gods and their temples.[11] In the following sections I will examine the religious aspect of royal authority in Hyderabad and Travancore and discuss to what extent the princes' co-religionists in these states were really privileged over other religious communities in terms of official employment and educational opportunities. Another question will be, whether their subordination was indeed accepted by the subordinate parties or resulted in communal tension and conflict. But for comparative purposes I will first take a quick glance at the situation in Madras Presidency and consider the way in which the relationship between state and religion was altered in several important respects with the introduction of direct British rule.

<div style="text-align:center">III</div>

The use of religious ideology and the manipulation of religious resources were not part of the system of authority introduced by the British East India Company. After the Crown had assumed direct control over the Company's Indian territories (1858), its local representatives were determined to continue this secular form of administration, even though the term 'secular' had not yet entered the parlance of current politics. Ignoring the complications of a more precise definition, what I mean by secular is that the state permitted the practice of any religion and would not give preference to one religion over another. More generally, it did not want to involve itself with the religious affairs of its subjects and their organisations. The equality of all religions and communities before the law, officially proclaimed in 1858, was qualified only by the important exception of personal laws. These continued to be governed by the religious laws of the respective communities, precisely because of the reluctance of the colonial state to intervene in matters of religious doctrine and practice.

Temples were not essential to the authoritative basis of British rule in India and the exchange of honours between king and deity as a basis for political authority largely ceased to exist. Yet, *Vaisnavite* temples thrived within the social and cultural context of south India and British administrators and judges had to deal with them given their ritual status and politico-economic power. In its early years, Company power had taken over many of the functions of patronage and administration previously carried out by Indian rulers, including the protection of temples. Soon, vehement protests were raised, especially by Christian missionaries, against the favours shown to the Hindu religion as evidenced by the presence of government officers at Hindu festivals and by donations to temples. In response to these protests, and the demands made by the English press and Parliament, the Company Directors had decided in 1842 to withdraw from all interference with religious establishments.[12] But although standard interpretation has it that by the mid-19th century the British government had abandoned policies which involved it directly with Hindu institutions, Presler reminds us that there was withdrawal only from the most explicitly religious activities which might raise doubts about official impartiality. But there was no general withdrawal, as the Madras Board of Revenue

felt such a policy would jeopardize government revenue and political stability.[13]

Since the Board of Revenue argued that temple income from land was in fact an appropriation of state revenues, temples had already lost most of their economic autonomy. Since 1796, successive regulations had made them dependent for all their regular income on the local revenue administration headed by the British District Collector. In Appadurai's words, there was first the fiscal extraction by the Collector's office with emphasis on direct control and then the financial redistribution with emphasis on indirect control, protection and subordination.[14] The British-Indian authorities remained in charge of the general superintendence of temple management

In spite of that, the British grew increasingly reluctant to arbitrate in temple disputes, especially those of a religious character. Therefore, subsequent legislation shows a continual struggle with the question whether legitimate authority over temples should be transferred to the judiciary or to the executive of the colonial state. The first major legislation pertaining to temples, the 1863 Religious Endowment Act, eliminated the Board of Revenue's primary jurisdiction, handing it over to local temple committees which had their conflicts to be arbitrated by the courts. After World War I, authority shifted away from the courts, and the executive returned to the temple precincts as the paramount state agent. In 1926 a Hindu Religious Endowment Board (HREB) was created and vested with the general superintendence to ensure that temples and religious endowments were properly maintained and administered.[15]

This change of policy took place in a context of growing Indianisation of the local administration and was initiated by a provincial government led by the Justice Party, a non-Brahmin organisation highly critical of Hindu orthodoxy. The leaders of that party wanted to impose a larger degree of central control on temple funds but also to bring important patronage (arbitration, nomination) under their command.[16] The government's main defense for this break with its non-interference policy was that protection of Hindu temples by the state was an ancient Indian tradition. But Sriman Mayasaya, one of the most forceful opponents, objected that, since the modern state did no longer base its legitimacy on temples, it should therefore abstain from all forms of interference and protection.[17]

The principle of equality prohibited the state from discriminating against any citizen on the basis of religion or caste, also in the field of education. But in actual practice that lofty principle affected the different classes of people in very different ways, depending on their respective position in society. When the first English schools were opened, the traditionally literate classes, especially the Brahmins, found themselves in a most favourable position. Because of their scribal background they showed great eagerness in acquiring an English education which - as many historians have shown - enabled them to perpetuate their predominance in government employment and literate professions. To quote just one illustration, in 1916 the Brahmins, numbering 3.2 per cent of the total population only, accounted for no less than 67 per cent and 40 per cent of the total students under higher and secondary education respectively. Even in primary education they were clearly

over-represented. The remainder had to be shared by other Hindus, Muslims, Christians and the so-called untouchable castes. Christians were also over-represented at all educational levels but their absolute numbers were insignificant.[18]

The Madras government as such was not opposed to admission of lower caste Hindus or Muslims to its educational institutions, as it was bound to be under its principle of religious equality. But in practice it proved very sensitive to the prejudices of schoolmasters and high caste Hindus. Apart from that, the examination rules, age bar and prohibitive school and college fees deterred the lower castes and classes from competing with the upper caste Hindus. It was not till the report of the Indian Education Commission (1882) that some action was initiated to restrict Brahmin dominance in educational institutions and to extend the benefit of schooling to the lower castes. In 1892 the Madras government introduced a scheme of half-fee concessions and drew up a list of backward classes entitled to educational concessions. Many backward classes petitioned for inclusion or tried to take advantage of the opening of special schools for Muslims and untouchables. Yet, these provisions could make no dent in the existing educational imbalance.[19] The tables produced by Baker show that in 1936 the number of Brahmin students had slowly fallen to 46 per cent in arts and professional colleges, and 29 per cent in secondary schools.[20] They still held on to their prominent position but gradually had to give way to non-Brahmin students who were making progress both at the higher and secondary levels.

Brahmin preponderance in education, inevitably, was also reflected in public service. The exclusion of the country's vernaculars from the work of administration and the requirement of some basic legal knowledge placed classes outside modern education at a disadvantage. Therefore, there was hardly any branch of public administration in which the educated Brahmins had not made themselves indispensable. In the districts, British Collectors were in charge of local appointments, but informally much was left to the *huzur sheristidar* who was a permanent official with a local background. As a result, by the mid-19th century Brahmins, controlling most of the huzur sheristidar positions, dominated the entire district administration and in some districts administrative posts were virtually monopolised by one or two influential families.

The British realised that the existing system of recruitment was incompatible with public interest and administrative efficiency. Since 1851 several orders had been issued instructing District Collectors to restrict the number of Brahmin entrants into the service and give preference to non-Brahmins. These instructions had remained notoriously ineffective. From the 1880s onwards appointments were increasingly centralised in the Secretariat and the Board of Revenue. That development seriously reduced the influence of the huzurs sheristidars in the respective districts, but also meant that 'an increasing amount of service patronage was pushed to the capital', which became the main arena for the fight for office.[21] In 1907 several Muslim organisations in Madras publicly complained of official neglect of their community (6 per cent of the population) both in education and the services. Some efforts, largely ineffective, were made to redress the existing

grievances with the government stressing that any communal imbalance was not due to official favour.

At the beginning of the 20th century the Brahmin-non-Brahmin ratio of all employees in superior service was still 70:30.[22] Demands for communal reservation in the public services had been refused, but after World War I government policy changed when the Justice Party assumed power. Its leaders had campaigned for a system of service recruitment that would favour the under-represented classes and now that they 'had entered the promised land of ministerships, their followers expected a steady flow of milk and honey'.[23] Shah suggests that these expectations were at least partially fulfilled under the 1927 government order which did introduce reservations and allotted their major proportion to non-Brahmin Hindus.[24] Real change, however, proved difficult to realise. Baker observes that there was an insufficient number of non-Brahmins qualified and willing to compete for vacancies, especially for the more subordinate posts. Apart from that, the Indian Civil Service resisted the idea of service appointments in the hands of politicians forced to dole out patronage to a large circle of followers. In 1929 a Madras Services Commission was created to protect the services from political influences. At the same time, a complex system of communal proportion for appointment and promotion in the services was introduced.[25]

We may conclude that the British government in Madras had arrived at a reasonably firm policy of not involving itself in matters of religion and of upholding a stance of impartial arbiter in secular matters. The state was firmly in British hands and there was little ground for any community to see the ruler-subject relationship in a proprietorial manner, even though some groups were strategically better placed than others. The British were convinced that this neutral bureaucracy was a major factor in the discouragement of communal strife.[26]

The functional imperatives of their colonial administration however, were both tactical and moral, as Radhakrishnan has pointed out.[27] On the tactical side were considerations of political stability, as evident from government's attempts to draw on its side the upper strata of society, both for reasons of administrative convenience and the wish not to disturb the existing social order. On the moral side was a concern for political legitimacy that was sought by rendering justice to the dis-privileged sections of the society through attempts at communal representation and reservation. These policies were inevitably full of dilemmas and contradictions.

Government was thus not the privileged domain of any caste or community. It belonged to all people alike, or maybe better, it belonged to no one in particular, at least *de jure*. Whereas, according to Copland, in the princely states a religious hierarchy bound the different communities to their respective, often subordinate places, in British Madras castes and communities were set free in a mutual competition for power and influence, though not on equal terms. Did it lead to communalism?

There were indeed, almost from the beginning of British rule, non-Brahmin protests against upper-caste dominance. The non-Brahmin movement, led by the upper strata of landed peasantry, began in Madras in the 19th century, much earlier

than elsewhere, challenging Brahmin religion and pressing the government for reservations in the public services and educational institutions.[28] But they were not communal in Copland's sense of structural rivalry between people of different religion. On the other hand, Hindus and Muslims used to move together quite peacefully, sharing in one another's festivals and practicing a common set of customs. It was only in the early 1930s, that Hindu-Muslim discord started with communal riots in the towns, sometimes violent, and with Muslim politicians founding their own separate political organisations.[29] Thus, communalism came but it came late.

<p align="center">IV</p>

The patronage and endowment of temples was the primary means to establish the legitimacy of rulers, great and small, on the Malabar coast. That practice had brought the temples into the possession of immense wealth and extensive landed property, making them the main financial institutions of their times. During the first part of the 18th century, Martanda Varma, a young and ambitious prince of Travancore, succeeded in wresting control over some of the major temples from their largely independent committees and managers. After some ruthless military campaigns, eliminating internal opponents and neighbouring principalities, Martanda Varma was able to make Travancore the major single power on the southwestern coast, stretching from Cochin in the north to Cape Kanyakumari in the south.

His state was a Hindu state, in the sense that the majority of the population belonged to that religion. Also, it had never been under Muslim rule. But the most important reason to call it a Hindu state was that in 1751 Martanda Varma, at the end of his reign, dedicated his whole kingdom to the *Sri Padmanabha* temple in Trivandrum. This religious grant of the whole state made of Travancore, at least in theory, a unified and divinely sanctioned polity with the king as the vassal of his tutelary deity Sri Padmanabha, the local appellation for Vishnu.[30] That ceremony not only was a political manoeuvre, but also a firm claim to all-embracing legitimacy by making to the temple the largest grant possible, the dedication of the whole kingdom. Later, this concept of the Maharaja administering the state for his deity would seriously complicate negotiations on Travancore's integration with the independent Indian union.[31] Elsewhere, similar notions of kingship existed, but what distinguished Travancore was that the relationship between deity and ruler was formally established in a constitutional sense and repeated in public declarations.[32]

As a servant of Sri Padmanabha the Maharaja had to observe a number of state rituals, described by Kawashima.[33] Amongst these rituals were 'the golden womb', most probably a ceremony of rebirth, and 'the bathing festival' with the ruler leading a procession carrying the image of Sri Padmanabha to the sea to be bathed. One of the most important was the *Murajapam* ceremony, held every six years and lasting 56 days, performed for the defense of the kingdom and the people. It was

instituted in 1751 in expiation of the acts of violence Martanda Varma was forced to commit in defeating his enemies and founding his state. In 1935 one was held and the British Resident wrote in his fortnightly report, that over 2000 Brahmins praying for the ruling family were lodged and fed by the state to the expense of Rs. 6 *lakhs* .[34]

Although in the 18th century the old temple organisation was smashed and centralisation established[35], a large part of the total cultivated area remained under temple control or was held as tax-free tenures by Brahmins. It was left to a British Resident, imposed after treaties with the East India Company, to acquire the properties of 378 important and wealthy temples for the state which brought two-thirds of the total cultivated area under direct state ownership.[36] By this measure, the Resident, temporarily acting as Dewan, wanted to reduce the political influence of the temples and at the same time tap their economic resources by bringing their extensive landed properties under the revenue system. After the introduction of these measures (1811-12), state control over temples, their expenditure as well as ceremonies, became more strict than ever before.[37] The management of religious institutions continued lending political and religious legitimacy to the ruling dynasty, but placed a heavy burden on the state treasury. Expenses for the support of temples and *uttupuras* (eating-houses for Brahmins) could amount to 7.6 per cent of total state expenditure.[38] Government control also enabled the state in 1936 to throw open all state temples for worship by the lower Hindu castes, a measure that in Madras province had to wait for Independence. After Independence the tradition of state patronage of religious institutions continued, as Kerala and Tamilnadu, incorporating the former Travancore's territories, were constitutionally made to pay an annual subsidy to the Travancore *Devaswom* Fund. [39]

Travancore was famous for its enlightened educational policies. Nevertheless, till far into the 19th century, education was mainly private and vernacular, and the rate of literacy low, also among caste Hindus. In the 1830s the first government English schools appeared, followed in the 1870s by the establishment of village schools. Because of the prevailing caste rigidity, the government preferred to support private schools open to all castes and creeds, rather than admit Hindus of lower castes to its own schools, with all the concomitant social tensions. Therefore, about the same time, it started the distribution of educational grants-in-aid to private agencies, and Christian missions working among the poor were quick to respond. Grants-in-aid were supplied on the condition that schools imparted a sound secular education and, as might be expected, this requirement has raised incessant controversy. But the remarkable fact remains that missionary education in this Hindu state, particularly among women and the lower Hindu castes (more than one-third of the population), was co-financed by the state to an extent unthinkable in Madras. Only in 1910, a restricted number of government schools were declared open to the lowest Hindu castes, but even then the state remained passive in the face of high caste resistance resulting in clashes. According to Mathew, Travancore's educational progress was not the work of its progressive Maharajas, but should be attributed to the efforts of Protestant missionaries in the 19th century and of social

reform movements among the lower castes, especially *Ezhavas*, during the first half of 20th century.[40]

During the first part of the 20th century, these efforts began to show substantial results. The rate of literacy jumped to 29 per cent in 1931 as against a poor 11 per cent in British Madras. The benefit of education, however, was very unevenly spread among the population, not only between male and female but also between castes and communities. In 1931 Hindus made up 61 per cent of the population, but only 27 per cent of them were able to read and write in the vernacular. A small number of rather wealthy Brahmins enjoyed a literacy rate of 49 per cent, whereas the numerous untouchable agricultural labourers - largely excluded from public life by a rigorous application of the concept of distance pollution - numbered only a few percentages. *Nayars* formed the dominant intermediate caste and with 17 per cent of the population they not only were over-represented in the state's educational institutions but also dominating the state's administrative services and the incipient legislative council. The Syrian Christians who trace their origin to the arrival of St.Thomas, the Apostle, were another important community. These Syrians enjoyed high status and carefully kept their distance from the lower-caste Christians, who were more recently converted by the numerous missionary societies working in Travancore. They were slightly superior to the Nayars, both in absolute number and rate of literacy, but were deliberately kept out of the bastions of political power.

Did Travancore's religiously sanctioned hierarchy mean that groups other than caste Hindus kept their heads down and acquiesced in their lack of privilege like getting no admittance to the public services? That is not the impression I get from internal developments in this state. First of all, the Naya*r* dominance of the services was the rather recent result of claims made from the end of the 19th century. As the Maharaja'*s* government had recruited a large number of Brahmins from the Madras and Bombay Presidencies to run the expanding administration, Naya*rs* began to resent what they felt to be official neglect. In the famous *Malayali* Memorial (1891), they asked the Maharaja for a fair share in government appointments for the local people and raised the demand for a distribution of jobs on the basis of the numerical strength of each community. This has been heralded as 'the birth of communal politics' in Travancore[41], but it was a rivalry between castes and not between religious groups.

As the main instigators of the Memorial, the Nayars were also the main beneficiaries. Soon however, they had to face increasing competition from a group with a different religious affiliation, the Syrian Christians. Some sects of these Syrians had emerged as the state's most enterprising community with activities stretching from trading and banking to plantation industries.[42] In view of their importance as a well-educated, economic elite, these Syrians found it difficult to accept their lack of political power. Therefore, from the beginning of the 20th century a fierce rivalry ensued between Nayars and Syrian Christians, with positions in the services and the legislative as the main issues at stake. In

this rivalry, the Syrians were supported by low caste *Ezhavas*, and, more hesitantly, by Muslims and new Christians. As receivers of state grants for their schools, the new Christians were not easily inclined to fight the government.

After World War I Syrian Christians together with some Ezhavas organised a campaign for a wider opening of the public services. As the management of many temples and temple properties had become part of the state's revenue administration, only caste Hindus were ritually allowed to join the important Land Revenue Department. After much pressure the government finally acquiesced in a separation of temple management from the Revenue Department, thus removing the ritual barriers that had until then prevented all but Brahmins and Nayars from entering this part of the services. As this measure did not really improve the situation, in the 1920s the aggrieved groups renewed their agitation against the Nayars. To press the case of castewise representation detailed statistics were prepared that were eagerly discussed in the Legislative Council.[43]

In the 1930s, numerical and communal classifications had become the standard idiom of Travancore political discourse. From all sides statistics were produced to claim political privilege on the sheer strength of number, and communities were grouped or split accordingly. In 1934 a government enquiry committee brought to light that Nayars alone still accounted for half of all official appointments, about three times their share in the population.[44] To solve the problem of recruitment, in 1935 the government of Travancore promulgated an order regulating recruitment to the various classes of service and their communal proportion. The principle of communal representation was accepted and a three-tier division of administrative service instituted with, in the higher division, efficiency as the primary criterion, and, in the lower division, communal representation and rotation. After promulgation of this order Ezhavas, Muslims and new Christians started complaining that the majority of key positions was now falling to caste Hindus and prominent Syrians, indicating that the latter category had come to arrive. Resolutions were moved in the Legislative urging the government to take steps to guarantee that all the important communities in the state were properly represented. The heated discussions that continued to flare up disclosed the deep-rooted communal bitterness that prevailed among the various communities, but still mainly between Christians and Nayars.[45]

The communal rivalry was also transferred to the field of political organisation and representation. The Legislative Council that in 1888 the Maharaja granted his people – the first such body in a princely state - was purely a deliberative body with a small number of nominated members only. With the institution of a Popular Assembly in 1904 elections were introduced, but the Assembly had no legislative powers at all. It was primarily aimed at promoting good understanding between the many castes and communities whose growing antagonisms at that time already were causing the state much trouble.[46] At its first meeting, the Dewan, called equality of treatment to all religions one of the principal features of Travancore state.[47] This official declaration

of religious equality, a core element in what I defined above as secular politics, did not go far in assuaging the feelings of the communities which felt unjustly neglected, the more so as caste Hindus remained in control of the main organs of the state.

The political fight came to a head in the 1930s. The constitutional reforms published in 1932 fell far short of the political aspirations that had been rising among many disadvantaged communities. Organisations of Syrian Christians, *Ezhavas* and Muslims joined forces and warned the Dewan that the proposed electoral rules would result only in the accentuation of existing communal bitterness in the state. As the government proved not responsive, these local organisations publicly declared that they would abstain from taking part in the coming elections for the reformed legislative bodies so long as government did not make provision for the representation of all considerable communities proportionate to their population. Their main objection was that the constitutional reforms placed all other communities under the dominance of one group, the Nayars, and that this unequal distribution of power was the basic cause of the intensification of communal strife and division. Only after a widening of the franchise and a regrouping of the constituencies which promised Nayars and Syrian Christians an equal number of elected seats, some peace was restored.

Communal relations however remained strained. They were further exacerbated by the policies of the Dewan who invited the Hindu *Mahasabha* to Travancore to counter alleged Christian designs to take over the Hindu state, and constant rumours that the government extended state funds to the Kerala Hindu Mission meant to reconvert untouchables who had gone over to Christianity.[48] When Travancore entered the Indian union, it had earned the dubious reputation of a state unhappily stricken by the deep-seated disease of communalism.[49]

<div style="text-align:center">V</div>

The state of Hyderabad was carved out of the crumbling Mughal empire in the course of the 18th century, when the provincial governor of the Deccan, the Nizam, centralised the administration of this region under his personal control and established an independent centre of power. The state that emerged can be seen as a political implantation by Muslim rulers from the north in a Hindu majority area. According to the 1931 census the Muslim share in the total population was 10 per cent, mainly concentrated in the urban centres, whereas the Hindus made out 84 per cent of the population, much more than in Travancore.

Hyderabad was a Muslim state in the sense that it was ruled by a Muslim royal dynasty of Nizams surrounded by a select circle of powerful Muslim nobles. But it was not a theocratic state. Even though Islamic orthodoxy does not permit a dualistic sacred versus secular dichotomy on the ideological plane – a similar dichotomy might also be questioned in Hindu religious tradition – the rule of the Nizams cannot be seen as the enthronement of Islam as religion. Had it been otherwise, their rule could not have lasted for a single generation. As Madan

reminds us in his study of Muslim rule in India, there was an inherent tension between the *ulama* as the upholders of orthodoxy, calling for a purification of their religion and the establishment of an Islamic state, and the Muslim kings as the protagonists of dynastic rule, bent on safeguarding their temporal power. The state may have been seen by all concerned ideally as the protector of the true Islamic way of life (*sharia*), but there was also a keen awareness that this role could seldom be discharged in full.[50]

Islamic law did not prevail in Hyderabad. Bills were placed on Muslim jurisprudence, the Hindu *shastras*, special laws binding on a particular community, or customs and usages having the force of law. In addition to these sources, laws in force in British India were consulted.[51] After the end of Muslim rule in India on a sub-continental scale (1858), Hyderabad was eager to style itself the successor to the former Mughal empire, using Mughal authority as its main source of symbolic legitimacy. Only on the eve of Independence Muslim leaders in Hyderabad began to connect the political tradition of the Mughals with the religion and laws of Islam.[52]

The Nizam was seen as the political representative of his religious community. Yet, his power was not in any way related to mosques or any religious establishment, even though he might favour these establishments with his generous donations. As the Nizam drew an enormous income from his crown lands, the custom revenues and the state civil list - apart from more obscure, often illegal sources – he represented an immense source of patronage.[53] Part of this wealth was used to propagate the message of inter-communal tolerance, as mentioned by Copland. The Nizam's non-Muslim subjects occasionally received generous contributions to their religious and educational institutions.[54] However, by far the major part of his largesse was spent on Muslims. In the 1930s the British Resident pointed out that ninety-five per cent of the state's revenue was paid by Hindus who felt bitter at the high expenditure on Muslim institutions and personages.[55]

Various biographies describe the last rulers of Hyderabad as extremely solicitous of Hindu sentiments. The sixth Nizam made a lasting impression by performing a *puja* when the floods of 1908 had to be pacified - which according to legend caused the waters to recede. According to Yazdani, his son, the last Nizam, continued these symbolic actions, especially in his younger years.[56] He regularly attended church at Christmas and singled out his Parsi subjects for praise. His government is also said to have tried to accommodate the Hindus by placing restrictions on cow-slaughter, but local reports refer to the existence of numerous slaughterhouses in the larger towns and cities. At personal level, the Nizam treated his Hindu courtiers and officials with the same consideration that he showed to his Muslim courtiers and officials. Nevertheless, discrimination of non-Muslims was rampant in all branches of government and a subordination of the Hindu majority in the services, judiciary and army was rigorously maintained.

On the occasion of his silver jubilee in 1937, the Nizam declared that the Hindus and Muslims of his state were like his two eyes. But some of his subjects

complained that he must be blind in one eye, because he did not hold the scales even between the two communities.[57] In the same year, the British Director-General of Police tried to allay a growing Muslim-Hindu hostility by getting an order issued declaring all religions free and equal before the law. His efforts remained in vain.[58]

In 1854 the state had assumed responsibility for education and in this field Hindus were clearly at a disadvantage. Urdu was proclaimed the official language of Hyderabad and Urdu-medium schools became widespread. The majority of rural-based students however, were Hindu with *Marathi, Telegu* or *Kannada* as their mother tongue. Apart from state schools, there were private schools in these local languages (20 per cent of the total in 1931), many of them managed by Hindus and receiving government aid. Schools throughout the state were open to children of all castes without distinction; but in practice few of the lower castes availed themselves of the permission, partly owing to the prejudices of the higher castes.

As far as higher education was concerned, two institutions dominated the field, Nizam College and Osmania University. Nizam College, an amalgamation of several local English-medium schools, was said to attract the best students of the state. Nevertheless, Osmania University, formed in 1917-18, was the pride of the state's educational achievements and the first university in India to use a vernacular (Urdu) as its medium of instruction.

In 1931 no more than 5 per cent of the population in Hyderabad state was literate, a percentage not only far below that of Travancore, but also less than half the percentage in the neighbouring British provinces. Muslims, though only a minority of the population, dominated the classrooms. At the beginning of the 20th century they numbered 83 per cent of students in colleges, 45 per cent in secondary schools and 42 per cent of the pupils in primary schools, a result which at that time the State Gazetteer could in all frankness attribute to 'the position held by Muhammedans in a State of which the ruler belongs to their religion'.[59] In 1931 the Muslims with a literacy rate of 12.4 per cent were still much better educated than the Hindus with 4 per cent. The higher the Hindu caste, the higher the level of literacy with the *Vellalas* on top with a rate of 59 per cent and the so-called *Adi* Hindus at the bottom with less than one per cent. Female literacy was dismally low and literacy among Christians high, but in absolute numbers insignificant.

Most of the state newspapers, whatever their political colour, were published in Urdu. At the beginning of the 20th century, their total number was 14, all in Urdu with two of them partly in *Marathi*. Some English newspapers published outside also had a large circulation, but the state of the press was decidedly poor. In 1931 there was not a single printing company. This compared quite unfavourably with Travancore where a high rate of literacy stimulated a flourishing local press.

The Nizam was surrounded by a bureaucracy that was strongly dominated by Muslims. This composition of the bureaucracy may offer the most convincing illustration of the privileged position enjoyed by his Muslim subjects. It definitely became the greatest political problem, especially when a federal structure and

elected representation drew near. In the 19th century the number of non-local Muslims in the state services, often recruited from north India, showed a steady increase, but the resultant tension was gradually overshadowed by the even more problematic relationship between Muslims and Hindus.

Hindus were not completely excluded from the bureaucracy and the legislative. Their cooperation was deliberately sought as part of state politics. They could even attain the Prime Ministerial office and from 1925-1936 Sir Kishen Pershad, an old-fashioned, conservative Hindu courtier[60], served the state in that most responsible position. When in the 1930s communal tensions in the state threatened to take a violent turn, Sir Pershad addressed an open letter to his brother Hindus, reminding them that Muslims and Hindus were 'the two arms of these dominions' and should live in peace.[61]

Nevertheless, different sources all point to the conclusion that Muslims were over-represented in the bureaucracy. My own counts of the Hyderabad *Civil Lists* for the years 1896, 1923 and 1936 confirm that conclusion with a slight variation. Among the main officers at headquarters (all departments excluding the military) Muslims varied between 55 and 71 per cent, the number of Europeans diminished from 29 to 11 per cent, but the Hindus had been able to increase their share over that period from 7 to 20 per cent. Even then, Hindus were grossly under-represented, but indignation about this communal imbalance seems to have been greater outside the state than inside. Yet gradually, recruitment to the services became a major theme in Hyderabad's public life and the concomitant tensions and conflicts increasingly found their way along religious lines of demarcation.

The freedom of assembly and expression in the state was strictly limited. Therefore, the growing resentment among Hindus at their subordination in all aspects of public life first found expression in political meetings organised beyond Hyderabad's borders. Their major demand became the introduction of constitutional reform and the establishment of a responsible government under the aegis of the ruling dynasty. The sharing of power however, was a most delicate question in view of Hyderabad's communal complexion where for a long time Muslims had ruled the state and Hindus worked the land. The prospective entry into an Indian federation (India Act 1935) and attacks from outside by Hindu communal organisations made Muslims in Hyderabad seize upon religion as a shared symbol to mark their own boundaries and defend their interests. In the late 1930's communal tensions rose to fever pitch on issues like the ban on the entry of religious preachers from outside, allegations that the state's Ecclesiastical Department was withholding permission to the establishment of Hindu religious buildings, and rumours that the Nizam's government was using state funds for the *Tabligh* movement, organised for the purpose of the conversion of untouchables to Islam.

In 1938, a new political association was formed on Hyderabad territory, the Hyderabad State Congress (HSC), alongside of and opposite to the already existing Muslim *Ittihad*. Rejecting all forms of communalism, the HSC stressed its sincere loyalty to the ruling dynasty and declared its main objective to be the attainment of

a responsible government by all peaceful and legitimate means.[62] The government refused to be misled by this 'cloak for subversive, communal activities'[63] and declared it an unlawful association under the Public Safety regulation. As the government was not prepared to lift the ban, the HSC decided to launch a *satyagraha* campaign to wrest civil rights for the people from this 'feudal-cum-communal hierarchy'.[64] This satyagraha got increasingly a communal colour because of the external involvement of extremist Hindu organisations in British India.

In his opening address to the Legislative Council (1938), Hyderabad's Prime Minister declared his government's firm determination to defend the peaceful preaching and practice of every religion. But though, 'till lately, much to our pride and credit, [communalism] was unknown in these territories', he had unwillingly to conclude that religion was degenerating into the promotion of racial hatred and political propaganda. This alarming development, he warned, was going to have a retarding influence on constitutional reform.[65] It also resulted in large-scale violence and, as Copland concludes in his study of Hyderabad, it irreparably shattered the state's much vaunted communal accord.[66] On the eve of Independence, armed volunteers of the Ittihad, reinforced by embittered Muslim refugees from elsewhere, terrorised the Hindu population, followed by a massive and brutal Hindu retaliation after Hyderabad had been incorporated into the Indian union (1948).

VI

The approach adopted in this study has resulted in the neglect of several important issues. First of all, the main question addressed has not been why and under what immensely varied conditions communalism emerged in the Indian princely states, but rather why it failed to come up or came up much later than in the directly-ruled British provinces. Looking for an explanation I have made use of ideas developed by Ian Copland in an article that was recently published in this journal.[67] In that article he pointed at the continued existence in the states of a religious-cum-political hierarchy and argued that this unsecular mode of governance effectively kept the lid on the rise of communal animosities. I have examined his argument for the southern states of Travancore and Hyderabad, comparing them to Madras Presidency where the British tried to end all forms of religious involvement and favouritism. Not all aspects mentioned by Copland could be included. An element like tolerance is difficult to measure and many of the ruler's private donations to religious establishments remained hidden from public view. Therefore, the main thrust of this paper was on the state's connection with religious institutions and groups, and the extent to which certain communities were favoured in educational and employment opportunities.

What this study confirms is the observation made by Copland that within the Indian princely order religion was a far less divisive factor than caste. From

the second part of the 19th century, the main tension in Travancore was between Brahmins and other emerging caste communities like the Nayars. In Hyderabad similar tensions could be noticed, though not between castes but between local Muslims and those recruited from outside. In British Madras, no part of the princely order, a non-Brahmin movement, challenging Brahmin caste dominance in society, came up, earlier than anywhere else in India.

With regard to communalism, much depends on the definition used for the purpose. Copland defines it as the structured rivalry between groups of different religions. From the rest of his paper it appears that violence might be part of that rivalry though not as a decisive criterion. Defined in that wide sense, communalism in Travancore was not late in coming. Though pre-eminently a Hindu state, Travancore could not forestall the emergence of strong rivalry, mainly between caste Hindus and Christians. From the beginning of the 20th century, different sects of Syrian Christians, with the help of Muslims and other Hindu castes, started to question their marginal position in the state's political structure. Their mobilisation on a religious basis was primarily aimed at an improvement of their community in the field of political representation and economic opportunities, and was not much different from the campaigns conducted by local caste associations.

The way in which communalism manifested itself in Hyderabad was more prone to slide into cultural dominance, exclusivism, and even violence. Here it came late, not before the 1930s, but when it came, it exploded with a force too long suppressed. The bolstering of state authority with appeals to Muslim and Mughal tradition enabled, as suggested by Copland, the continuation of an absolutism that was impossible in British India. But it also meant that the battle lines were drawn more sharply along religious lines. At about the same time, the first communal stirrings could be registered in Madras, but even then it was not a very prominent phenomenon in this British province. Therefore, I think that the importance of an unbroken relationship between state and religion should not be overrated. It did not prevent subordinated communities from challenging the existing social hierarchy from an early date, as was the case in Travancore. In Madras on the other hand, the British may have withdrawn from all involvement with religious affairs and declared all their subjects equal before the law, but at the local level rural magnates continued their traditional connections with religious institutions and Brahmins were able to preserve their pre-eminent position in a hierarchy that at the top was deprived of an Indian crown.

In both Travancore and Hyderabad, there was a highly uneven opportunity structure that excluded important groups from a share of political power. The resistance by these groups to a dominant Hindu and Muslim elite gradually assumed a communal colour. The reason why the emergence of communalism could much longer be delayed in Hyderabad can be explained by strong state repression. Also, the virtual absence of forms of election and representation -- in contrast with the situation in Travancore - restrained the growth of communal

feelings. But decisive, in my view, was the much higher level of literacy in Travancore which made subordinated groups more conscious of their position and afforded them with the means to work for their improvement. The social divergencies with their explosive potential were present in both states. But whereas in Travancore communal rivalries emerged from within as part of local developments, in Hyderabad the fire was to a large extent inflamed by communal forces from outside.

Copland framed his discussion mainly in the context of the Punjab states, but suggests that his conclusions might be not specific to them. The impression I have is that the difference in mode of governance between princely India and British provinces does not bring us very far in explaining the absence or late arrival of communalism in the former, at least as far as southern India is concerned. The differences in the incidence of communalism between northern and southern India seem to be much more striking and asking for explanation. Yet in all cases, in order to arrive at more definite answers we need to better define our concepts, like communalism, (un)secular governance and institutionalised subordination. Otherwise, our answers will retain the rather provisional character, from which this article is equally unable to escape.

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The religious dimension in the struggle for Khalistan and its roots in Sikh history

Sandeep Chohan *(University of Wolverhampton)*
Ron A. Geaves *(University College Chichester)*

The call for Khalistan was made explicit after 1947 and the idea gained momentum in the early 1970s. However, many scholars believe that the idea of Khalistan was a result of the Independence talks in 1947 or other contemporary social, economic or political factors. This article will attempt to explore the possibility that the ideal of an independent Sikh nation pre-existed the events of this period of political turmoil and has its roots in the earlier history of the Punjab and the development of religious doctrines and practices unique to Sikhism.

Introduction

The demand for a separate Sikh homeland in the Punjab has been explored by a number of scholars in order to determine its causes. According to Goring (1995), Owen Cole (1994), McLeod (1995), and Riar (1999), the idea of Khalistan originated in 1946 during the negotiations with the British for India's independence. It is agreed by these scholars that the Khalistan notion was suppressed and denied by the British and Indian authorities but that there remained an underlying current to create Khalistan, revived publicly in the late 1960s with the requests for a Punjabi Suba based on linguistic arguments and the campaigns by the Akali Dal for a Punjabi speaking state.[1] However, the Akali campaign was in accordance with the then current policy of the Government of India to reorganize states on a linguistic basis. However, it is unlikely that the Indian Government would have recognized the innate dangers of the submerged ideal of Khalistan implicit in encouraging the ideal of more autonomy, based on linguistic arguments. The ideal, at least in the form of a Sikh homeland, had remained throughout the intervening period as an invisible tendency awaiting the right political climate to emerge. Scholars have posited a range of complex reasons for the Sikh demand to have a separate state. Wallace suggests that the solution to the reasons for the increase in the Sikh call for Khalistan in the 1980s can be found in the idea of the 'Panth in danger'. He argues that this was the result of the migration of Hindus into the Punjab and the outflow of Sikhs to other parts of India and further afield to other parts of the world.[2] Generally, Sikhs have always been a minority in the Punjab except in

the period after 1966. Wallace seems to be arguing that these demographic changes began to exert pressures on the Sikh community.[3]

In addition to the Sikhs becoming yet again a minority under Hindu numerical dominance, Keppley Mahmood (1989) argues that the rebellion in the Punjab was associated with the long-term aspirations of Hindus to dominate the subcontinent both religiously and culturally. She suggests that the ideal of the Sikhs as an ethnic nation with a right to self-determination arose out of these demographic and political struggles with a resurgent Hinduism and combined with the fact that the geographic range of Sikhism corresponded with the physical boundaries of the region where Punjabi was the dominant language.[4]

On the other hand, Oberoi (1987) sees the emotional allegiance of Sikhs to the territory of the Punjab arising out of the demand by the Muslims for an independent Pakistan that was successfully achieved in 1947[5]. Jeurgensmeyer (1994) argues that the reasons are not to do with either Hindu or Muslim domination, but that young Sikhs rallied to Bhindrawale as a religious alternative to the corruption of secular leaders and it was therefore a part of the larger response of combating secularism through the alternative of religious nationalism that has manifested itself as a variety of 'fundamentalisms' in different parts of the world[6]. Others such as Pritam Singh (1987) have looked at economic changes in the Punjab and the cultural processes resulting from the capitalist modernization of the Punjab's agriculture in the 1960s. He argues that this led to 'a dislocation of the old forms of life and the fracturing of moral-ethical norms' and contributed to the emergence of religious revivalism as a response to this cultural trauma.[7]

This article acknowledges that these were contributing factors to the creation of the demand for a separate Sikh state that culminated in the tragic events in June 1984, but intends to explore the religious concept of *miri/piri*. This ideal dates back to the time of the human Gurus and provides a powerful sacred symbol in the development of Sikh identity. Our argument is that it could help sustain a growing awareness of a political entity that could combine with religious identity and evolve to a desire for statehood that would emerge under the right conditions of crisis. Pettigrew (1987) acknowledged the close relationship between sacred and temporal power in the Sikh community. She states: 'religiously regulated political action always remains a possibility in the Sikh system because of the indivisibility of religion and temporal power'.[8] Keppley Mahmood also affirms that the ethnic, linguistic and regional identity of the Punjab is intertwined with Sikh religious identity and agrees with the authors that the reason for the conflict in the Punjab needs to be sought by an 'excursion into history'.[9] Oberoi introduces the concept of a metacommentary that parallels the contemporary political and social issues that gave rise to the Punjab conflict. He describes these as 'a kind of coded reality' of the Sikh worldview and their experiences expressed in the sacred stories of the Punjab that Sikhs have communicated to themselves since the Panth's creation.[10] He argues that underneath the political realities are a 'repertoire of myths, metaphors, signs, symbols and gestures'[11] and it is our suggestion that one of the most powerful of these symbols drawn upon by Sikhs in the Punjab is the

religious ideal of *miri/piri*. Pettigrew appears to agree with this hypothesis and states that '*miri/piri*, by providing sovereignty, gave the Sikhs an exclusive territorial home on earth'.[12] She suggests that the political theory supplied by the religious concept of miri/piri provided a counteraction to combat growing Hindu revivalism which emerged in the 1970s.[13]

The Concept of Miri and Piri

Cole and Sambhi state that the concept of miri and piri is derived from Muslim culture and denotes the same meanings but in a specific Sikh religious and cultural context. Miri originates in the Arabic title '*Amir*' used to describe a ruler, whereas piri is obviously associated with '*pir*' which is used by subcontinent Muslims instead of *shaikh* as the title for a spiritual master in the Sufi tradition.[14] In the Muslim context it is necessary to return to the period of Muhammad to find the full embodiment of pir and amir in one person. In Sikhism, the relationship between the temporal power of the Guru and his spiritual authority and guidance changes dramatically from the first Guru through to the tenth. This article suggests that in order to chart the development of the concept of a separate Sikh homeland, it is necessary to assess the implications of the increasing importance of miri in the relationship between the Gurus and their followers.

The Punjab is considered by Sikhs to be their spiritual homeland and more significantly, the Golden Temple in Amritsar is their religio-political seat of power. Shri Harimandir Sahib and the Akal Takht are the two highest seats of Sikh authority and foremost in determining both the religious and administrative rules and regulations for the majority of orthodox Sikhs. In the Harimandir Sahib complex, the placement of the two Gurdwaras expresses the centrality of the Sikh doctrine of miri and piri. The Akal Takht is regarded as the temporal seat of power and was built by Guru Hargobind in front of the Harimandir Sahib which is the spiritual seat of power. The Guru Granth Sahib, not merely a scripture, but the final and last Guru of the Sikhs, is kept in the Akal Takht at night and is taken back and forth between Harmandir Sahib and the Akal Takht twice a day in ritual procession. Piri, as the spiritual authority of the Guru, has supremacy over the temporal but all major decisions are agreed and passed to the Sikh people through the authority of the Akal Takht.

Traditionally the twin concepts of miri and piri are seen as originating in Guru Hargobind (1595-1644). However the decision by Guru Nanak (1469-1539) to found a community of devotees in Kartakpur, which was continued in the new location of Goindwal by Guru Amar Das (1479-1574), would have contributed to the temporal power of the Gurus. It can be asserted with some assurance that Guru Nanak's and Guru Amar Das's motivations were essentially to gather the devotees in one place where they could benefit spiritually from living together under the inspiration and guidance of their respective Gurus. In other words, the miri authority of the Guru was subsumed in the overriding piri relationship. However, the inevitable social processes of continuing community development through succeeding generations would have had profound

implications on the need for separate religious and cultural identities, along with the formation of organisational and institutional structures. Even as early as the third Guru, organisational changes were taking place in which Guru Amar Das felt the need to divide the community into twenty-two *manjis* in the Punjab, which corresponded to the provinces of Akbar's empire.[15]

The relationship between the growing Sikh community and the Mughal rulers was not always easy but there is no doubt that the Sikhs were influenced in their own development both by the organisation of the empire and the lifestyles of its rulers. The model for the miri authority of the Gurus would have derived from and been modelled on the Mughal rulers even though they were sometimes deadly enemies. An aspect of that enmity, often played down by Sikhs who prefer to focus on the motivation of religious persecution, was the increasing temporal power of the Sikhs in the Punjab. It can be seen that the roots of Khalistan or, at least, Sikh aspirations for their own sovereignty lie in the increasing miri authority of the Gurus as they began to acquire territory and the trappings of temporal authority.

Guru Ram Das (1534-1581) had moved the centre of Sikhism to Amritsar where he founded a new town. His son, Guru Arjan (1563-1606) continued his father's work of consolidating the Sikh *panth*. Besides developing Amritsar, he built four new towns in the Punjab. Revenue had been collected in the form of *daswandh*, a tithe of ten percent, by the *masands* or leaders of the *manjis* since the time of the third Guru. Cole and Sambhi make the observation that Guru Arjan ruled the *Panth* as a theocracy.[16] He had been groomed by his father for the role of leading the Sikhs, and it was certainly during his period that the temporal power of the Gurus was extended. He not only sat on the *gaddi* throne but called himself by the title of *Sacha Padshah* (the true emperor). As a leader of thousands and a ruler over territory in the Punjab, the fifth Guru maintained a political role in the Mughal world. Jehangir, the Mughal ruler, acknowledged this when he arrested the Guru, ostensibly on suspicion of supporting the rebellion of Khusrau, the son of the emperor, against the succession of his own father to the throne. Although Sikhs are inclined to seek religious reasons for the Guru's death at the hands of the Mughals and to regard Guru Arjan as a martyr, when one switches to a Muslim perspective it is possible to comprehend the Mughal unease with the new political dimension developing in the Sikh community.

Guru Hargobind continued in the role developed by his father, Guru Arjan. He maintained an army and hunted in the company of Jehangir himself. He is said to have declared 'My self shall be the sword-belt and on my turban I shall wear the aigratte, the symbol of royalty'.[17] Cole and Sambhi certainly endorse the view that the Guru appeared to emphasis the miri aspect of his authority.[18] Certainly the Muslim authorities acknowledged that the Gurus were the temporal authority over a people. This was demonstrated when the young Guru Har Krishan (1656-1664) was taken to the court in Delhi to await the Emperor's decision on whether he was a suitable ruler of the Sikhs.

The culmination of miri and piri authority in one person was manifested in the person of Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) and resurrected again in the time

of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) in the nineteenth century albeit in a new form. Ranjit Singh was not himself able to present himself as the repository of miri/piri as the final human Guru had done. However, there is no doubt that the miri authority was in his hands. The title of Maharajah gave him actual sovereignty over all the people of the Punjab and a legal right to insist that surrounding kingdoms, that had at any time paid revenue to Lahore, should offer tribute to him. Ranjit Singh appeared to be aware of the theological impetus to subsume miri authority under the domain of piri. He refused to wear the emblem of royalty in his turban or to sit upon a throne. The coins of his realm contained Guru Nanak's name and his court was known as the *Darbar Khalsaji*. Khushwant Singh suggests that the first Sikh ruler of the Punjab was aware of the religious dynamic involved in his kingship. He states:

> Ranjit Singh did not derive his title from either the Mughals or the Afghans; it was given to him by that mystic entity, the Panth Khalsaji. He acknowledged no earthly superior. He was impelled by the weight of tradition that had grown up over the years, that it was the destiny of the Sikhs to rule (Raj Kare ga Khalsa) and that perhaps he had been chosen by the Gurus to be the instrument of their inscrutable design.[19]

The sword was often perceived as a symbol of the struggle against tyranny and oppression but it also represents the actual processes of history in which Sikhs fought to maintain their right to live under both the miri and piri authority of the Gurus. Khushwant Singh seems to be acknowledging that Ranjit Singh was aware of the spiritual authority required to be a legitimate ruler of Sikh territory. Both Daljeet Singh and Jagjit Singh place emphasis on the centrality of the concept of miri/piri in Sikhism and argue that this ideal of the unity of temporal and spiritual authority separates Sikhism from any other Indian religious tradition.[20] Jagjit Singh goes even further and argues that acquiring political power in a just cause is a 'legitimate spiritual pursuit'.[21] It can therefore be argued that the goal of a Sikh homeland or Khalistan is rooted in these ideals of united piri/miri authority as the model for Sikh governance.

The Roots of Khalistan

The ideology of a 'land of the Khalsa' was further developed during the reign of Guru Gobind Singh, although the word Khalistan itself was not introduced until 1946 in the Independence negotiations. Gopal Singh claims that glimpses of a sovereign Sikh nation could be perceived at the creation of the Khalsa on the Baisakhi day of 1699.[22] The creation of the Khalsa was religiously and politically a very important and ingeniously effective move by Guru Gobind Singh to unite the Sikhs as a community but Kapoor and Singha relate the concept of Khalsa to Guru Nanak, the founder of the religion.[23] Singha states that Khalsa is 'the concept of Guru Nanak about ideal society matured in the form of Khalsa (the pure) at the time of Guru Gobind Singh'.[24]

In fact, in many ways it can be argued that the fluctuating political relationship between the latter Gurus and the Mughal authorities had pushed the Sikh community towards identifying itself as a separate entity that culminated in the creation of the Khalsa. Jagjit Singh states: 'it was not Guru Arjun's martyrdom which gave a political turn to the Sikh movement; rather it was the political aspect of the movement which contributed to his martyrdom'.[25] This relationship of politics and religion derives from miri/piri and had begun to shape the Sikh community from early days. During Guru Ram Das's guruship (1574-81), administrative officials (masands) were established, borrowed from the Mughal administration of the empire, and already the manji system had emerged as a parallel system to the Mughal administration of the Punjab. Traditionally the manji system had been established by the third Guru who had appointed deputies to act on his behalf. Thus a separate administrative system which incorporated the collecting of tithes had been established during the time of Gobind Singh's predecessors. By the time of Gobind Singh, it would seem reasonable to argue that a fledgling form of identity between the Sikhs and the land of the Punjab had begun to manifest itself. Guru Gobind Singh is reported to have written to the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb: 'I shall strike fire under the hoof of your horses and I will not let you drink the water of my Punjab'.[26] Kanwarjit Singh argues that the writings of the Sikh Gurus before Gobind Singh also contain explicit political messages that provided a logic for Sikh confrontation against the prevailing state.[27] McLeod suggests that the Sikhs were developing a qaum rather than a full-blown concept of nationhood. The original Arabic meaning of the term is 'a people who stand together' and develop a strong corporate sense of identity.[28]

The creation of the Khalsa was therefore a unique way to provide a formal structure in order to unite the community both religiously and socially and create this corporate identity. There are two important reasons for the creation of the Khalsa which can both relate to the idea of a separate Sikh state. According to McLeod these are:

1. Guru Gobind Singh provided his followers with a militant and highly visible identity, essential if they were to withstand imminent trials arising from the conflict with the Mughals.
2. The Guru was determined to have a united following, therefore the control of the masands needed to be dismantled, restoring political, financial and religious commitment to the Guru himself.[29]

Oberoi believes that the creation of the Khalsa was the only way forward because the Sikh people needed to be culturally distinct as they were surrounded by Hindu and Muslim influences.[30] Secondly, the Sikhs were on the verge of a great struggle against the Mughals, who under the rule of Aurangzeb were campaigning to Islamicise the empire and to convert Hindus and Sikhs to Islam by persuasion or force.[31] Gopal Singh argues that prior to the formation of the Khalsa the Sikh people followed a life which adhered to the Hindu caste system and this prevented the unity of the community.[32]

After evaluating the reasons given for the birth of Khalsa it is clear that the most important aim of Guru Gobind Singh was to create a single community undivided by caste prejudices. It took the form of a community of saint-soldiers who were devout in their religious commitment but also able to defend their faith. Their primary obedience and loyalty was only to their Guru.

The use of the word Khalsa is also very significant. McLeod explains that 'Khalsa derives from the Arabic/Persian Khalisa ("pure"). However, a secondary meaning was applicable to the organisation of the Mughal empire and indicated "lands under the Emperor's direct control"'.[33] It is difficult to decide either way whether the use of the word 'Khalsa' was an intended ploy by Guru Gobind Singh, because if the word is used in its Arabic context Guru Gobind Singh was declaring the Sikhs to be an independent people under the direct leadership of his Guruship and therefore engaged in a liberation struggle against a powerful Mughal Empire. If this is true then this could be construed by Sikhs as an early indication of the formation of a state ruled by the Sikhs themselves.

Finally, although tracing the origin of the creation of Khalsa does not give firm support to the view that Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa with Khalistan as his ultimate intention, there are inclinations in his use of language (i.e.Khalisa/Khalsa), the imagery borrowed from the Mughal courts, and the use of their royal terms that do suggest that the concept of an independent territory with a temporal and spiritual ruler at its head existed. Examples of this are still present in the Sikh religion as in the term *'Darbar'* which was derived from the Mughal period and was used by the emperors to refer to their royal courts. Sikhs use the term to refer to their hall of worship in the Gurdwara, therefore applying a sense of imperial status to the domain of the Guru Granth Sahib. In a similar fashion the dress and ceremony that were used by Guru Gobind Singh showed his tendency towards the external paraphernalia of royalty. Chaddah points out that the famous Sikh couplet attributed to Guru Gobind Singh that is sung by the whole congregation at the end of the Sikh communal prayer, the *Ardas*, refers to the Khalsa as rulers.

> The Khalsa shall rule.
> No rebel shall exist.
> Crestfallen shall they return.
> Only those who take refuge with the Sikhs would be saved.
> (Ardas)

The origins of the couplet are questioned at length by Chaddah, drawing upon texts only available in Punjabi to trace its roots. However, he concludes that the couplet was introduced after the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in order to exhort his Sikh warriors in battle against the Mughal empire. It has now evolved to a proclamation of the role that the Khalsa and the Sikhs will have in this world and provides affirmation that the Sikhs will be their own rulers.[34]

Although the creation of the Khalsa did not create the notion of Khalistan in Guru Gobind Singh's own time the use of the scripture and the way in which the Khalsa was established (saint-soldiers/miri-piri) can be used to support the ideas of Khalistan. It is possible for Sikhs who desire an independent Sikh state of Khalistan to use Guru Gobind Singh's period as an ideal foundation and legitimation for its creation and utilize the slogan 'the Khalsa shall rule' to influence and unite public opinion to their cause. The problem here is one of insiders' conceptions of a religious event loaded with significance and capable of generating several overlapping metanarratives. There is considerable distance between the contemporary notion of Khalistan and the formation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh. However, there are enough powerful symbols that can be drawn upon, especially surrounding Guru Gobind Singh's relationship between statecraft and spiritual authority, to leave the Guru's conception vulnerable to new forms of political demands against perceived injustice.

The Formation of a Sikh Kiingdom

After the death of Guru Gobind Singh the control of the Sikh people was initially divided between the Guru Granth Sahib and the Khalsa panth who were to guide the Sikh community and religion as equals. However, some commentators suggest that a great deal of responsibility has to be given to Banda Singh Bahadur, the devout Sikh and military leader who led the Sikh people in this troubled period. For seven years after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, Banda Singh and his army waged war with the Mughal forces in the Punjab.

According to Oberoi the presence of Banda Singh in the Punjab from 1709-1716 developed the Gurus' teachings of equality and demonstrated the ideal of Guru Gobind Singh's Khalsa discipline to a high number of lower castes that joined with him in his struggle for the freedom of Punjab. Oberoi also mentions that the large estates that were controlled by the rich landowners were divided into smaller estates and given to the peasantry. These social and economic gains that were made by the community because of their acceptance of Khalsa and the leadership of Banda Singh would have cemented the idea of a Sikh territory and the gains to be achieved under Sikh leadership as opposed to the Mughal administration.[35]   Gopal Singh concentrates on the religious outcome of the period by paying special attention to the role of Khalsa and its focus on sovereignty, but he also acknowledges the socio-economic gains whilst highlighting the role of Banda Singh as a revolutionary leader. He states that 'it was Banda who, for the first time after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, made his people taste the fruits of political freedom'.[36]

However, it is necessary to view Banda Singh's successes in the Punjab with some caution. There is no doubt that he had been a committed follower of the last Guru and a man whose biography suggests he was inclined to solitude, piety, contemplation and even pacifism before embarking on his struggle against the Mughal authorities. Yet still Muzaffar Alam suggests that it was economic interest rather than a sense of religious community that provided

support for the rebellion. He suggests that Banda Singh's supporters came from those elements of the Sikh community that had most to gain, such as village-level *zamindars* (landowners), peasants and a large number of low-placed castes.[37] In spite of this analysis, it is still possible to argue that the Khalsa code initiated by Guru Gobind Singh provided the ideological basis for the egalitarian movement behind Banda Singh's leadership against the existing authorities. In addition to this, Guru Gobind Singh's militarisation of the Sikh headquarters in Anandpur and his establishment of a *darbar* based on the regal court provided Banda Singh with an ideal for his own vision of the Punjab. There are signs of this in his behaviour during the period of his campaigns when large parts of Sarkar Sirhind came under his control. By 1709, Banda Singh had established his own seat of power at Lohgarh and given himself the title of *Sacha Badshah*.[38] This was reinforced by the minting of coins and an official seal whose inscriptions provide some evidence that Banda Singh's own awareness of the relationship between miri and piri authority had developed through the institution of the Guru.[39]

According to this analysis it is clear that an ideal of sovereignty and corporate identity was deep-rooted from the period of the Gurus. The earlier Gurus, especially from the period of Guru Hargobind, had laid the foundations for sovereignty whilst Guru Gobind Singh had provided the possibility to confirm this process under the Khalsa, but it was during Banda Singh's control that the Sikh people briefly realised it. Banda Singh's role during his seven year period as a leader was an invaluable contribution to the psychological and political development of the Sikh people as a unique nation.

After the death of Banda Singh, the Sikh people were left without a militant leader to organise them. The Mughal forces were then able to recapture control of the people and once again regulate Sikh territory. In 1716 the territory of the Punjab was ruled by a Governor appointed by the Mughal empire who was then able to retain control of the economy and political leadership. During the Governor period the Sikhs were allowed to regroup gradually. Not long after Banda Singh's death, the community was divided into small groups known as *Jathas*. However, these were not powerful enough to cause a threat to the Mughals. In 1747/1748 Ahmed Shah Abdali of Afghanistan invaded India for the first time. The Sikhs took advantage of the invasion and called a meeting of the whole Sikh community (*Sarbat Khalsa*) in Amritsar. The Sarbat Khalsa decided to form a Sikh army (*Dal Khalsa*) which would unite all the individual Jathas under a single commander in chief, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Sikh territory was then divided into eleven *misls* with their own leaders as a more developed form of the jathas. The Mughal authorities were focused on the invasions from Afghanistan and uprisings amongst the Marathas and this enabled the Sikhs to bring small territories back under their control. The flame of a Sikh territory in the Punjab remained alive as can be seen from the statement of one of the misl leaders, Hakumat Singh, who issued orders to the revenue collectors under his control referring to the Mughal authorities as *qarar-i-qadim* (the old order).[40]

Although the misls were not of equal size or strength and rivalled each other, the system at least gave the Sikhs greater autonomy and a sense of unity through the institution of the Sarbat Khalsa and the formation of the Dal Khalsa. This was achieved through the doctrine of the Guru Panth, through which the ideal was maintained amongst the various leaders of the misls that their meetings were held in the presence of the Guru and whatever decisions were made, they happened through the will of the Guru present in the Panth. The biannual meetings of the Sarbat Khalsa in front of the Akal Takht in Amritsar were held in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib and any formal decision that was reached by the assembled leaders of the misls was known as a *gurumata* (the decision of the Guru) and refusal to acknowledge the content was seen as rebellion against the Guru himself.[41] This pragmatic device provided a religious authority to reinforce the political decisions and consequently the close link between miri and piri authority in Sikh affairs was kept intact. Gopal Singh considers the decision to form the Dal Khalsa the most important and influential in the history of the Sikhism at this period because of its achievement in uniting the Sikh people as a community once again. It would appear that the Sikh ideal of a united community was developing around the doctrine of miri/piri providing a unique model of statecraft and corporate identity that was also gradually developing a Sikh notion of nationhood.

During the whole misl period, the fate of the Sikhs was determined by the influences of the frequent invasions of India by Ahmed Shah Abdali. The Dal Khalsa used the invasions as an opportunity to establish a Sikh sovereign nation, however, apart from a few occasions the attempts were obliterated by the powerful Mughals. On 21 November 1761, Ahmed Shah Abdali was attacked by Sikhs as he returned to Afghanistan after his fifth raid. The Sikhs 'took back much of his loot and liberated over 3,000 Hindu women, whom he was taking with him as slaves'.[42] Ubaid Khan, the Governor of Punjab, attempted to prevent the Sikh uprising from spreading but was unsuccessful and under the leadership of Charat Singh, the Sikhs conquered Ubaid Khan and occupied the fortress of Gujranwala. On the same date Jassa Singh Ahluwalia attacked and conquered Lahore and was declared *Sultan-E-Qaum* (King of the Nation). However, the victories were short lived as the power of the Mughals and the invading forces made it difficult for the Sikhs to form a lasting foundation for their new sovereign territory. Kapoor acknowledges this and states that there was 'lack of knowledge in politics, statecraft and civic set-up. They were certainly great soldiers but poor administrators'.[43]

Although the Sikhs were unable to sustain their positions of advantage in the misl period they had begun to fight once again as a united community even though their territory remained divided. However, the misl period paved the way for Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the first and most powerful ruler of a Sikh empire. Among Sikhs he is popularly known as *Shere-e-Punjab* (The Lion of Punjab) and considered to be the greatest ruler of the Punjab after Guru Gobind Singh and Banda Singh Bahadur. Ranjit Singh's rise to political power began with his leadership of the Sukkarchakia Misl. During his leadership of this misl, Gopal Singh and Kapoor claim that Ranjit Singh recognised a need for the

misls to unite as one state under the control of one leader in order to gain any political ascendancy over the Punjab.[44]

In 1799 Ranjit Singh began his political and territorial conquests by seizing Lahore and one year later he captured Jammu. In 1801, he was officially declared and anointed the Maharaja of the Punjab by Baba Sahib Singh Bedi. The act of coronation of Ranjit Singh is symbolically and concretely a significant point in the continuation of the miri and piri relationship. Ranjit Singh represented the miri authority with his political and territorial success but is honoured by the piri authority through anointment and confirmation of his rule by an eminent Sikh *Sant* (holy man). To commemorate Ranjit Singh's political ascendancy and the unity of the Punjab under the one leader, coins were minted with religious inscriptions praising the grace of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh in the establishment of a Sikh state along the lines of the precedent set by Banda Singh. The public anointment of Ranjit Singh as king, the minting of coins and the use of Mughal terminology are the confirmation of the formation of a Sikh nation and can be viewed as the culmination of developments which originated with Guru Arjun and extended through to Guru Gobind Singh.

However, although the kingdom was sustained for forty years thus providing a new dimension to the Sikh's political aspirations, it can be argued that the religious circumstances in the kingdom had been completely changed from the ideal of the Gurus. During the misl period, in spite of rivalry between them, the Sikh religion remained the unifying factor through allegiance to the Guru Granth Sahib and the Khalsa panth. During Ranjit Singh's reign the power of the Khalsa panth and the authority of the Guru Granth Sahib was apparently decreased. The weakening of the religious authority was necessary for the success of Ranjit Singh as he needed complete autonomy to create his kingdom in the Punjab and it was necessary to maintain his rule over both Hindus and Muslims in the region. Oberoi supports this argument to an extent when he states that:

> The conservation of the pre-existing social framework by the Lahore state has prompted some authors to characterize it as the Hinduization of the Sikh state. This reflected in part how it sanctioned the rituals and life-cycle ceremonies associated with Brahminical Hinduism and its accompanying social system encapsulated in the varna hierarchy.[45]

Other Sikh scholars portray Ranjit Singh's liberalism and its relationship to his allegiance to Sikhism in a completely different way. Kapoor argues that 'he was a practising Sikh and had regard for all other religions. He gave very valuable gifts to Hindu *mandirs* and Muslim mosques. He donated tons of gold to Harimandir to cover its domes in golden plates'.[46] However, it is possible to argue that Ranjit Singh's eclectic approach to his rule demonstrated a move towards the balance shifting from piri authority towards miri and consequently prepared the way for the ideal of a temporal Sikh state. In this context

Bhindranwale's vigorous preaching of the Khalsa ideal and his final takeover of the Akal Takht could be seen as an attempt to reassert the balance and ensure that any attempt to create a Sikh homeland governed by Sikhs came closer to the perceived ideals of Guru Gobind Singh and Khalsa sovereignty.

Regardless of the debates concerning religious practice and belief under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikhs were able to realise what they had longed for since the reign of Guru Gobind Singh 140 years before. This period was the first taste of complete freedom that Sikhs had yearned for and Ranjit Singh's kingdom added to the aspirations of Sikhs to be free from outside control over their affairs. However, it is important to note that different interpretations of the religious life in Ranjit Singh's kingdom provide the justification for the appropiation of the exemplar of a Sikh proto-state by both religious and secular nationalists. The mythology that has developed around Ranjit Singh's kingdom shows two alternative versions of a Sikh ideal. In one account, the kingdom is modeled on an authentic Khalsa ideal. This is supported by the donations bestowed on Sikh shrines, the minting of coins bearing the image of Guru Nanak, and the naming of the royal court as Darbar Khalsaji and the administration of the kingdom as Sarkar Khalsaji. Mc Leod makes the point that the enthronement of Ranjit Singh must have appeared to many as the fulfilment of the prophesy that the Khalsa would rule (*raj karega khalsa*) and that many twentieth century Sikhs have viewed this period as a golden age in which Ranjit Singh becomes a folk-hero.[47] On the other hand, Ranjit Singh disbanded the assemblies of the Sarbat Khalsa, married both Hindu and Muslim wives and employed Muslims and Hindus in positions of authority in the kingdom. These apparent moves towards the acceptance of all religions has also been given a symbolic significance by those who would prefer a more secular spirit to dominate over a Sikh nation. McLeod points out that: 'as with all mythologies, its features reflect the aspirations of those for whom he (Ranjit Singh) had acquired symbolic significance'.[48]

After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839 it took only ten years to destroy the Sikh empire that he had built and sustained over forty years. In 1849 the Punjab of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was annexed to the British empire. From 1849 to 1947 the Punjab and India remained a part of the British empire. The complexity of the political situation that existed between the struggle for independence, the aspirations of the Muslim and Hindu communities, the attitudes of the British government and the economic and social situation of the Punjab in this period is beyond the scope of this article. Generally the Sikhs enjoyed a close relationship with the British because of the number of Sikhs used in the armed forces and the loyalty of the Sikh regiments in 1857.[49] However, the relations were marred by the bitter struggle of the Akali Dal to reclaim control of the Sikh historic *gurdwaras* from the *mahunts* in the 1920s. Although the campaign was generally peaceful, relationships with the British authorities had been dented by the tragic events at Jallianwala Bagh and the deaths of 130 Akali Dal reformers in Nankana at the hands of Mahant Narain Das. Eventually after prolonged struggle and passive resistance, the power to control their Gurdwaras was given back to the Sikhs in the form of the

Shiromani Gurudwara Parbhandak Committee. The successful organization of the Akali Dal against the British authorities must have certainly helped fuel Sikh aspirations for freedom and independence.[50]

Although the Akali Dal generally supported the Congress during the campaign for independence, at the end of the British Raj in 1947 some Sikhs felt a sense of betrayal because they were not given the rights or the power by the British to control the Punjab as an independent state as it had been before the Raj. Secondly the size of the Punjab was reduced drastically with the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan but, on the other hand, the partition provided the possibility for a demographic consolidation of Sikhs in the new Indian state of Punjab. The disaffections helped provide fuel for Sikh political movements beginning to consider a more independent status for the Punjab. The ideas of Khalistan were specifically raised during this politically unstable period and gained gradual support over the next twenty-six years with several small groups proclaiming the foundation of Khalistan on various occasions. However, the introduction of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in 1973 marks the emergence of Khalistan into the political arena of contemporary Sikh history. The Resolution itself was ambiguous as its central demand was for more autonomy for the state from central government but certainly contained clauses that suggested aspirations for a more theocratic Sikh state. However, the Khalistan idea gained rapid support over the next eleven years both overtly and covertly and resulted in the fateful army action in the Harimandir Sahib complex in 1984.

Conclusion

The battle that took place in June 1984 inside the precincts of the Golden Temple, in which Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale played a key role, was the culmination of many years of religious and political rivalry in the Punjab. He had been elected as head of the Dam Dami Taksaal in August 1977, a specialist school for the study of the Guru Granth Sahib, originally founded by Guru Gobind Singh as Damdama Sahib. The school gained attention and support in the 1930s under Sant Sunder Singh who introduced a traditionalist approach into the *Taksaal* thereby making it a centre for the promotion of a Sikh orthodoxy, controlled by the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib and Khalsa principles followed according to the instructions of Guru Gobind Singh.

After gaining leadership of the Taksaal, Sant Jarnail Singh began a tour of villages calling all Sikhs to return to the true form of Sikhism by becoming brothers and sisters of the Khalsa discipline.[51] His message was known as *Amrit parchar* (preaching for baptism). As well as carrying the *Kirpan* which is part of the Khalsa discipline, Sant Jarnail Singh urged his listeners to return to the days of Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh and become *Shastradhari* Sikhs (weapon bearers) He encouraged his listeners to carry modern fire-arms after his own example. He wore a Kirpan on his left and a holstered handgun on his right. According to Khushwant Singh this was an attempt to re-ignite the

warrior in Sikhs as Guru Gobind Singh had at the original Khalsa event in 1699.[52]

Besides these apparent links with the original foundation of Khalsa it could be argued that there was a theology in Sant Jarnail Singh's activities and teachings which related to the institution of miri and piri formalised by Guru Hargobind but which had even older roots in Sikh history.[53] The use of the firearm can be viewed as the contemporary manifestation of the principle of miri authority, and his return to orthodox discipline based on the authority of the Guru Granth Sahib and Khalsa sovereignty could be recognised as the principle of piri authority. These teachings can be viewed as a return both to the orthodox tradition of Sikhism and to the belief that the Sikh people were discriminated against in Sant Jarnail Singh's period and throughout Sikh history.[54]

The search for Khalistan amongst Sikhs remains alive today and so far no solution has been found to this religio-political problem that has proved to be a cause of great anguish for the Sikh panth. This article has tried to show that the development of the ideology of Khalistan was a part of Sikh religious and political history arising out of the relationship of miri and piri and boosted by the events during the time of Guru Gobind Singh. The article does not commit itself to asserting a deterministic relationship between miri/piri and the struggle for Khalistan. Perhaps a more useful relationship between the two is akin to Weber's idea of 'elective affinity'. One need not necessarily lead to the other, but in certain circumstances exacerbated by demographic, political, social, or economic conditions miri/piri can be drawn upon as a metanarrative or metacommentary to supply symbolic affirmation for the cause of Khalistan.

Even though Guru Gobind Singh did not personally call for the formation of the Sikh state his actions in creating the Khalsa, the use of religio-political language, and the nature of his Guruship can be called upon by advocates of a Sikh state as a basis for their aspirations to create Khalistan. In this scenario, a 'bounded entity' that does not conform with the reality of the Sikh people dispersed throughout India and the world, can be negotiated even though there is not the strong theological ground for a connection between land, people and God as in Judaism.[55] They can argue that the couplet that is sung after the *ardas* in every Gurdwara throughout the world and attributed to Guru Gobind Singh himself is further proof of his intention for the Sikh people.

The ideal of the state of Khalistan gradually began to evolve as part of the metacommentary of Sikh narrative at varying points throughout the history of the Sikhs. Banda Singh Bahadur and the misl regime provided the Sikhs with brief glimpses of a Sikh nation but no permanent foundations were laid to establish it. Only under the politically astute guidance of Ranjit Singh was a Sikh nation established which flourished for forty years. The political advances in this period spread the Sikh kingdom from the borders of Afghanistan to the river Sutlej. The nation was not, however, as the religious Sikh supporters of a state view Khalistan today as directly controlled by the Guru Granth Sahib and the Khalsa panth, but rather by Maharaja Ranjit Singh as his own fiefdom. It can be argued that it provided an example of a Sikh territory where miri

authority or temporal power became divorced from the piri authority of the Gurus. Some scholars have been critical of this and point out that the kingdom was not exclusively Sikh, but the period is still regarded as a golden era in Sikh history and provided an impetus for the continuing ideal of an independent Sikh nation.

We hope that we have shown that the roots of the Khalistan movement may go deeper into Sikh history than some scholars tend to indicate. Khushwant Singh (1992), Akbar (1995) and McLeod (1995) are not completely correct in saying that the idea of Khalistan originated in 1947.[56] It would appear that these scholars regard the introduction of the new word 'Khalistan' as an emergence of a new Sikh ideology. However, it is our hypothesis that the idea of Khalistan as 'a separate state desired by some Sikhs[57] was introduced much earlier in Sikh history and has its origins in religious and cultural traditions that came about partly as a consequence of Sikh relations with the Mughal Empire and partly as a product of the unique development of the Sikh Panth.

Notes

1. Goring, R., *Dictionary of Beliefs and Values* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1992); Cole W, O., *Sikhism* (London: Hodder and Staunton, 1994); McLeod, W.H., *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1995) and Riar, Sukhmani, 'Khalistan: The Origins of the Demand and its Pursuit Prior to Independence, 1940-45' in Pritam Singh and Shinder Thandi (ed.) *Punjabi Identity in a Global Context* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).
2. Wallace, P., 'The Sikhs as a Minority in a Sikh Majority State', *Asian Surve,y* 29:3 1989), 363
3. ibid, 363-377.
4. Keppley Mahmood, C., 'Sikh Rebellion and the Hindu Concept of Order', *Asian Survey*, 29:3, 1989, 326-340.
5. Oberoi, H.S. 'From Punjab to "Khalistan": Territoriality and Metacommentary', *Pacific Affairs* 60:1, 1987, 26-41.
6. Juergensmeyer, M. *The New Cold War: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 90-99.
7. Singh, Pritam, 'Two Facets of Revivalism: A Defense', in Singh, Gopal (ed.), *Punjab Today* (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1987), 169.
8. Pettigrew, J., 'In Search of a New Kingdom of Lahore', *Pacific Affairs* 60:1, 1987, 5
9. Keppley Mahmood, op.cit., 327.
10. Oberoi, H. S., op.cit, p.27.
11. Ibid.
12. Pettigrew, op.cit.7.

13. Ibid.

14. Cole O.W. & Sambhi, P.S., *The Sikhs: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 29.

15. Ibid,20.

16. Ibid,26.

17. Ibid,29.

18. Ibid,30.

19. Singh, Khushwant, *A History of the Sikhs Vol.1*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 201-202

20. Singh, Daljeet in *Recent Researches in Sikhism*, eds Mann, Singh, Jasbir and Singh, Kharak (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1992), 42-60.

21. Singh, Jagjit, ibid, 136-151.

22. Singh, Gopal, *A History of the Sikh People (1469-1988)*, (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1995).

23. Kapoor S.S., *The Sikh Religion and the Sikh People* (New Delhi: Hemkunt Press, 1994) and Singha, H.S., *Mini Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, (New Delhi: Hemkunt Press, 1992).

24. Singha, op.cit., 63-64

25. Singh, Jagjit, (1992) op.cit.

26. Quoted from the *Zafarnama*, the Epistle of Victory sent by Guru Gobind Singh to Aurangzeb in Singh, Khushwant, op.cit, 1992, 92.

27. Singh, Kanwarjit, *The Political Philosophy of the Sikh Gurus* (New Delhi: Atlantic 1989).

28. McLeod, W.H., *Who is a Sikh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1989), 107.

29. McLeod, W.H., *The Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, (London: Scarecrow Press, 1995).

30. It should be noted that Oberoi's thesis that Sikhism gradually established a unique identity for itself as an evolutionary process as it reacted with Muslims, Hindus and the British is challenged by Daljeet Singh who argues that Sikhism was always a unique religious tradition from its inception (Daljeet Singh in *Fundamental Issues in Sikh Studies*, ed. Kharak Singh, Gobind Singh Mansukhani and Jasbir Singh (Chandigarh: Institute of Sikh Studies, 1992), 105-15

31. Oberoi, H., *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

32. Singh, Gopal 1995, op.cit.

33. McLeod, W.H., 1995, op.cit.122.

34. Chaddah, M.S., *Are Sikhs a Nation?* (Delhi: Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, 1982).

35. Oberoi, H., op.cit.

36. Singh, Gopal, 1995, op.cit .355.

37. Alam, Muzaffar, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab 1707-48* (Delhi: Oxford University Press 1997), 145-146

38. The Muslim historian Khafi Khan claims that Banda Singh gave himself the title of *Sacha Padshah* (*Muntakhabul-Lubab, vol.ii*), p. 651 cited in Singh,

Gopal, *The History of the Sikh People* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1995 4th edition), 343. However, Singh, Kushwant, *The History of the Sikhs, Vol 1*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), on page 107 states only the title *padshah* was used by Banda Singh.

39. Banda Singh's seal contained the inscription 'Bounty and power and unlimited victory are the gifts received by Guru Gobind Singh from Guru Nanak'. The coins contained the following words: 'With the help of the sword of Guru Nanak, the coin is struck in both the worlds. The victory of Guru Gobind Singh, the King of Kings, is due to the grace of the True Lord', (Banga, Indu, 'The Formation of the Sikh State' in *Five Punjabi Centuries: Polity, Economy, Society and Culture*, ed. Banga, Indu (New Delhi: Manohar 1997), 85-109.

40. Banga, Indu, ibid., 85. Khushwant Singh points out that 'Phoolkia, under Ala Singh of Patiala, was the twelfth misl, but it was not a part of the Dal khalsa, and sometimes acted against the interests of the community', Vol. 1 (1999), 133.

41. McLeod, op.cit (1989), 55

42. Kapoor, S.S., op.cit., 232.

43. Ibid. 244.

44. Ibid. Singh, Gopal, 1995, op.cit.

45. Oberoi, H., op.cit. 87.

46. Kapoor, S. op.cit., 261

47. Mcleod, op.cit (1989), 62-63.

48. Ibid.

49. David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army 1860-1940* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1994), 6, argues that the Sikhs supported the British in 1857 as a sort of revenge against the Hindustani soldiers' role in extinguishing the Sikh state during the Anglo-Sikh wars and that they hardly relished the prospect of a restored Mughal power.

50. Rajiv Kapur, *Sikh Separatism: the Politics of Faith* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1996) although not providing a central role to miri/piri, confirms that the Akali Dal agitation for control of the Sikh gurdwaras during British rule helped crystallise a growing Sikh separate identity. This work provides an important study in the evolution of separate Sikh identity but is limited in its focus upon the Gurdwara movement as an explanation.

51. Pritam Singh explains the attraction of Sant Jarnail Singh's message to the Sikhs in terms of his uncompromising message against caste identity by popularizing *amrit chakkna* (initiation into Khalsa) amongst scheduled caste Sikhs and his opposition to perceived danger to Sikh identity arising from Congress. This was manifested by a strong anti-Nirankari feeling that resulted in the assassination of the Sant Nirankari guru in Delhi (Singh, Pritam (1987) 'Two facets of Revivalism: A Defense', in Singh, Gopal (ed) *Punjab Today*, (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House), 171.

52. Singh, Khushwant, *My Bleeding Punjab*, (New Delhi: UBS Publishers, 1992).

53. Pettigrew, op.cit., 6, makes the point that Bhindranwale, by talking so much about the sixth Guru in his speeches, gave central place to the *miri/piri* doctrine.

54. Angela Dietrich makes the point that Sikh fundamentalism, as in the example of Bhindrawale, can be traced back to the formation of a religio-military brotherhood of the khalsa maintained through 'popular charismatic religious leaders who appear whenever the Sikh community is threatened by outside dominant hostile forces (Dietrich, Angela, 'The Khalsa resurrected: a Sikh fundamentalism in the Punjab' in Kaplan, L. *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism* (New York: State University of New York, 1987) 122.

55. Pettigrew, op.cit., 6.

56. Singh, Khushwant, op.cit; McLeod H., op.cit and Akbar, M.J., India: *The Siege Within* (New Delhi: UBS Publishers, 1996).

57. Goring, R. *Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1992), 283

The Akhand Kirtani Jatha: a local study of the beliefs and practices of its members

Joy Barrow
University of Leeds

On the basis of fieldwork in Southall in the latter half of the 1990s, this article provides a detailed account of the religious discipline, which distinguishes members of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha from Sikhs more generally. This includes their emphasis on, and interpretation of, *nam simran* and merits attention not least because of the involvement of young people. Through extensive taped interviews and active participation, the author provides unique insights into the nature of spiritual devotion and practice of kirtan among the Akhand Kirtani Jatha in west London. Special attention is paid to the Jatha's distinctive understanding of amrit sanskar (initiation), gurmantra (repetition of God's name) using a special technique and their practice of sarab-loh-viveka (use of iron) and rainsbai (overnight devotional singing). The Jatha's arguments for the keski (small turban) as one of the five Ks, and their beliefs concerning the appropriate form of the Guru Granth Sahib are discussed.

Introduction

This article arises out of research that I conducted between 1993 and 1999 among the Sikh communities of Southall, which is about fifteen miles west of London. During this time I was first introduced to members of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, whom I found notable for their spiritual devotion and their practice of *kirtan* (songs praising God). They invited me to kirtan programmes in both their gurdwaras and their homes, and became research informants. Of these, six members (of whom one was female) gave me taped interviews, and approximately ten other members (of whom two were female) provided me with information during informal conversations. My informants were typically either university students, some undertaking post-graduate research, or under thirty years of age and employed in the professions, particularly information technology and business management. Bhai Ram Singh, who is the *Jathedar* (leader) of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha in the UK, also gave me a taped interview.

Although there have been several local UK studies of Sikh communities, for example Aurora (1967), Helweg (1979) Nesbitt (1981), Agnihotri (1987), and Kalsi (1992), and others that are discussions of the dynamics of religious groupings, for example Tatla on *sants* (1992), no local study has previously been published on the Akhand Kirtani Jatha.[1] The intention of this article, therefore, is to provide a local study of members of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, discussing their main beliefs: the importance of the *gurmantra* (God's sacred

word) '*vahiguru*' (wonderful God), which is implanted on the breath of the initiate at the *amrit sanskar* (initiation ceremony), the practice of *sarab loh* (all iron), and the importance of kirtan, especially *rainsbai*, or all night kirtan programmes. I will also discuss their belief both that the wearing of the *keski* (small turban) is compulsory for Sikh women and men, and their belief in the unchanging and unchangeable content of the Guru Granth Sahib.

According to one informant, there are approximately two thousand members of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha in the UK who are mainly located in England in the West Midlands, and in the Southall and Slough areas. While its membership is numerically small when compared with the total Sikh population in the UK, which is approximately 400,000, members of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha are, because of their commitment and devoutness, influential members of their local *sangats* (gurdwara congregations).

There is no concept of an Akhand Kirtani Jatha gurdwara. Consequently, they will obtain the gurdwara committee's agreement, if they wish to organise an event. This is usually a kirtan programme, although members of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha also have an interest in youth work and organise Sikh camps during school holidays which are usually located in a gurdwara. However, I am aware of occasions when permission has not been given for kirtan programmes, or rooms have not been made available for young people's work. This has been a cause of tension, although it is debatable whether the refusal was due to the connection with the Akhand Kirtani Jatha. Other possible reasons are that the devotion of the young people was presenting a challenge to the committee members, a view held by several of my informants with respect to one gurdwara, or a generational issue with the committee considering that the young people should be guided by their elders.

My informants explained that the Akhand Kirtani Jatha had its origins in the late 19th century at a time of difficulty for the *Panth* (Sikh community). The two Sikh reform movements of the day, the Nirankaris and Namdharis, were believed not to be following the *rahit* (daily practice) of Guru Gobind Singh, and gurdwaras were controlled by Hindus. In response some Sikhs, who were devoted to the rahit of Guru Gobind Singh, met together to perform kirtan. Gradually they began organising kirtan programmes in different places as a result of which they became known as the Akhand Kirtani Jatha.[2] My informants emphasised that at this stage they were not an organised group or movement, but 'some devout Sikhs who met together for kirtan'.

They emphasised that to describe the Akhand Kirtani Jatha as the Bhai Randhir Singh Jatha was both misleading and inaccurate.[3] It was explained that to do so gave the false impression that Bhai Randhir Singh was being accorded the status of a *sant* (spiritual guide): 'We have respect for any Sikh who has reached the high status', my informant stated. He explained that Bhai Randhir Singh had the *jot* (God's light), and was *gursikh* (devoted to serving God); he was not the founder of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, but he was described by informants as 'a main personality'. In other words, he was perceived by his contemporaries as having a much higher understanding of *sikhi* (Sikhism, God's

teachings), and consequently his words and actions were used for guidance in their daily lives if there was no explicit teaching contained in the Guru Granth Sahib. This attitude of respect for Bhai Randhir Singh was continued by my informants who, in discussions, frequently made reference to his words and actions as sources of guidance, if there was no explicit teaching in the Guru Granth Sahib.

The headquarters of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha is presently in India, the jathedar (leader) being Squadron Leader Ram Singh. In Britain, there is an organisational committee, which is elected every two years. A meeting is advertised in the Punjabi press. Those who attend select a committee - usually of five Sikhs, and usually from those present. Currently the headquarters is based in Slough. However it was stressed that its purpose was for administrative reasons only. All those who attend Akhand Kirtan programmes and are initiated at *amrit sanskar* (initiation with sweetened, holy water) ceremonies according to the Rahit Bibek automatically consider themselves as members; there is no regular membership list.[4] To emphasise that they follow only the rahit which Guru Gobind Singh prescribed at Vaisakhi 1699, the Akhand Kirtani Jatha has no constitution, either written or unwritten.

Bhai Ram Singh

The jathedar of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha in Britain, who is a member of the *sangat* (congregation) of the Singh Sabha gurdwara in Southall, is Bhai Ram Singh, who is not to be confused with Squadron Leader Ram Singh.[5] Bhai Ram Singh was born into a Hindu family. However, when he was six years old he had a burning desire to meet God. It was not until he was twenty four years old, and working in the film industry, that he was introduced to *gurbani* (the divinely given utterances of the Sikh Gurus). His employer used to recite the prayer *Sukhmani Sahib* (hymn of peace), and he brought Bhai Ram Singh a *gutka* (book of prayers) which was printed in the *Devanagari* script. When he started reciting Sukhmani Sahib he started to progress; his income doubled and his business suddenly increased. After working for another five years in the film industry, he worked at the Indian embassy in Indonesia for a similar period, before returning to India where he had more time to recite gurbani each day. Bhai Ram Singh emphasised that he knew nothing about Sikhism, he merely recited Sukhmani Sahib. One day he saw some people with short hair entering a gurdwara. He also had cut hair and was beardless at the time, and asked if he too would be allowed to enter. When he prostrated himself before the Guru Granth Sahib he felt an inner happiness and peace, and realised that the Guru Granth Sahib was the perfect Guru. He was told that it was necessary for him to recite the *nit nem* (daily prayers), which he did.

When Bhai Ram Singh arrived in Britain on 18 January, 1964, he looked for a gurdwara, and made it a principle to attend the gurdwara regularly. He then learnt that he should serve the community by performing *seva* (service), during which time he recited the gurmantra, *vahiguru*. Bhai Ram Singh then

received a blessing in which Guru Gobind Singh appeared to him. Guru Gobind Singh gave him three teachings: first, to take *amrit* (become initiated into the Khalsa) after which he would perform seva as one of the *panj piare* (beloved ones) at future amrit ceremonies for other people. However, he was unable to take amrit for six months because, in 1964, there were only four, not the necessary five, Sikhs who had taken amrit who could therefore perform seva as one of the panj piare. This first amrit sanskar in England took place at Shackleton Hall, Southall. The following week, in fulfilment of Guru Gobind Singh's prophecy, Bhai Ram Singh was asked to perform seva as one of the panj piare. Three weeks after he took amrit, there was an amrit sanskar in Leicester alongside which the first rainsbai (all night programme) took place in England.

The second teaching that Guru Gobind Singh conveyed to Bhai Ram Singh was that when he bestowed on people the *panj kakke* (5Ks), the last one was the *keski* (small turban), not *kesh* (uncut hair) as more generally held by Sikhs.[6] However, the Panth had not obeyed the *hukam* (commandment) to wear the keski.

Guru Gobind Singh's third teaching to Bhai Ram Singh was that the *Khalsa Raj* (rule of the Khalsa) would occur only when all Sikhs maintained the panj kakke. Guru Gobind Singh stated that he would reign in the Khalsa Raj, but would appear in the form of the panj piare. The Punjab would then become part of the *sach khand* (realm of truth), and each village would have its own panj piare who would rule over them. From conversations with informants regarding the teachings of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha with respect to the concept of the Khalsa Raj, and their own agreement with these teachings, it was apparent that both are disinterested in the desire of some Sikhs for the establishment of a Sikh homeland, Khalistan, in Punjab. This is because they believe that the Khalsa Raj will be the spiritual reign of Guru Gobind Singh on earth, which will initially begin in the Punjab and subsequently spread throughout the world, and not a political rule restricted to the specific geographic area of Punjab.

Belief and practices of my informants

Amrit Sanskar

All my informants emphasised that there was only one amrit (holy nectar), though there were several rahits (codes of conduct), because the ingredients of an amrit sanskar are always identical: water, sugar crystals, and the power of the *shabad* (God's word in the scriptures) which is repeated during the preparation of the amrit. One informant explained the importance of amrit by using an analogy which he stated was often used in *kathas* (sermons in the gurdwara). In India there are tube wells but, if you don't regularly draw water from them, they dry up. If you try and draw water from them you won't get any water regardless of how hard you try. You first have to pour water down and start the whole process again. In a similar way the amrit shabad is inside each person

although she/he may not be aware of it. In order to re-activate it, people need to receive amrit at the amrit sanskar. This 'kick starts' that which is within. The person then needs to practise *nam simran* (continuous meditation on God's name) and keep her/his rahit in order to maintain the amrit and to grow in spiritual strength daily. By nam simran this informant meant the continuous recitation of the gurmantra.[7]

There were, however, distinctive features of the amrit sanskar ceremony which was conducted according to the Rahit Bibek.[8] It was explained that members of the sangat who were devout were questioned about their spiritual life, and the five most devout were chosen 'to do the seva of the panj piare'.[9] My informant stated that the initiates then had to present themselves individually before the panj piare, 'which is Guru Gobind Singh's spirit at that time'.[10] Each was then questioned regarding why she or he wished to receive amrit: 'Whatever is relevant to you is read from your soul and that question is thrown back to you', she stated. This enabled the panj piare to confirm that the initiates were ready to take amrit and able to make the necessary commitment, that is, to maintain the teachings of the Rahit Bibek in their daily lives. My informant stated that she herself had been questioned regarding whether she would be able to keep the rahit, and live the gursikhi lifestyle, as she lived with her family who were 'not gursikh'. She had also been asked to commit herself to marrying a gursikh.[11] After each of the initiates was questioned they were sent away, then those whom the panj piare decided to accept were together called back before them.

My informant stated that, in accordance with the usual practice, the amrit sanskar ceremony at which she was initiated into the Khalsa began with the prayer, *Ardas*. The panj piare sat in front of the Guru Granth Sahib, looking into the amrit, each with one of his hands on the *sarab loh* (all iron) *khanda* (double edged sword). As the amrit was being prepared by the panj piare, each of them remained focussed on the water while one by one they recited the five gurbanis (scriptural passages) of the nit nem. At the same time the initiates also focused directly on the amrit as they listened to the gurbani. When the amrit had been prepared, the initiates presented themselves, one by one, to the panj piare. The initiates then had amrit sprinkled five times in their eyes, five times on the *dasam dwar* (understood by them to be the 'tenth door' on the top on the head), and five times in their mouth by one of the panj piare.

The Gurmantra

There was then a component which only takes place at amrit sanskars conducted according to the Rahit Bibek. The panj piare placed one hand each on top of the other on the dasam dwar of the initiate while they recited the gurmantra 'through their breath' in uniformity. By so doing the gurmantra was 'installed and embedded itself down into the breath of the initiate'. In that way the gurmantra was given in its direct form, or 'through the spirit of Guru Gobind

Singh'. 'It often takes only a minute, but you can feel it coming into you' she explained. According to Bhai Ram Singh:

> If someone hasn't done bad deeds, actually has a clean soul themselves, a pure soul, instantaneously the gurmantra will catch on to it in their breath and the simran will begin with every breath of its own accord. If someone hasn't done good deeds, or has an impure soul, they have to make a lot of effort in order for the gurmantra to become settled in their soul, in their breath.

My informant explained that the reason for the gurmantra being implanted in the breath was that in this way the nam simran was automatically within you: 'You could be talking, you could be sleeping, it still goes on...with every breath you are repeating God's Word'. After each of the initiates had received both the amrit and the gurmantra on their breath, one of the panj piare said Ardas, and gave instructions regarding the rahit and lifestyle that the initiates must follow.

Two of my informants, however, stated that they had experienced saying the gurmantra with their breath prior to its being 'implanted during their amrit sanskar'. The first stated she was reciting the gurmantra in the normal fashion in the presence of a very spiritual gursikh when she experienced it on her breath:

> It shocked me, the experience that I'd had with it. I knew there was something there very spiritual, something very strong, so I knew I had to go to the panj piare to attain that blessing so that I could recite it always like that.

A second informant explained that when he was listening to kirtan or *path* (readings from the Guru Granth Sahib) 'certain things would happen, the movement of my breath, so to me I was activating the amrit'. Although he had still needed to 'commit himself to Guru Nanak's path by taking amrit', the 'technique', or process by which the gurmantra was implanted onto his breath, was made available to him 'by the Guru's grace'.[12]

A third informant stated that, after he had received amrit sanskar, there were occasions when he had experienced *amritras* (which literally means 'juice of amrit') as he recited the gurmantra.[13] Amritras was when amrit from inside his very being came into his mouth in a physical sense and he swallowed it. Explaining his experience of amritras, he stated that:

> When you repeat the name you taste this nectar, sweeter than anything you've ever known. You take sips of it on your tongue, same as the amrit, but you keep drinking it all the time.

Bhai Ram Singh, in my interview with him, reported that it is only very rare individuals who have the blessing of amritras: 'It's the ones who have recited the gurmantra in many lives before who obtain that blessing.'

The Akhand Kirtani Jatha usually also organise an amrit kirtan (a kirtan programme concurrent with the amrit sanskar) at the gurdwara. By so doing, those present at the kirtan supported the initiates. At one such amrit kirtan, which I attended there, was an audible recitation of the gurmantra on the breath. For the first hour three middle aged men led kirtan, then a group of ten to twelve younger men did so for the next three hours.[14] Informants described the Akhand Kirtani Jatha style of kirtan as very repetitive and slow, and not essentially sung in a *rag*, or 'musical scales that best match and amplify the thoughts and words of the shabad'.[15] This meant that it was very easy for people to follow. However during the amrit kirtan, some of the kirtan sounded quite loud and aggressive, because those leading it were concurrently meditating with their breath. At regular intervals there were several minutes of repeating the gurmantra increasingly fast until the pace was almost frenetic and sounds could be heard coming as if from within the person. On one occasion this lasted several minutes. The sounds were rather like those made by a person who is unable to articulate words but expresses his or her wishes through sounds. My perception was of a primal sound that was coming from within their very being. It was not constrained by the need to resort to the cerebral and articulate words that could be understood by other people; it was direct from their inner being and by-passed their brains so that there was no interference between their inner being and its expression. I had a sense that a direct communication with God was taking place, and was conscious of a heightened awareness of God's presence during this time.[16]

My informants believed that when a person received the gurmantra it ignited the spiritual potential, or spiritual entity, within each person. Whereas every person was believed to have the jot (God's light) inside them, it was only those who had the gurmantra implanted on their breath who could see the jot. A variety of illustrations were used to explain this, the most frequent of which was the analogy of wood and fire: just as wood has fire inside it, but needs a trigger from outside itself in the form of a spark to change it from wood to fire, people have the jot inside them, but need the gurmantra to bring to life God's presence within them.

The gurmantra is the single word 'vahiguru'. However, while most of my informants quite openly revealed this to me, one informant refused to do so explaining, 'It's God's true name that hasn't been revealed to the world'. My informants believed that God gave the gurmantra to Guru Nanak, together with his life's mission to practice *nam simran* (meditation on the name of God) and teach others to do the same, after God summoned the Guru into the divine presence while he was taking his morning bath in the River Bein. Furthermore, they believed that when Guru Nanak taught people to practise nam simran he was telling them to repeat the gurmantra and teaching them the 'technology' of implanting it on their breath. However, they emphasised that the gurmantra was only given to Sikhs who became his disciples and were willing to give their lives to the Guru. Bhai Ram Singh, tracing the continuity of the gurmantra from Guru Nanak to today, stated:

> Guru Nanak used to initiate people through *charnamrit* [water that has touched the feet of the Guru], and then he used to instruct people to recite the gurmantra, to meditate on it, and it has followed on through Guru Nanak Ji, to Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, and then to Guru Gobind Singh Ji who passed that authority on to the panj piare to pass on the gurmantra in the way we have it at amrit sanskar now.

In his autobiography, Bhai Randhir Singh recounted how, when he took amrit, an outsider intruded into the ceremony, and uttered a divine name into the ears of the initiates. This led to a confusion in his mind regarding the true gurmantra. He believed that the constant repetition and meditation on the gurmantra would lead to self realisation and oneness with God. Consequently he prayed for knowledge of the true gurmantra, and vowed to accept the word that was indicated in the first hymn he read or heard in the gurdwara on a particular morning. If there was any indication of the popularly used divine name of vahiguru through the use of words such as 'vah' or 'Guru' he would accept vahiguru as the true gurmantra. As he entered the gurdwara, although there was no *granthi* (person reading the Guru Granth Sahib) or other person present, Bhai Randhir Singh heard the words: 'O slave Nanak, utter thou the praise of the great Lord (Gur vah)', from page 376 of the scriptures. When the granthi arrived and opened the Guru Granth Sahib the *hukamnama* (divine command) he began, 'Uttering Vah (Guru) Vah (Guru) the tongue is sweetened by the word', from page 514 of the scriptures. This led Bhai Randhir Singh to believe that 'through the mystic word Vah Guru and through this word He reveals Himself'.[17]

There is presently a continuous recitation of the gurmantra for one hour each twice daily at the Singh Sabha gurdwara, Southall.[18] In the daily programme, which is displayed on one of the main notice boards in the gurdwara, it is described as nam simran. Bhai Ram Singh stated that both the 4.00 a.m. and 10.00 a.m. recitation were started about 1986, the former at his instigation. The timing of the 4.00 a.m. nam simran was because Guru Amar Das stated, 'He who calls himself a Sikh of the True Guru, should rise early (*amrit vela*) and meditate on God's name'. Bhai Ram Singh explained that the passage meant that 'whoever gets up early and recites the gurmantra will be accepted. He will be taken out at the end cycle and he will gain everlasting bliss.' This is another instance of equating nam simran with reciting the gurmantra.

When I was present at amrit vela (the time just before sunrise, which is traditionally regarded in India as the most conducive to meditation) there was a tranquillity in the gurdwara which seemed to reflect a heightened spiritual awareness. I was told that this was both as a consequence of its being amrit vela and that only those who were committed to worshipping and serving God were present. Consequently, the entire congregation were focused on the gurmantra.

Sarab-loh-viveka

Two other practices which are distinctive of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, and which are adhered to by some of my informants, were *sarab loh* and *viveka*. Sarab loh literally means 'all iron' and is the practice of using iron, and not steel or other metals, both for cooking utensils for the food they eat, and for the *kara* (bangle) that Sikhs wear on their right wrist. Viveka, which literally means discernment or discrimination, is the practice of only eating food prepared by Sikhs who have taken amrit as prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh and so, by extension, as performed by the Akhand Kirtani Jatha. In his autobiography, Bhai Randhir Singh stated that after he had taken amrit, his practice was that whenever the *langar* was prepared by unbaptised Sikhs his Jatha cooked their own food and spent most of the time listening to divine kirtan. Squadron Leader Ram Singh described the practice of viveka as 'We do eat with others in the sense of alongside them, but we don't take the food of those who haven't taken the amrit of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha'.[19] Sometimes the two practices of sarab loh and viveka were joined together in the phrase sarab-loh-viveka.

While the ideal was acknowledged, its practice varied among my informants due to family circumstances. Several were unmarried and living in homes where their parents were 'not gursikh'. Consequently they either prepared their own food and ate it apart from family members, or were unable to keep sarab-loh-viveka. While not the ideal, they believed that it was not appropriate to disconnect themselves from their families by choosing the latter option. However all my informants wore an iron, and not a steel, kara.

The reason given by my informants for the practice of sarab-loh-viveka was because of the practice and teaching of Bhai Randhir Singh. When he was in prison it was recorded on his prison records that he had taken a vow of sarab-loh-viveka, 'which was to take food in iron utensils prepared only by those persons who lived by the code of conduct of Guru Gobind Singh'.[20] When he was not allowed to keep this vow he went on a fast in order to maintain it, stating that he would 'survive on the sustenance of His divine Name'.[21]

The practise of sarab loh is believed to have had its origins in the way of life that Guru Gobind Singh practised and his instructions to his Sikhs.[22] 'Iron or steel was the pre-eminent symbol of the Akal Purakh, or Vahiguru, conspicuously present in the sword of the Khalsa'.[23] Another explanation for the practice was given by Squadron Leader Ram Singh. He stated, 'We also eat from utensils of iron because iron is a magnetic element and if our women in the villages took their food in that manner there would be no need for iron and B12 supplements during pregnancy.'[24]

Rainsbai

Another distinctive practice of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha is that of the rainsbai. My informants explained that '*rain*' means 'all night' and '*asbai*' means 'shortened'.[25] The rainsbai is so called because during it a person is so blessed

by the kirtan that the times flies by and thereby the night is shortened. The kirtan is continuous; there is no speech or *katha* (sermon). Bhai Ram Singh explained that Bhai Randhir Singh introduced the concept of the rainsbai after he met a very spiritual woman named Mata Gulab Kaur who gave him the blessing of continuous kirtan and recital of gurbani.[26]

The Akhand Kirtani Jatha organise rainsbai in a different town each month. However, sometimes a rainsbai is held outside England, for example Paris in September, 1998, Glasgow in May 1999, and Holland in August 1999. All the dates are published both on their web site on the Internet, and in a variety of printed materials.[27] For every rainsbai listed on their web-site, transport is organised from gurdwaras in Birmingham, Bradford, Slough and Southall, payment being by voluntary donation.

The rainsbai usually begins at 7.00 p.m. and ends at amrit vela, when the usual gurdwara programme for the day begins. At the rainsbai I attended in 1999, the atmosphere changed after midnight, and there seemed to be a more intensely spiritual focus than previously. I was told that this was because only those people who were there for the kirtan had remained; they were focussed on the kirtan and therefore the spiritual energy of the whole sangat was being harnessed.

The Rahit Bibek

The Akhand Kirtani Jatha believe that the Rahit Bibek is the same as that given by Guru Gobind Singh at the festival of Vaisakhi in 1699. Furthermore they believe that the rahit should be followed as it was revealed by Guru Gobind Singh, and without alteration.

Members of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha believe that the more widely accepted Rahit Maryada is mistaken in important respects. This was first published by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandak Committee, Amritsar (SGPC) in 1951 as the Code of Conduct that Sikhs should follow.

Keski

One of the principal differences between the Rahit Bibek and the Rahit Maryada is that the former gives the keski (small turban), not kesh (uncut hair), as one of the panj kakke (five markers of a Khalsa Sikh) which both women and men are required to wear.[28]

The first reason, according to the Akhand Kirtani Jatha web-site, for the practice of both women and men wearing the keski is that it is in accordance with the events of Vaisakhi 1699.[29] A written account of these events, found in the Karnal District in Haryana State by Prof Piara Singh Padam of Panjabi University, states that 'all [the panj piare] were given *kangha* (comb), *karad* (knife), *kesgi* (keski) and *kachhehra* (baggy shorts)'.[30] The specific and separate mention of all the panj kakke is regarded by the Akhand Kirtani Jatha as evidence that the keski, not kesh, is one of the panj kakke. Informants have also

made me aware of an oral tradition that Guru Gobind Singh took a supply of keskis with him so that they would be available for initiates who joined the Khalsa on that day, although there is no reference to their presence in any of the written accounts of the events of the day.

A second reason, given by the Akhand Kirtani Jatha on their web-site, is that the *rahit nama* (Code of Conduct) of Guru Gobind Singh includes the injunction, 'It is forbidden to take off the turban (*pag*) while eating'.[31] While it is a matter of dispute whether women were initiated into the Khalsa at Vaisakhi 1699, if it is believed that the rahit nama of Guru Gobind Singh should remain unchanged: the presence or otherwise of women on that day is not relevant.[32] His clear intention was to include women as members of the Khalsa.

Historically, rahit namas have gone through a process of change, and there are several different ones being followed by Sikhs today. Despite their belief that the Rahit Bibek is identical with that of Guru Gobind Singh, and that this is the one gursikhs should follow, the Akhand Kirtani Jatha also appeal to the evidence of subsequent rahit namas to support their belief in the keski as one of the panj kakke. One example is the definition of Sikh identity in the Chaupa Singh Rahitnama. This they translate as: 'To be a Sikh, one must observe five rahits of wearing the five Sikh symbols beginning with 'K': *kachh* (kachhehra), *kada* (kara), *kirpan* (sword), kangha, and keski'. They argue that some Sikhs erroneously divide the last word into *kes* and *ki*, and interpret it to mean 'the rahit of the keshas' (ie prohibition of cutting one's hair).[33] However McLeod lists the 'five companions' which the Khalsa Sikhs should never be without as 'kachh, kirpan, kes, bani and *sadhh sangati* (true company)', that is, he includes kes, (not keski) and omits any mention of kangha and kara.[34]

Informants cited the example of Mai Bhago who wore the keski at the time of Guru Gobind Singh. She wore the keski and Nihang dress when she fought in the battle of Mukatsar, along with the *mukte* (forty saved ones).[35] Informants stated that there is a tradition that Mai Bhago continued this practice and used to guard the place where Guru Gobind Singh rested in a tent. Such was her spiritual state that she no longer cared about replacing her worn clothes, however Guru Gobind Singh instructed her to maintain gursikh dress, particularly the kachhehra (baggy knee length shorts) and keski.

A third reason, given by informants, for the keski being one of the panj kakke was that Guru Gobind Singh wanted to give something extra to Sikhs of the Khalsa.[36] 'Hair is natural', one informant stated, 'therefore he couldn't give them something that God had already given them, so he had to give them something extra, which is the keski'.[37] However my informant also emphasised that the wearing of the turban by Sikhs dated back to the time of Guru Nanak.

My informants emphasised that rich materials should not be used for the keski. They wore either black or dark blue turbans, the women exclusively favouring the former. For women, the correct position of the topknot of hair was at the top of the head, just above the forehead, and not at the back of the head. One female informant stated that this was both to protect the dasam dwar (see above), and as a symbol of honour for it.[38]

Because of this emphasis on keski, members of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha only marry women wearing the keski. One informant stated that his proposed wife had not previously worn a keski but, after discussing the matter, she agreed to do so before their marriage.[39]

However today, although all women who are members of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha wear the keski, few other Sikh women do so.[40] One explanation given by informants was that the practice of women wearing the keski was especially associated with the Bhasaur Singh Sabha who regarded it as an expression of the equality of women and men.[41] However, when its leader Babu Teja Singh was banished from the Panth (Sikh community), women stopped wearing the keski as they did not want to be associated with him. When Bhai Randhir Singh was released from prison in October 1930, he revived the custom for women to wear the keski.

A second explanation reflects both the antagonism of Bhai Randhir Singh to British rule of India and the spiritual power associated with the keski. One of my informants had been told by an elderly man, who had spent time with Bhai Randhir Singh, that the British perceived Sikhs to be powerful soldiers and wanted to weaken their sikhi. They therefore persuaded the jathedar of the Akal Takht, Amritsar to give amrit one week to women wearing the keski and one week to women who did not wear the keski.[42] Making reference to the same explanation, Bhai Ram Singh stated that it was human nature for people to take the easier option if one was available to them:

> That resulted in women taking amrit but not having to keep the full rahit and not having to wear the full *dastar* (outer turban). That weakness set in and that created what there is today, you have a woman taking amrit and not wearing dastar and men that do.[43]

Guru Granth Sahib

The Akhand Kirtani Jatha also believe that the Guru Granth Sahib is gurbani and divinely given, and therefore unchanging and unchangeable, and perfect in every way.[44] Furthermore, the same jot (light) which was passed from Guru Nanak to his successors now resides in the Guru Granth Sahib. Consequently, they are opposed both to the *pad chhed* version, where the text has been broken into separate words, and the inclusion of the *rag mala*, which is a list of rags (ragas).

The first collection, or Adi Granth, which was made under the supervision of Guru Arjan and installed by him in the newly completed Harmandir Sahib in 1604, was written in the sacred gurmukhi script in a continuous chain of writing so that the individual words on the line were joined together. However at the end of each line there were two vertical strokes to separate one line from the next. It was also the version of writing upon which Guru Gobind Singh conferred Guruship. The Akhand Kirtani Jatha believe that the Guru Granth Sahib should continue to be printed in accordance with how it was divinely given, and that God will give the wisdom necessary to enable it to be read

correctly, and with understanding. My informants stated that, when the literacy rate in India was lower than it is today, devout Sikhs learned how to read the gurbani in its continuous form, therefore the modern contention that it is inaccessible in that form is due to 'people's slackness', that is, their lack of commitment. The Akhand Kirtani Jatha believe that because the separation of the continuous script into words was made by scholars, these changes are subject to error as no person can fully know the mind of God. As evidence of this they argue that there are between five hundred and seven hundred words where there is dispute regarding how they should be read.[45]

Historically, the pad-chhed version was opposed by both the Chief Khalsa Diwan and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) until the middle of the twentieth century. According to the Akhand Kirtani Jatha website, the reason for the reversal of policy was the lack of demand for versions in their original form.[46] While my informants believed the true version to be that of Guru Gobind Singh they considered it was very difficult to learn. Only one of them could read it, although all read the pad-chhed version.

The Akhand Kirtani Jatha also believe that the rag mala is not gurbani and should therefore not be included in copies of the Guru Granth Sahib.[47] When Guru Arjan supervised the compilation of the Adi Granth it ended with Mundavani M5, 'mundana' meaning 'to close', followed by the last thanksgiving shabad, '*Tera kita jato nahiri, mano jog kitoi*' (I have not appreciated what you have done for me, O Lord. You have made me worthy of your service). Reflecting the circumstances of the day, a meticulous system of checks and balances was devised to ensure that no extraneous material could be inserted. However, in some of the handwritten copies additional material was included after the last thanksgiving shabad including, in some copies, the rag mala.[48] Included among these are the ancient copy which now resides in Kartarpur.[49] Supporters of the inclusion of the rag mala contend that Guru Arjan himself wrote it after being petitioned by some Sikhs who requested him to provide them with some means which would help them to achieve their deliverance from birth and death. However, there are two reasons why this explanation seems to me to be unlikely. The first reason is that the purpose for the compilation of the Adi Granth was to provide an authoritative collection of gurbani for Sikhs. Secondly, the gurbani was given through divine inspiration; the Gurus did not write it to order.

Macauliffe attributes authorship of the rag mala to the Muslim poet Alam who wrote a work of 353 stanzas in 1583, stanzas 63-72 of which are the rag mala. Macauliffe concludes: 'It is not understood how it was included in the sacred volume. The rags mentioned in it do not correspond with the rags in the Guru Granth'.[50] This reflects one kind of internal evidence to support its omission from the Guru Granth Sahib. A second internal evidence is that the rag mala does not contain the system of numbering that is found within all other shabads of the Guru Granth Sahib. A third kind of internal evidence is that there are errors contained in the rag mala.

Historically, the rag mala has only been credited with being part of the Guru Granth Sahib since the middle of the twentieth century. According to the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, the Guru Granth Sahib was printed without the rag mala at the time of the founding of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902, and subsequently by the Gurmat Press at Amritsar in 1915.[51] The Akhand Kirtani Jatha also quote the first edition of the SGPC Rahit Maryada in 1938, which stated that the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib should end with the Mundavani and that the rag mala should not be read.[52] However in the final edition, which was published in 1950, the instruction regarding the inclusion of the rag mala in an *akhand path* (continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib) was changed and now states, 'The rag mala may or may not be recited according to the local custom or according to the wishes of the person or persons who arrange such a reading'.[53] According to Grewal, the reason for the change was because Bhai Jodh Singh, after personally examining the Kartarpur *bir*, reported that it included the rag mala.[54] However, if the rag mala is read, the reading will end with the mundavani, that is, the rag mala has been inserted before the mundavani although in those handwritten copies where it is present it appears after the closing shabad. It is of significance that, according to informants, the rag mala is not read at the Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar.

Conclusion

Although members of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha are few in number when compared with the total Sikh population in the UK, they are significant for two main reasons. The first reason is that they represent a devotional group within Sikhism which places emphasis on nam simran, by which they mean the practice of reciting the gurmantra. They believe that the gurmantra, 'vahiguru', was divinely given to Guru Nanak and that when Guru Nanak was told to practice nam simran and teach others to do the same, God was instructing him to teach people to recite the gurmantra with their breath. At amrit sanskar ceremonies conducted according the the Rahit Bibek, which the Akhand Kirtani Jatha believe to be the true rahit given by Guru Gobind Singh at the festival of Vaisakhi in 1699, the gurmantra is installed into the breath of the initiate, although two of my informants had experience of this happening to them for short periods of time prior to their amrit sanskar. The Akhand Kirtani Jatha also place emphasis on kirtan, which may sometimes be a rainsbai, or all night programme. Reflecting that their origins arose out of their emphasis on the practice of kirtan and its spiritual purpose, on their web-site the Akhand Kirtani Jatha describe themselves as 'a group of Gursikh devotees who joined him [Bhai Randhir Singh] in recitation of Gurbani Kirtan and who adopted Gurbani Kirtan, not as a profession but as a sacred mission for the salvation of their souls and propagation of the true Sikh way of life'.[55]

The second reason why the Akhand Kirtani Jatha is significant is that, although not exclusively a youth movement, at kirtan programmes organised by them that I have attended, over 75% of those present appeared to be under thirty

years of age. Through its emphasis on reciting the gurmantra and kirtan, and its strict adherence to the Rahit Bibek, it is providing a way of life that is meeting the spiritual desire of my informants and many other young people to obey the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib in their daily lives. The Rahit Bibek states that the keski is one of the panj kakke that all practising Sikhs should wear, and both my female and male informants wore it, even though there was a belief among them that doing so may disadvantage them in their professional careers. My informants believed in sarab loh, or using only iron cooking utensils and wearing an iron kara, (although those living in familes which were not gursikh only kept the latter out of respect for their parents), and they also believed in the divine origin and unchangeable nature of the Guru Granth Sahib, by whose teachings they sought to live their daily lives.

Notes

1. G.S. Aurora, *The New Frontiersman* (Bombay, Popular Prakashan; 1967); A.W. Helweg, *Sikhs in England: The Development of a Migrant Community* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1979); Eleanor M. Nesbitt, *Aspects of Sikh Tradition in Nottingham* (Unpublished M.Phil thesis, University of Nottingham); R.K. Agnihotri, *Crises of Identity: Sikhs in England* (New Delhi, Bahri Publications, 1987); S.S. Kalsi, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community in Britain* (Leeds, Community Religions Project, University of Leeds, 1992); Darshan Singh Tatla, 'Nurturing the Faithful: the role of the sant among Britain's Sikhs', *Religion*, 22, 4, 349-374.
2. Informants explained that 'Akhand' means 'continuous', '*Kirtan*' is 'singing *gurban*' (God's word), and '*Jatha*' means 'group of people', hence they were a group of people who were known for performing continuous kirtan. This was not a self description, but how they were described by others.
3. Some books do describe the Akhand Kirtani Jatha as the Bhai Randhir Singh Jatha, for example Hew McLeod, *Sikhism* (London, Penguin Books; 1997), page 199; Harbans Singh, *The Heritage of the Sikhs* (New Delhi, Manohar, 1994), 347.
4. '*Bibek*' means 'discrimination' or 'discipline', and is therefore Sikh religious practice. The Rahit Bibek is the second part of *Gurmanti Bibek*, which is published by the Bhai Sahib Randhir Trust, Ludhiana. 'Bibek' and 'Viveka' (see below) are the Punjabi and Hindi forms of the same word.
5. The autobiography of Bhai Ram Singh, *Roop Gobind Ka Raa Khalse Ka Sikka Sonne Ka* (sic) (Derby, *Panjab Times International*, 1999) is currently available only in Panjabi. During my research, Bhai Ram Singh allowed me to interview him, which is the source of the information and quotations of his below.
6. Some scholars consider that the Sikh rahit has evolved over a period of time. For a discussion of this debate see J.S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition* (New Delhi, Manohar 1998), 178-184.

7. In this context, my informant was referring to the way in which those who have had the gurmantra installed and embedded on their breath automatically repeat it every time they take a breath. See below for details of how it is imbedded on their breath. There is also the more general meaning of *nam japna* or *nam simran* as constantly meditating on the name of God. For example in AG 305, 'The Guru's disciple, who with every breath and morsel contemplates over my Lord God, he becomes pleasing to Guru's mind', is understood by members of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha as repeating the gurmantra with the breath, but by other Sikhs in the more general sense.

8. The orthodox way of conducting amrit sanskar is according to the Rehit Maryada. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, *Sikh Rehit Maryada.* (Amritsar, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee; 1997), 33-37.

9. Both women and men may perform seva as one of the panj piare (beloved ones) at amrit ceremonies. One of my female informants had done so on several occasions.

10. I was often told that the united power of the panj piare was equivalent to the power of the Guru.

11. Another informant stated that when he took amrit, the panj piare decided to postpone giving amrit to one man until his wife was able to take amrit with him.

12. The implanting of the gurmantra into the breath was frequently referred to by the phrase 'the technique'.

13. I am not aware of any similar practice in another faith.

14. Both women and men may lead kirtan.

15. Gobind Singh Mansukhani, 'The Unstruck Melody: musical mysticism in the Scripture' in Kerry Brown (ed.) *Sikh Art and Literature* (London, Routledge; 1999), 117-128, 125.

16. My perception was that such meditation through the breath, or *svas svas simran* as it is sometimes called, came from the gut/stomach area of the body in contrast to, for example, singing in tongues which is found in some Christian churches where the sound comes from the throat and is more lyrical, usually pitched among the higher ranges of the musical scale. Furthermore, in Christianity, singing in tongues is one of several spiritual gifts, all of which are of equal status, one or more of which are divinely given to Christians according to God's grace: I Corinthians 12:4-11. I am not aware of any other faith which has a concept of a mantra being divinely implanted into the breath of a believer, nor of any source that could have influenced this Akhand Kirtani Jatha practice. Although the use of the breath as an aid to meditation is found in several faiths, for example Buddhism and Hinduism, it is a discipline which can be developed by the individual.

17. Trilochan Singh (trans.), *Autobiography of Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh* (Ludhiana, Bhai Randhir Singh Trust; 1995), 28, 35-37.

18. There is also a one hour recitation at 5.30 a.m. daily at the Singh Sabha gurdwara in Hounslow, West London.

19. Trilochan Singh (trans.), *Autobiography of Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh*, 27. See also 205; Joyce Pettigrew: *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, (London, Zed Books, 1995), 71

20. Trilochan Singh (trans.), *Autobiography of Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh*, 98-99. See also 189.

21. Ibid., 217

22. During a visit to Patna in 1999, I was shown relics of Guru Gobind Singh, including his iron kara.

23. W.H. McLeod, *Sikhism* (London, Penguin; 1997), 199.

24. Joyce Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, 71.

25. Another explanation I have been given, by a Sikh who is not a member of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, is that 'rain' means 'night' and 'sabai' means 'all' therefore 'rainsbai' means 'kirtan is performed all night'.

26. One informant emphasised that if you have the gurmantra implanted in your breath you are saying nam simran all the time, even when asleep. However, at a rainsbai you are sitting and doing it physically as well.

27. www.akj.org.uk   In 2001 rainsbai is being held in Glasgow in May and in France in September.

28. Keski/kesgi and *chhoti dastar* (small turban) may be used interchangeably.

29. www.akj.org.uk

30. Based on the language and style of the writing it is assessed to have been written about the end of the 18th century.
See www.akj.org.uk/books/srm/keski.htm, 5

31. J. D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs* (New Delhi, Low Price Publications; 1994), 343.

32. Cunningham, writing in 1849, makes reference to the women being initiated into the Khalsa. 'Women are not usually, but they are sometimes, initiated in the form of professors of the Sikh faith. In mingling the sugar and water for women, a one-edged, and not a two-edged, dagger is used', 315. This seems to imply that women were only occasionally initiated into the Khalsa at the time and, even when they were, it was in a different manner to men.

33. www.akj.org.uk/books/srm/keski/htm , 2.

34. W.H.McLeod, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama* (University of Otago Press, Dunedin; 1987), 212, endnote 28.

35. For details of the battle of Mukatsar see M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion* (Delhi, Low Price Publications; 1990), V, 212-213. Macauliffe does not include any reference to the sakhi (story) in his account of the life of Guru Gobind Singh. Women members of the Nihang order continue to wear the keski.

36. Rejecting this viewpoint, McLeod stated that there was no Punjabi word beginning with the letter 'k' at the time which served to designate a turban, and that the word keski did not arise until later than the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. McLeod, W.H., 'The Turban and Sikh Identity', 59 in Singh,

Pashaura and Barrier, N.J. (ed.), *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change,* (New Delhi, Manohar; 1999), *59.*

37. This should not be seen to indicate a lack of importance for kesh. An indication of its importance was demonstrated when, during a discussion, I was made aware that when my informants combed their hair they kept that which came out on the comb in a box. It was stressed that it could be any kind of suitably sized box and did not have to be special in any way. When a quantity was collected it was burnt. It was stressed that it would never be thrown away. I am not aware that this is practice is found among other Sikhs.

Another indication of the importance of kesh is that two of the panj kakke, the kangha and the keski, were given to protect it.

38. J.D. Cunningham, *The History of the Sikhs* (New Delhi, Low Price Publications, 1994), 318, states that 'Sikh women are distinguished from Hindus of their sex by some variety of dress, but chiefly a higher topknot of hair'. Although this does not make specific reference to keski, the precise page number was quoted by several informants as a kind of 'proof text' of the fact that Sikh women at the time commonly wore the keski, to which Cunningham was referring when he made reference to 'some variety of dress'. However other informants were uncertain if Cunningham was making a specific reference to women wearing the keski.

39. When I asked what his response would have been had she been unwilling to do so, he expressed gratitude that the situation had not arisen. He wife had, subsequently, confessed to him that she was initially uncomfortable wearing the keski but then became used to it.

40. Not all women who wear keski have taken amrit according to the Rahit Bibek. One member of the sangat at the Singh Sabha gurdwara, Southall was a physiotherapist, and wore it for reasons of convenience as she was constantly bending over patients to give them appropriate medical treatment.

Another, who lives in America, wore a keski as she wished to be clearly identified as a Sikh. She has informed me that in the district of Saragoda, now in Pakistan, the majority of Sikh women wore keskis prior to Partition. In a conversation with 'some very old women from there', they stated that there was a sant from there who instructed them that when they took amrit they should wear a keski. Unfortunately the name of the sant is unknown (private communication, 31 August, 1998).

41. The Bhasaur Singh Sabha was a branch of the Singh Sabha which was founded in 1893 by Teja Singh Bhasaur in the village of Bhasaur in the state of Patiala. His ideal was strictly fundamentalist. In the Bhasaur Singh Sabha beards were free flowing, women were required to wear turbans, the rag mala was removed from the Adi Granth, *sahaj-dharis* (Sikhs who do not observe the rahit, especially by cutting their hair) were cast out, and the conversion of non-Sikhs and the re-conversion of lapsed Sikhs was rigorously advocated. Eventually the more orthodox Sikhs found the actions of the Bhasaur Singh Sabha too radical and, in 1928, Teja Singh Bhasaur was excommunicated from

the Panth by the Akal Takht in Amritsar, which is the primary temporal centre of Sikhism where all major decisions concerning the Panth are made. See W.H. McLeod, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism* (Maryland, Scarecrow Press Inc; 1995), 54.

42. Until the early 1930s Sikh women wore the turban for the amrit ceremony. However Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir, the Jathedar of the Akal Takht in Amritsar began to baptise women without the turban. Despite strong protests, gradually the fashion took over and it became customary not to wear one. The Rahit Maryada did not direct amritdhari women to wear turbans. Tara Singh Bains and Hugh Johnston consider that the reason why it did not do so was 'perhaps because the Sikh renaissance was so strong in those days, and the religious standard of the Sikhs was so good, the leadership did not think that Sikhs would dare to interfere with the hair as excessively as they have', Tara Singh Bains and Hugh Johnston, *The Four Quarters of the Night: the life-journey of an emigrant Sikh* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queens University Press, 1995), 230-231.

43. The keski, or chhoti dastar, is the small turban which is worn by itself at night and inside the home during the day unless visitors are present, whilst the dastar is the outer turban which is usually only worn outside the home.

44. See, for example, AG 52 and AG 628, and AG 1412.

45. www.akj.org.uk/books/srm/pad_chhed.htm

46. Resolution 2682 of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, dated January 1, 1945, stated: 'The installation of the pad chhed bir is not legitimate', and Resolution No 7 of the SGPC, dated January 1, 1950, stated: 'Until any decision is arrived at on Panthic level, pad-chhed bir should not be printed or installed'. Ibid.

47. www.akj.org.uk/books/srm/ragmala.htm

48. However it makes explicit that the rag mala is not part of the Guru Granth Sahib. In its index it states, 'All the leaves of Guru Baba: 974'. The Mundavani was written on page 973, the following page being blank with the rag mala on additional leaves which have been inserted afterwards. Ibid.

49. However, the authenticity of the Kartarpur bir is disputed: J.S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*, 1998 (Manohar, New Delhi; 1998), 238-241.

50. M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, iii, 65.

51. www.akj.org.uk/books/srm/ragmala.htm

52. ibid.

53. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, *Rehat Maryada*, (Amritsar, SGPC; 1978), 10

54. J.S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*, (New Delhi, Manohar: 1998), 238.

55. www.akj.org.uk/books/srm/intro.htm

Crisis, Crisis, Crisis...
Rural Indebtedness and Farmers' Suicides in the
Post-Green Revolution Punjab (India)

Surinder S. Jodhka
Panjab University, Chandigarh

H.S. Shergill, *Rural Credit and Indebtedness in Punjab* (Chandigarh: Institute for Development and Communication, monograph series IV), 1998. 95pp. Rs. 100.

Pramod Kumar and S.L. Sharma (co-ordinators), *Suicides in Rural Punjab* (Chandigarh: Institute for Development and Communication (monograph series V), 1998. 102pp.

K. G. Iyer and M. S. Manick, *Indebtedness, Impoverishment and Suicides in Rural Punjab* (Delhi: Indian Publishers Distributors, 2000). 114pp. + 11(appendix). Rs. 325.

Punjab has for long been known for its vibrant agrarian economy. It was here that the idea of Green Revolution was first translated into practice in India. The success of Green Revolution in the region virtually solved the chronic food problem of the entire country. Though occupying only a tiny proportion of the total geographical space, it began to provide for nearly two-thirds of the central food-grain pool of India. Punjab justifiably came to be known as the most dynamic and prosperous state, the 'food basket' of India.

It was not only to the new agrarian technologies and the high yielding varieties of seeds that the success of Green Revolution was attributed. Credit was also given to the enterprising rugged farmers of the region and their hard work. Their love for land and the high values they attach to the practice of self-cultivation (*khudkasht*) played important roles in making the Green Revolution a success story in the region much before it caught up in the other parts of India. The local dominant agrarian caste, the jats, have particularly been known for the pride they take in their rural identities. A sociologist working in a village of the Doaba region during the early 1980s had reported 'the jat might be employed as a school teacher, or serve in military but he saw his primary role as that of an agriculturalist; his connection with land was what he held most dear and what identified him' (Kaur 1986, 233). Another anthropologist similarly writes about the contempt that the jats had for the city life. They despised 'the townsman as lacking in physical bravery. They also had an image of them as grasping, greedy and lacking in dignity' (Pettigrew 1992,169).

However, over the last three or four decades, the story of Punjab seems to have changed a lot. While in terms of statistical indicators of economic and social development, Punjab still occupies a leading position in the country, the terms of popular discourses on Punjab's economy seem to have undergone a complete shift over the years. From a region known for its economic vibrancy, the popular image of Punjab today is more often articulated in the media and in academic writings in terms of a region marked by perpetual crises (Jodhka 1997). From the militant movements of 1980s to the successive failures of cotton crops in the 1990s, there are crises all the way. Even when there is a bumper crop of wheat or paddy, it rarely becomes an event to celebrate. The media reports tend to highlight - and the farmers' unions complain about - the problems of procurement and the accumulating stocks of food grains in the state. This, when a neighboring state could be experiencing a drought and famine! The crisis is however not merely economic. Ideologically also, agriculture and agrarian values have lost the charm that they seemed to enjoy until some time back (Jodhka 1999).

The studies being reviewed here deal with one such crisis that has been occupying the front pages of the local newspapers during the last four or five years, namely, the growing indebtedness of the Punjab farmers and a sudden increase in suicide rates in certain parts of the state. The three studies being reviewed here are independent works. However, their approach and themes connect them. The first two studies, brought out by the Institute of Development and Communication (IDC), were sponsored by The Punjab State Co-operative Apex Bank of the Government of Punjab. The third study (by Iyer and Manick) was funded by a Bangalore based Non-Governmental Organisation, called Action Aid.

Though an increase in the incidence of suicide in the rural Punjab was first reported in the media in the early 1990s, the prevailing political scenario (i.e. the preoccupation with the militant Khalistan movement) overshadowed them. It was in 1997-98 that the problem of suicides began to be highlighted by the media again. Interestingly, more or less, similar kinds of suicides were also being simultaneously reported from some other parts of India, particularly the southern states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Even the explanations offered of these suicides in different parts of India have mostly been on similar lines.

Commentators on the subject have mostly tended to see a close link between these rural suicides and growing indebtedness of the farmers, caused in most cases by successive crop failures. The modern commercialised farming has made the farmers, particularly those with smaller holdings, much more vulnerable to such 'debt-traps'. The new agricultural practices had considerably enhanced the market orientation of the cultivators. All the inputs required for cultivation needed to be bought from the market. Since the smaller cultivators rarely have surpluses of their own, they invariably need to borrow for the fulfilment of such requirements. Their sources are also mostly informal. At times, they have to also borrow for consumption and allied requirements, such as weddings and major illnesses in the family. The only source of income being from the agriculture, a crop failure could easily lead to a difficult situation for such cultivators.

Interestingly, indebtedness has been a recurring theme in the literature on Punjab agriculture. Malcom Darling's *Punjab Peasantry in Prosperity and Debt* and S. S. Thorburn's *Musalmans and Moneylenders in the Punjab* carried out during the late 19th century were perhaps the first studies of their kind in the sub-continent. Apart from reporting to their masters about the 'political dangers' of growing indebtedness among the peasantry in the province and the implications that it might have for the colonial rule in the region (given the fact that a good proportion of the British Indian army drew its men from the Punjab peasantry), Darling and Thorburn for the first time also systematically documented the extent and nature of peasant-indebtedness in different parts of the colonial Punjab. Malcom Darling's work is still considered a classic on the agrarian economy of the region.

Though the contexts have completely changed, talking about the indebtedness of the Punjab farmers - who undoubtedly are much more prosperous than their counterparts in other parts of India - does remind one of the kind of situation that Darling described more than a century back. The context today, in a sense, is much more depressing. The colonial administrators were worried about the growing indebtedness of the peasantry because they thought there could be political unrest. Today, in the post-militancy period (that is, after the 1980s), the 'politics' seems to have become an inaccessible mode of expressing discontent for the people of Punjab. Instead, the marginalised cultivators seem to be taking their frustrations out through the extremely individualised mode of suicides.

II

H. S. Shergill's study of *Rural Credit and Indebtedness in Punjab* does not directly address the question of rural suicides in the state. His method and approach are typically those of a professional economist and he examines the whole question in a dispassionate manner. Unlike the other two reports, he even avoids making any specific recommendations to the funding agency i.e. the Punjab Government. Apart from examining the 'extent, nature and burden of debt on Punjab farmers', Shergill's study investigated the availability, sources, and use of the short and long term borrowings by the different categories of farmers.

He locates the context of the growing indebtedness amongst the Punjab farmers in agrarian modernisaton brought in by the success of green revolution during the 1960s and 70s and subsequent decline in the growth rate of agriculture, particularly during the 1990s. For example, during 1960-61 to 1990-91, farm production in Punjab grew at the rate of more than 5 percent per year. This increase was even higher in case of wheat (6.69 percent) and rice (11.80 percent). Over these thirty years, production of wheat went up by seven times and that of rice, as much as 28 times. The increase in productivity was obviously accompanied by an increase in the expenditure on land. Apart from the expenses on high yielding varieties of seeds, chemical fertilisers, pesticides and hired labour, farmers, particularly those with relatively bigger land holdings, also bought tractors, threshers and harvesters. In other words, it meant a considerable increase in the investments required for

carrying out cultivation. Not all farmers could finance such investments from their own savings. Shergill argues that though agricultural production has been growing at a very high rate in the state, per capita incomes of the farmers have not grown at the same high rate. If one was to also take into account the increase in population, the net growth in per capita income of the agricultural population works out to be only about 1.5 percent per year.

More critical was the fact that much of the additional income had been absorbed by an increase in the per capita expenditure and 'rising living/ consumption standards of the farming community'. The growth in consumption having absorbed almost the entire increase in the real income of the agrarian population, only a few were left with any surplus of their own. 'As a consequence farmers had to, regularly and routinely, borrow huge amounts to finance the modern agriculture. This is why the spectacular growth of agricultural output in the state has been accompanied by an even faster growth of agricultural credit' (page 7).

The dependence of farmers on lending agencies and their growing indebtedness becomes particularly serious in light of the reported stagnation, and in some cases, even decline in the agricultural productivity of the land during the recent past. While in the case of cotton, the yields per acre have considerably declined over the last four or five years, even in the case of crops like wheat and rice, there have been reports of stagnation. The percentage of the respondent farmers of Shergill's field study reporting fall in crop yields during the last 3 years ranged from 42.71 to 87.80 percent in the case of cotton and 27.80 to 45.80 in the case of wheat from different regions of the state.

As many as 86 percent of the respondent farmers routinely borrowed from various credit agencies for short-term investment on crops and nearly 27 percent of all the farmers borrowed for capital investments in farm machinery. Interestingly there was no significant difference in the percentage of borrowing farmers in the various holding size categories of cultivators in case of the short-term borrowings. However, the long-term borrowings were done more by medium and large landholders (36 and 31 percent respectively). The proportion of borrowing farmers in the case of small and semi-medium landholders was only 26 and 21 percent respectively.

In terms of dependence on borrowed money, the smaller landholders were clearly in a much weaker position than their counterpart bigger landholders. Though the bigger farmers also frequently borrowed for short and long-term investments on land, many of them also had savings of their own. For example, the average per acre outstanding debt of the small farmers worked out to be Rs. 3,396 as against Rs. 1,398 and Rs. 1,599 for the medium and big farmers, respectively.

It is rather interesting to note that despite official efforts at making institutional credit available to the cultivators, a significant proportion of the short term borrowings (61.31 percent) by all categories of farmers were from the commission agents in the grain markets, the *arhtias*. As many as 63.85 percent of the farmers regularly borrowed from them. The Primary Co-operative Credit Societies came next from where 51.31 percent of the farmers borrowed for their short-term credit

needs. Only 8.85 percent of the farmers borrowed from commercial banks for short-term investments in land. Commercial banks were more popular when it came to long-term loans for investments in farm machinery (accounting for nearly 55 percent of the total amount borrowed). Arhtias rarely lent money for such investments. The only other source from where long-term investment loans were available to the farmers was the Cooperative Land Development Banks (45 percent).

Shergill's study also documents the borrowings for non-productive purposes. While in the case of short and long-term productive borrowings, there was not much significant difference among the different categories of farmers, in case of non-productive borrowings the percentage of farmers borrowing declined sharply as the holding size increased. Nearly 68 percent of all the amount borrowed in this category was by the 'small' and 'semi-medium' farmers. On the whole, the number of those who borrowed for non-productive purpose was comparatively much lesser (only 27 percent of small and 22 percent of the semi-medium farmers had been borrowing for non-productive purposes). Since the formal sector credit agencies did not advance money for such needs, most of these borrowings were from informal sources, generally the arhtias.

Why did they need to borrow for unproductive purposes? Shergill does not attribute the indebtedness of farmers to their economic distress. On the contrary, he explains it by referring to cultural factors, particularly the changing consumption patterns. As he writes:

> With the growth of income and prosperity in the Punjab rural side expenditure on social ceremonies, house building, consumer durables etc. has also grown at a fast rate... As a result of the almost single caste (Jat Sikh) complexion of Punjab farmers, demonstration effect on peasant families is also very strong. Even those farm families that are in deficit go on in for huge expenditure on social ceremonies and other items (p. 50).

However, Shergill does not theoretically identify the critical level of indebtedness, a stage that could be called as that of distress. Though he frequently uses the term 'burden' while talking about their 'debt', he does not seem to suggest that the Punjab farmers were in a state of any serious crisis. The point that comes out most sharply from the study is the continued dependence of the cultivators on the arhtias. As many as 70 percent of all the farmers surveyed for the study reported that they could not manage without borrowing from the arhtias. This was despite as many as 79 percent of the borrowing farmers reporting that the arhtias charged very high interest rates and another 32 percent complaining that they even tampered with credit accounts and fleeced the farmers.[1]

III

While Shergill's study is a dispassionate exercise aimed at documenting the nature and extent of indebtedness among the farmers of Punjab, the two studies of suicides address the question of indebtedness in a very different perspective. It is with a sense of concern that they approach the question of farmers' indebtedness and its possible link with a sudden spurt in suicides in the rural Punjab. This is particularly true of the study by Iyer and Manick.

The IDC study of *Suicides in Rural Punjab* (co-ordinated by Pramod Kumar and S.L. Sharma) was a sequel to the study *on Rural Indebtedness in Punjab* by H. S. Shergill. While Iyer and Manick's study was framed around the hypothesis that there was a link between the increasing economic hardships among the rural people, particularly the small/marginal farmers and the landless labourers, and the growing numbers of suicides, the scope of the IDC study was more exploratory in nature. The stated purpose of the IDC study was to investigate the nature, extent and causes of suicide in rural Punjab, particularly rural suicides.

As per the figures quoted by the IDC report, there had been a distinct increase in the number of suicides in Punjab since 1992-93. In 1992-93 suicides in Punjab increased by a staggering 51.97 percent while the comparable all-India figure was only 5.11 percent. In the years 1993-94 the increase was 14 percent in Punjab as against 5.88 percent for the country. While there was a decline in the reported cases of suicides at the all-India level, the state of Punjab once again reported an increase of 57 percent in 1994-95. One must also remember that there was always a possibility of underreporting of suicides in the Indian situation.[2]

An important feature of the recent suicides was that they were concentrated only in certain pockets. The most suicide prone district has been Sangrur where, according to the IDC study, as many as 22.39 percent of all the suicides reported from the state during 1988-1997 had occurred. Iyer and Manick further assert that within Sangrur also, it was from certain blocks that most of the cases were reported. In fact they could identify 12 specific villages in Lehragaga, Andana and Barnala blocks of the Sangrur district where most of the suicides had been committed. It was in these 12 villages that Iyer and Manick carried out their field study. Bhatinda (11.88 percent), Mansa (6.42 percent) and Hoshiarpur (10. 16) were the other suicide prone districts. In contrast the district of Ropar (0.84 percent), Moga (0.48 percent), Jalandhar (0.70 percent) and Fateh Garh Sahib (0.00) reported very few suicides (MC report p. 20). Interestingly, the percentage of cultivators among all those who committed suicides was also highest in the Sangrur district. According to the IDC study, cultivating farmers constituted 50 percent of all the suicides committed in the Sangrur district as against a mere 6.6 percent in the Hoshiarpur district.

The two studies also identify some clear patterns in the social background of those who committed suicide. According to the IDC study, as many as 45 percent of all the suicide victims were landless labourers and another 43 percent were small (owning less than 5 acres of land) and medium (owning 5 to 10 acres of land) land

holders. Age-wise, about 60 percent of the suicide victims were 15 to 29 years old and as many as 5 8. 50 percent were illiterates. The mode of committing suicide was also quite similar. As many as 58.50 percent had killed themselves by consuming pesticides. Further, Iyer and Manick also point out that in terms of the caste background, as many as 59 of the 80 suicide cases identified by them were the jats. Though not mentioned explicitly by either of the studies, with the exception of one or two, most of these cases were of men. The women who have been reported to have committed such suicide were generally those who died along with their husbands and other family members.

The presence of a link between indebtedness and suicides has been reported by both the studies. However, the two studies differ a great deal on the emphasis laid on this factor. The explanations offered for the indebtedness of those who committed suicide by the two studies are also considerably different.

According to the IDC study, the contemporary crisis of the Punjab agriculture emanated from (a) limitations of the Green Revolution and lack of inner dynamism to build up forward and backward inter-sectoral linkages; (b) decline in the size of operational holdings and fragmentation of land as well as pauperisation of small and marginal farmers; (c) decline in the growth rate of productivity; and (d) increase in input costs and a corresponding fall in income of the small and marginal farmers. Inferring from Shergill's study, they also point to the fact that small and marginal farmers had a much higher share of debt. However, they do not give much weight to indebtedness *per se* as being the main factor that explained the rise in suicides. Of the causes identified by the IDC study, indebtedness came at number three. As per their survey, only 41.50 percent of those who committed suicide were indebted. The corresponding figure for the 'general sample' was 71.40 percent. The fact that 'only 6 percent of the suicide victims had to sell land under the burden of debt' (p.69) implies, according to the IDC study, that the debt burden was not particularly severe.

The IDC study tends treat the 'social factors' as being much more determining while explaining the rural suicides in contemporary Punjab. The most important factor identified by the study was 'family discord' followed by 'alcohol and illicit drug use'. Even indebtedness in most cases was 'socially induced'. It may be worthwhile quoting from the study:

> ...greater proportion of the debt of the small and marginal farmers originated from loans taken for non-productive purposes.... a large amount of debt is socially induced among these sections. Sixty eight percent of the suicide victims' families have a debt on them because of unproductive expenditure as compared to 20 percent of general households.

> ... A number of suicides were noticed among those for whom the use of credit for conspicuous consumption had aggravated the stress situation (pp36-37).

Similarly, commenting on drug addiction and alcoholism, the study claims:

> The incidence of drug use has also been found to be very high in the districts of Sangrur, Bhatinda, Mansa and Firozepur ... Our field survey indicates that the frequency of the intake of alcohol is high among suicide victims' families. About 68 percent of the suicide victims were drinkers as compared to 49 percent of the general population sample (pp. 37-38).

In contrast to the IIDC study, Iyer and Manick treat the crisis of the agrarian economy and the growing indebtedness of farmers as the foremost cause of increase in suicides in the rural Punjab. They make a crucial distinction between the 'causative' and 'precipitant factors while explaining these suicides. While the precipitant factors could be social and psychological, the causative factors, in most cases, were economic (in most cases, indebtedness). According to them, the causative factors are the ones that produce those social conditions under which an individual begins to feel insecure and helpless.

Nearly 79 percent of those who committed suicides came from poor families, mostly marginalised farmers or landless labourers. Only around six percent of those who committed suicides were free from debts and most of them had borrowed money from informal sources, generally from the arhtias (the commission agents in the grain markets). In some cases, drug addiction and marital disputes also became causative factors. Though indebtedness was a crucial and determining factor, by itself it could not be a sufficient cause for committing suicide. Iyer and Manick point out that in most cases, it was the loss of honour and constant experience of humiliation at the hands of the lenders that seemed to have 'precipitated' them to take such an extreme step.

A critical factor (identified both by the IDC study as well as by Iyer and Manick) was the general breakdown of the 'community' and kinship support system in the rural Punjab. A majority of the respondent family members of the suicide victims in the MC study expressed that approaching social institutions like *panchayats* and *mahilla mandals* at the time of crisis was of little use. 'These institutions had ceased to be social and were apathetic to the needs of the underprivileged sections' (p.43). Of the 16 victims who sought help from relatives and friends, the respondent family members of the 15 reported that no such help came through (p70). As many as 76 percent of the suicide victims in the Iyer and Manick study were from nuclear families. Commenting on the effects of this overall decline of the 'community' in rural Punjab on the individuals in distress, they write:

> The role of traditional institutions like the Biradari, the village Panchayat, religious and other humanitarian institutions, which were providing mutual help and social security, are now under great stress.
> The economic development,... dominance of the capitalist value system, emergence of consumerist culture and the role of mass media have contributed jointly to the degeneration of traditional value system and is overtaken by the value of individualism (p. 101)

Another important point made by Iyer and Manick in their study is the near absence of the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the regions. This became particularly significant in context of the fact that in most cases the suicide victims were the sole bread-winners of the family. Their death had left the surviving family members in a state of helplessness. While in the southern states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, voluntary agencies (the NGOs) had come forward to help in such cases, there seemed to be no institution or agency that was providing help to these families in Punjab. Thus they call upon official agencies to undertake measures that would provide some support to the impoverished cultivators and those who had lost their bread earners.

More importantly, however, the authors emphasize the need to address the problems of the agrarian crisis. The currently popular economic philosophy of liberalisation and a complete trust in the market forces would certainly not be able to redeem the agrarian economy of the region.

Notes

1. Interestingly, I had also observed a similar kind of situation in my study of the neighboring Haryana during the late 1980s (Jodhka 1995).

2. As reported in Iyer and Manick's study, 'there was a near unanimous agreement among villagers not to report these deaths to the police to be recorded as suicides. The reason is that the villagers avoid desecration of the dead body during post-mortem examination and associated harassment by the police'. (p. 2)

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J.S Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1998), 315 pp. Rs. 500 (hb), ISBN 81-7304-255-1.

This work is a valuable addition to both the historiography of Sikhism and our understandings of the construction of Punjabi identities, both at home and amongst the communities of the diaspora. Although Grewal emerged as a significant voice in South Asian studies with *Muslim Rule in British India: Assessments of British historians* (1971), the revised version of his University of London doctoral thesis, his work has largely focused on Punjabi history and an impressive arc of publications - from studies of the Gurus through to analyses of the Sikh polity, from his landmark volume on the Sikhs for the New Cambridge History of India through to his more recent history of the Akalis - has established him as one of the most important academic interpreters of Sikh tradition: only W.H. McLeod rivals him in terms of analytical range and sheer productivity. And like McLeod, Grewal's work has been increasingly concerned with Sikh identities and the role of historical scholarship in delineating the boundaries of the community and its history.

Grewal's introduction to this volume charts his own involvement in Sikh studies and traces the growing interest in Sikhism outside India and especially within the North American academy. From this starting-point, Grewal extends the arguments he elaborated in *Guru Nanak in Western Scholarship* (1992) as he reviews the colonial pre-history of Sikh studies in 'Part One' (chapters 1-4). Here he examines the gradual transformation of understandings of Sikhism, from the uncertain beginnings marked by Father Jerome Xavier's fleeting reference to the execution of Guru Arjan through to the work of scholars such as Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha and C. H. Loehlin. 'Part Two' (chapters 5-9) onward focuses on the development of Sikh Studies from the late 1960s, when the Panth marked the quincentenary of Guru Nanak's birth and a flood of publications (most notably McLeod's *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* [1968] explored Nanak's life and teachings and the subsequent development of the Sikh community. As he examines the range of responses to McLeod's reappraisal of Nanak from within the Panth, Grewal emphasises the importance of McLeod's work in fashioning a new (and highly controversial) approach to the Sikh past grounded in a tradition of textual criticism well-established in the western academy. Rather than dismissing this approach as an attempt to undermine Sikh identity (as Trilochan Singh, Justice Gurdev Singh and many others have done), Grewal suggests that McLeod's work embodies the greatest strengths of history as a discipline, as well as its shortcomings (especially its difficulties in treating faith and its general reluctance to credit the supernatural). 'Part Three' on the 'Extension of the Controversy' focuses on development in the 1990s, when sustained and increasingly co-ordinated attacks were directed against not only McLeod, but also towards younger scholars such as Harjot Oberoi and Pashaura Singh, culminating in Pashaura Singh's indictment by the Jathedar of the Akal Takht in

1994 on five charges of blasphemy. This discussion (especially pp. 227-234) is particularly valuable, as it foregrounds the new community-networks institutions, and journals that have energised the response to 'critical scholarship', both in the Punjab and in the diaspora. Here Grewal provides important insights into the negotiation of Sikh identity within an age of migration and globalisation and hints at fruitful avenues of research which might allow us to connect our understandings of community organization, identity, and knowledge-production in a more coherent and cogent manner.

Pashaura Singh's indictment is a clear indication of the high stakes surrounding the interpretation of Sikh history. Against such a backdrop *Contesting Interpretations of Sikh Tradition* is an important intervention, as Grewal has fashioned a judicious summation of recent debates over 'historical approaches' to the Sikh past. Written with Grewal's customary clarity and analytical precision, this volume is a welcome relief from the inflamed rhetoric and exaggerated claims that mar some recent work within the field. Eschewing polemic, Grewal offers a methodical and judicious overview of the development of Sikh studies. This in itself is an extremely important contribution, given that many of the conflicts that currently rack the Panth and the community of scholars working on Sikhism can be traced back to the careless exposition of sophisticated historical interpretations and reductive caricatures of both 'tradition' and 'western scholarship' (pp. 17, 215-6, 230-232).

Looking beyond occasional typographical errors and recurrent problems with hyphenation, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition* has two major weaknesses. Firstly, while one senses that Grewal is walking a delicate line (as he notes that he too has been challenged for his attachment to 'critical' scholarship), a more candid and assertive authorial voice would have greatly added to the overall strength of the volume: unfortunately at many points Grewal's own voice is hidden under his delineation and juxtaposition of various arguments. Secondly, and more substantively, Grewal fails to highlight the fragmentation of western scholarship in the late twentieth century and as a result the divergent philosophical positions that co-exist within 'western' approaches to Sikhism are glossed over. Although Grewal sketches the theoretical problematics that frame Oberoi's *Construction of Religious Boundaries* (1994) with some care, he frequently pairs Oberoi and McLeod, masking the deep-seated differences between their analytical approaches. Oberoi's work, a product of history's increased engagement with anthropology and literary theory, draws upon Sherry Ortner, Michel Foucault, and Hayden White and as such marks a radical departure from the empiricism and close textual criticism that McLeod has championed. A fuller exploration of these tensions would have allowed Grewal to illuminate the fissures within 'critical' or 'western' approaches to Sikhism and complicate the easy dichotomies (East vs. West, tradition vs. scholarship, Sikhism vs. Christianity) that recur within Sikh studies.

Nevertheless, this volume an important and welcome intervention in the ongoing debates over Sikh identity and history. A model of careful and precise

analysis, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition* is an indispensable guide to the development of the field and it further cements Grewal's position at the forefront of Sikh historiography.

Tony Ballyantine
National University of Ireland, Galway

C. Shackle, G. Singh and A.S. Mandair (eds.), *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity*, (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), ix+220pp. £40 (hb). ISBN 0-7007-1389-1.

Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity grew out of an international workshop entitled 'New Perspectives in Sikh Studies' held at the School of Oriental and African Studies on 28-29th May 1998. The workshop's title was intended to focus discussion on the many lines of fresh inquiry being pursued by scholars actively involved in Sikh studies in Western universities. The volume produced is suitably eclectic with contributions from established academics and doctoral students from both sides of the Atlantic grouped under the broad categories of religion, culture and ethnicity.

The first set of essays explores classic religious formations in Sikhism. Gurinder Singh Mann's opening contribution, 'Canon Formation in the Sikh Tradition' (pp.10-25) is a lucid analysis of the historical evolution of Sikh scriptural canon based on the data available in early manuscripts and the way these manuscripts are located in the context of early Sikh institutional development. Mann concludes that the process of shaping Sikh scripture 'apparently began in the days of Guru Nanak himself and continues to evolve even as we speak' (p.23). Khalsa identity is the theme of Jeevan Deol's paper 'Eighteenth Century Khalsa Identity: Discourse, Praxis and Narrative' (pp.25-47) which focuses on the contesting uses and role of the Indian myth of the four ages (*chaturyuga*) in the political and religious discourses of the eighteenth century.

Whilst the first two papers attempt to historicise the Sikh religious tradition, this approach is problematised by Arvind-pal Singh in 'Thinking Differently about Religion and History: Issues for Sikh Studies', (pp.47-72) the next paper in the volume. The very separation of the history of religion from the philosophy of religion, which Arvind-pal Singh traces back to Hegel, has resulted in the establishment of a dominant paradigm in the field of Sikh studies something akin to what Gurharpal Singh would call a 'conventional wisdom' which has defined the very criteria for research into religion. This paradigm, as exemplified by the recent work of W.H. McLeod, upholds the opposition between a static 'religious' tradition and a secular, objective 'history'. The task of the historian, for McLeod, should be to 'understand simply for its own sake' or impart a strictly impartial understanding' (p.64), to the study of a religion, thus giving

rise to what Arvind-pal Singh, considers 'a classificatory, informatic regime that has sustained a museum culture of experts' (p.68). By calling provocatively for its replacement with 'an educational culture in which the study of Sikhism is at once a form of self-discovery, no less spiritual than political, no less therapeutic than classificatory' (pp.68-9), Arvind-pal Singh opens up space within Sikh studies for Balbinder Bhogal in his essay 'On Hermeneutics of Sikh Thought and Praxis' (pp.72-97) to ask whether the words of Guru Nanak can 'speak again' to an English-speaking diaspora. Bhogal concludes that 'Nanak's words should not be read as though they were in some quantitative sense comprehensive, nor in some rational sense systematic, but as providing locations of engagement that may reveal truths that have temporal and spatial significance' (p.94).

The second section, comprising essays by Christopher Shackle (pp.97-118) and Nikky-Guninder-Singh (pp.118-142), broadens the concept of Sikh culture in relation to comparative literature and psychoanalytic theory. Whilst Shackle's paper, drawing attention to the neglected Islamic influences on modern Sikh and Punjabi literary traditions looks sadly out of place in this volume, Nikky-Guninder-Singh convincingly makes the case for viewing Kirpal Singh in Michael Ondaajte's *The English Patient* as a 'post-colonial being'.The final set of essays examines the concept of ethnicity (and nationalism) in Sikh studies. Both the contributions by Gurharpal Singh (pp.142-161) and Darshan Singh Tatla (pp.161-186) have subsequently been developed in their respective recent books and deserve reviews in their own right. Whilst Tatla, focusing on the diasporic context, views the storming of the Golden Temple in 1984 as the 'critical event' in the development of a specifically Sikh nationalism centred on the imagined homeland of the Punjab, Singh traces the origins of India's 'ethnic democracy' back to partition. Sikh nationalism, for both Tatla and Singh, is seen as a reaction to the Indian state's espousal of a Hindu identity well before the BJP and Hindutva became a significant political force. Perhaps the most interesting, and certainly most accessible, contribution in this volume comes from Harjot Oberoi's autobiographical account of the attacks made upon him firstly in India, for being a Sikh caught up in Tatla's 'critical event', and secondly in a diasporic context, for not being Sikh enough, as the object of McLeod's 'cries of outrage' (pp.186-207), experiences all to familiar to many Sikhs caught between the twin tyrannies of state-sponsored terror and 'community policing' or fundamentalism.

In conclusion, the volume's main strength, its eclecticism, is also its main weakness. Despite the best intentions of the editors, there appears to be no coherent perspective or central argument uniting the disparate contributions. Moreover, the inclusion of post-structuralists, critical theorists, Marxists and Orientalists in one volume, although illustrating the maturity of Sikh studies, makes any predictions of future directions or research avenues difficult. A slimmer volume based on the work of the newer contributors to the conference

working broadly within a critical/post-structuralist perspective might have provided more pointers to future debates in an age of 'virtual *sangats*' (p.69).

Georgio Shani
Japan

R. Kaur and J. Hutnyk (eds), *Travel Worlds: Journeys in Contemporary Cultural Politics*, (London and New York: Zed, 1999), 186pp. £14.95 (pb), ISBN 1 85649 562 0. £42.50 (hb), ISBN 1 85649 561.

The cover photograph of *Travel Worlds* gives us a tantalising glimpse of the complex trajectories of contemporary cultural formations – a signpost on a corner in Hauz Khas village, a market in New Delhi. The signpost points towards 'authentic' Kashmiri handicrafts and contemporary Indian art, a mixture of traditional and modern, region and centre which might be seen to define the parameters of a newly imagined India. Then, however, there are the unexpected, discrepant pathways – Italian ristorantes, 'authentic' Mexican food and, perhaps most evocatively, the enigmatic 'Nomad'. It is this terrain that the substance of the book traverses – the contours and interstices of ancient and modern, real and imagined, authentic and commodified, home and abroad – multiple, uncertain, sometimes discordant, often disruptive journeyings in which narration denies arrival: what the editors describe as 'traveller's tale(s)... with a sting'.

In many ways, like its earlier sister-work *Dis-Orienting Rhythms* (Sharma, Hutnyk and Sharma, 1996), *Travel Worlds* is a protest piece. It thus works on two interconnected levels; to provide an alternative picture of travel, placed at the margins and looking towards the centre, and to simultaneously render visible and critique the structures and practices of dominance that maintain the unidimensional fiction of travel and tourism. The editors argue in the introduction that their aim is to explode the fashionable valorisation of travel as the experience of marginality and unconstrained postmodern subjectivity, and to explore the structures of privilege, orientalism and violence that mark out travel and tourism as 'the colonization of pleasure and desire' (p.3). As did *Dis-Orienting Rhythms* (which includes many of the same authors), *Travel Worlds* provides a timely corrective to the 'romanticized exoticism' (p.2) of the old anthropological gaze and the new diaspora/transnationality fixation with transformation and untrammelled 'becoming'. Travel, the authors assert, is never innocent, travellers are inscribed through power and history, the subject is always part of a process of subjectification and knowledge of 'the Other'.

In this, *Travel Worlds* forms part of a broader field of postcolonial enterprise, mixed with a very British concern with cultural studies, commodification and identity construction. Its focus is primarily on the Indian subcontinent and its diaspora formations and this marks it out from the predominantly African diaspora concern with difference that dominates the

publishing market in the UK. In challenging linear, teleological notions of travel and narrative, the collection adopts a multi- and interdisciplinary approach, challenging the expectations of the reader through an eclectic mixture of more traditional anthropological accounts, 'faction', poetry, high theory, popular culture and history. Although each chapter shares a concern with travel and its discontents, each retains an individual tone and style which, while not always making for easy or comfortable reading, does force the reader to acknowledge the fictions of 'truth' and the imprint of power at play in constructing more seamless narratives.

The chapters also share a concern with the tension between structure and agency in the travel encounter, whether between self and other, or within the self. Identities are, seen as multiple, shifting, relational and contextual - academic truisms, perhaps, though the authors of *Travel Worlds* are careful to place weight on the continuing role of historical contingency and constraint alongside (and sometimes at the expense of) the more fashionable cultural studies concern with unfettered subjectivity. These tensions are explored through a variety of imagined geographies, histories and journeys – the Indo-Pak border to Goa, missionary ventures to Kula Shaker, tourism to terrorism. In several chapters (Phipps, Hutnyk, Dube) the concern is with a clear cut trajectory from the colonial centre to the colonised margin, while others are concerned with a more complex and ambivalent matrix of alliances and disjunctions. The former contributions tend perhaps too far towards a binary attribution of guilt and innocence; in Hutnyk's chapter particularly this leads to a strident, and ironically unreflexive, stance against commodified Orientalism in which white Capitalism, personified in Kula Shaker's lead singer Crispian Mills, is pitted against the more politically 'authentic' South Asian cultural production. Other chapters strike a more intricate balance of 'latticed' identities (p.141), with more or less success. Housee's contribution, for example, leans too far towards introspection and personal confession and stands out from the more subtly theorised arguments that surround it.

There are, however, ample compensations: the articles by Banerjea, Kalra and Purewal and Kaur are, in very different ways, provocative, multi-layered and textured. Unlike the other chapters, Banerjea's lyrical and powerfully visceral contribution moves beyond an Asia-Britain trajectory to explore the 'dissident footfalls' (p.22) and lateral encounters of other diasporas and other cultural formations, equally embedded - if not equally positioned - in the struggle for geographic and psychological space. Kalra and Purewal's chapter on the partition of the Punjab is an elegant exploration of the ambivalences of borders, both as sites for transformation and control, weaving accounts of ritual, privilege, constraint and subversion in a timely challenge to those theorists who valorise borders and border crossing as inherently creative and liberating. Kaur's concluding chapter is a 'factional', sometimes uncomfortable but often amusing, account of the vicissitudes of fieldwork, which threads the themes of the book - travel, knowledge, insider/outsider epistemes, power, control and subversion - in

a complex web which does not allow for a final resting place.

Travel Worlds is then an eclectic mixture - a fact acknowledged by the editors, 'this book is meant to be something of a travel guide, something of a hold-all backpack, and something of another compass' (p.6). While it does not perhaps fulfil its avowed transformatory political purpose 'to renew the vistas of what is possible in the social sciences, to extend the access points, passport and passageways of what can be said and done, to chart other directions and dimensions, and to anticipate other neglected horizons' (pp.11-12) - an itinerary impossible within the scope of a slim, edited volume - the contributors to *Travel Worlds* do provide collectively a provocative starting point.

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A. Sharma, J. Hutnyk and S. Sharma (eds), *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: the politics of the New Asian Dance Music*, (London: Zed, 1996)

Claire Alexander
South Bank University

Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, (London: Hurst and Co., 2000), 293pp. (pb), £12.95. ISBN 1- 85065- 533-2.

It has been the historic task of fiction writers and sensitive poets – Krishan Chander, Ramanand Sagar, Saadat Hassan Manto, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Ustad Daman, Amrita Pritam, to name a few – to capture in their works not only overwhelming situations of egregious wickedness but also instances of human kindness, magnificence and sacrifice, associated with the Partition of British India in 1947. The current estimates of the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs slaughtered during those fateful months suggest a figure of two million. Woman and children were kidnapped in the thousands. At least 75 thousand women are reported to have been raped.

Urvashi Butalia performs the enviable task of confirming through painstaking empirical research that reality is no less surprising or shocking than fiction. In fact sometimes it is the other way round. The book is written with great feeling and personal involvement. Although born five years after Partition at Delhi in a refugee Hindu family from West Punjab, Butalia understandably has no way of extricating herself from the recurrent references to places, events and people lost and left behind on the other side.

A section called 'Facts' provides the necessary background information on the events leading to Partition, based on a careful reading of official and semi-official reports. However, the book relies heavily upon the collection of oral histories through extended in-depth interviews. The great merit of the technique of oral history is that the narrator is not simply an object or source of information but a subject who is intrinsic to the telling of the story itself. The

author does not stop at recording the accounts of what happened in 1947 but connects them to their lives afterwards, right up to the time when the interviews ended. This is done with great skill and readers are indeed provided, as the author intended, with rare insights into the shattered lives of ordinary people of flesh and blood.

The author, a feminist, gives special attention to the impact Partition had on women and children. In this connection, the relationship between 'honour' and women during the riots receives special attention. Women were abducted, raped and subjected to various other indignities by men of the enemy religion. In some cases, as happened in early March 1947 among the Sikhs of Thoa Khalsa in Rawalpindi district of West Punjab, 90 of their women jumped into a well to drown rather than be captured by Muslims. A few survived and one of them tells her story to the author. There are other stories too of women being beheaded by their own fathers and brothers in order to escape the shame of falling into the hands of the other group. Butalia argues that Hindus were less willing to accept women who had been captured by Muslims than the other way round. This followed from the fact that in Hinduism the rules of purity and defilement are more rigid and unbending. Perhaps a more systematic study of this phenomenon on a comparative basis needs to be done to test if this hypothesis is correct. She narrates the story of a Sikh Buta Singh in whose hands a Muslim woman had fallen, whom he married and they had a daughter together. Later that woman was returned to her family in Pakistan. Buta Singh travelled to Pakistan, converted to Islam but his wife was not returned to him. He later committed suicide. This case seems to suggest that notions of 'honour' are equally inflexible on the Muslim side.

The accounts of the children affected by Partition are also very moving. Having witnessed and suffered acts of great cruelty those children obviously never could have a normal childhood and when Butalia talks to them as grown ups this fact comes out clearly. Butalia is right in insisting that men who have written about Partition have ignored its devastating impact on children.

The book is also a very personal journey into the past of her divided family. One of her maternal uncles converted to Islam and stayed on in Lahore, keeping his mother with him. His siblings in India have never forgiven him and there was no communication between the two sides until the author landed up in Lahore in 1987 and met him. The encounter is indeed a very interesting part of the book. It sheds light on the various considerations that individuals had when the decision had to be made either to move to India and abandon all material and other possessions in Pakistan or to convert to Islam and retain them. Some chose the latter course. Instead of damning them as opportunists, Butalia tries to present their case in a sympathetic, humane manner.

What should follow is an account of the Muslim suffering during Partition and from a Pakistani, Punjabi Muslim. Official historiography in Pakistan would like to create the impression that all Muslims were enthusiastic about the creation of a separate Muslim state and migrated to it willingly. However, some

people have started talking about those times (the reviewer's ongoing research on this theme suggests this) and it seems that the vast Muslim peasantry wanted to stay put in their ancestral homes and villages and left only under duress from East Punjab to save their lives.

The author does not attempt a systematic study of the causes of Partition, but it is important that she notes the role the Hindu caste system must have played in convincing Muslims to seek a separate state. It places non-Muslims and Dalits beyond the pale of dignified human society and it is not surprising that reaction to its practice evokes deep resentment. It was one important factor that to many Muslims justified Partition. For those interested in understanding the role Partition has played in the lives and politics of contemporary India and Pakistan, Urvashi Butalia's book is undoubtedly most necessary reading.

Ishtiaq Ahmed
Stockholm University

Jas Bains and Sanjiev Johal, *Corner Flags and Corner Shops* (London: Phoenix, 1999), 272pp. £6.99 (pb), ISBN 0 75380 852 8.

In less than a decade there has been a remarkable increase in the visibility of Asians in British public life. One only has to consider their role in politics (seen in their growing representation in both national and local government politics), in business (witness the introduction of *Asian Rich List*), in the media (in both print and visual media), in music (as seen in the remarkable success of *Bhangra* and Bolly-pop), in comedy and drama (as seen in the tremendous success of *Goodness Gracious Me* and proliferation of Asian theatre companies), in education and in food and fashion. With reference to the latter two, not only have the Brits become a nation of curry lovers (especially of *chicken tikka masala*) but also consumers of Indian designed fashion clothing. In sport too, Asian sportsmen are more visible and proud to represent Britain at the highest level of participation. This is especially so in the case of cricket, kick-boxing and other martial sports, tennis, boxing and of course, hockey. 'Asian Cool' appears to be visible everywhere and the vibrancy of Asian identity is seen as an important component of multicultural Britain.

There is however, one area in which there is a conspicuous absence of Asians - professional football. To date no Asian footballer has played in the Carling Premier League, nor in the Nationwide First Division. The first Asian, in recent times, to have played in the Second Division, has been Baichung Bhutia, the Nepal-born captain of the Indian national football team, who eventually signed for Bury F. C. after unsuccessful trials with bigger clubs like Aston Villa and West Bromwich Albion. Yet there are more than 300 all-Asian football teams across Britain playing regularly in local leagues and football is enthusiastically supported and followed by the majority of the Asian male

population. How then can one explain this extraordinary puzzle? Is it the case that young Asians simply can't play football? Are Asians only capable of succeeding in small businesses as captured by the often-repeated joke: Why can't Asians play football? Because every time they get a corner, they open up a corner shop! Did first generation Asian parents, in their concerted attempts to become upwardly mobile, 'push' their children towards middle class professions, steering them clear of working class, limited and uncertain career paths? Or were there other complex socio-economic processes at work, which denied them access to this multi-billion business of football? The book under review aims to provide some 'insider' insights into this intriguing puzzle.

It needs to be stated at the outset that the main purpose of this book is not to explain why Asians can't play football. On the contrary, it needs to be lauded as the first authentic book that provides a fascinating narrative on the British Asian football experience, whether they be players, managers, spectators, administrators, sponsors or owners of football clubs. Since the reviewer has been very much part of the Asian football experience, the book promised an additional nostalgic and observer-participant dimension.

This reader friendly book is divided into 10 small sections, each covering a different dimension of the Asian football experience. Chapter 1 starts with the two authors recalling their own passionate interest in football which started at an early age and how that interest has been sustained over the last two decades. As both of the authors grew up in the West Midlands, they recall their memories of their local and national football heroes and how they impacted on their daily lives. Chapter 2, disappointingly rather brief, directly tackles the issue of why there are no role models of Asian professional footballers for Asian youth to emulate. One of the authors, Jas Bains, had earlier co-authored a booklet with Raj Patel entitled *Asians Can't Play Football* which tried to dispel some of the myths and stereotypes about the ability (or lack thereof) of Asian footballers. The most common stereotypes alleged that Asians were not suited to the demands of the physical game (e.g. they were too short and/or lacked the competitive character or 'bottle'), they lacked commitment to the sport relative to other sports such as cricket or hockey, they weren't sufficiently talented compared with whites or blacks or they were insular in outlook preferring to play in teams or with players from their own cultural background. The booklet had in fact concluded that institutional racism was a major barrier to Asian footballing success. Many of these earlier arguments, unfortunately, are not elaborated in this book but the overall conclusions still emphasise the continuing role of institutionalised racism which acts as a major hurdle for Asian footballers to cross. Their conclusions are amply supported by interviews with Asian footballers who 'nearly' made the grade. These personal experiences are narrated in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Institutionalised racism operated in the following way. In the case of an overwhelming number of professional footballers, there is an established route of entry – it starts with the school team, continues with playing representative

football until a club scout spots the youngster. The youngster will then be given a trial and, if successful, asked to join the club's centre of excellence and sign on schoolboy forms. On leaving school the youngster is offered an apprenticeship and, if considered good enough, is given a chance to enter the world of professional football. Although Asian boys may be playing football in comparable numbers, for the most part, their participation was taking place outside this recognised system. The clubs' scouting operations simply never discovered Asian boys. Asians also tend to be less aware of the recruitment system and often it was too late by the time it was discovered. These difficulties were further compounded by the lack of practical and moral support from parents and, when forced to rely on this support from PE teachers, they were held back by the stereotyped perceptions such teachers had of Asian kids. The foregoing arguments may appear to offer very simplistic explanations but given that this was pioneering research, funded with great difficulty by the authors, it acted as a catalyst for subsequent investigations and actions by the football authorities and football clubs (such as the 'Kick Racism Out of Football' campaign) to seriously consider the issue of why there was an absence of Asian professional footballers.

Whilst the institutional racism story has substantial merit, and there is overwhelming evidence to support the continuing existence of both overt and covert racism in football, both on and off the field, the book is disappointing in not acknowledging the challenges and constraints which minority communities face when negotiating livelihoods in foreign lands. First generation Punjabi migrants, especially those coming from the rural areas, mainly worked as unskilled labourers, often six days a week, in hot and dirty foundries or other metal bashing industries which paid low wages. Their aspirations - indeed, the raison d'être for their migration, were to ensure a better living standard for their children. They saved a lot, lived in overcrowded conditions, sacrificed consumption of consumer goods and sent back money to their family or relatives whenever they could afford to do so. In such a context, sport or football had a very minor role. It was essentially a leisure activity - a *khel kud* - which is mainly to be enjoyed and not taken seriously. After all, how many rich, successful and recognised Asian sports personalities were there who the British born youth could look up to? These realities were paramount in the 1960s and 70s and only began to change in the 1980s. As professional football began to attract a lot of sponsorship money, and footballers began to command astronomical wages, the Asian community began to re-assess the game for its career potentials. Without full parental encouragement, however, children had little chance to excel in sport. The authors do recognise the belated shift in opinion among second-generation migrant parents towards sport and they see this as a significant moment for participation in sport by Asian communities.

As far as this reviewer is aware, Chapter 3 provides the first systematic attempt to capture the history and significance of Asian sports tournaments in Britain. Asian sports tournaments, dominated by *kabbadi*, hockey but especially

football, have become a regular feature of the summer months over the past 38 years in the major areas of Punjabi settlement. These tournaments have retained their popularity - with anything up to 7,000 spectators and participants taking part at the larger events such as in Birmingham - despite competing demands on time. Rather interestingly, these tournaments have had the effect of rejuvenating village level sports tournaments back in Punjabi *(doaba)* villages, funded by diaspora Punjabis. Their historical role in developing a strong Punjabi community identity has hardly been acknowledged. The authors emphasise their role in promoting community level sport in an organised, friendly but competitive environment at a time when access to mainstream sports facilities was limited for the Asian communities due to cultural and linguistic exclusion. More importantly, such tournaments, through their patronage by gurudwaras, political and cultural organisations, strengthened the development of Punjabi community networks and community morale. What is ironical about these tournaments, especially in football, is that the football club scouts simply snubbed them, not expecting to see any budding Linekers or Beckhams among the Asians. If anything, according to some commentators, such exclusive Asian tournaments simply reinforced the scouts' views that Asians are an insular community preferring to play only among themselves.

The authors are very aware that Asian sport in general, and Asian football in particular, is still a male dominated game. To their credit they do pose the question of Asian female participation in sport and provide a couple of interesting case studies of positive role models from the Asian community. However, unlike participation by and access to sport for male Asian youth, participation levels and access for female youth still remain limited, especially outside the school environment. The authors appear to be optimistic and hint that for Asian females, the breakthrough may come not so much through participation but in promotion and administration of sport.

Finally, although the book has the subtitle of 'the Asian football experience', it is more than that. Through this sporting experience, it provides a rich cultural history of Punjabis in Britain. It addresses questions related to sport and identity, faith and sport, community development and sport and the potential for developing multi-directional sports links with India for mutual benefits. Based around the same geographical space as Meera Syal's *Anita and Me,* the book, in parts, also provides complementary, *male* youth experiences of growing up in and around Wolverhampton. Although aimed at the general reader rather than academic audiences, the book provides excellent case studies of minority community sporting experiences in their attempt to gain mainstream recognition. The future for Asian success in football is much more optimistic now than thirty years ago. According to the authors 'we are on the threshold of new sporting times' with the predicted breakthrough by young Asian footballers, with Harpal Singh (at Leeds United), Amrit Sidhu (Derby County), Jas Jutla (Greenock Morton in Scotland) and Mickey Chopra (Newcastle) leading the charge. What a

boost this would be to future Asian footballing hopefuls if any one of them were to break the mould just as black footballers did thirty years earlier.

Shinder S. Thandi
Coventry University

Charles Allen, *Soldier Sahibs. The Men who Made the North-West Frontier* (London: Charles Allen, 2000), xii + 368, £22.50 (hb), ISBN 0-7195-5418 7.

Charles Allen, born in India and the son of a political officer in Assam, has been a pioneer in reviving popular interest in the Raj and other parts of the British empire. Beginning with a series of oral histories broadcast on BBC radio, and subsequently published as *Plain Tales from the Raj, Tales from the Dark Continent, and Tales from the South China Sea,* he has also further pursued his interest in the Raj with *Lives of the Indian Princes,* and *Kipling's Kingdom.* His most recent book, *Soldier Sahibs,* was originally conceived as a book about John Nicholson, one of Allen's forbears. However, finding that Nicholson's adventures on the North-West Frontier were closely bound up with those of the other officers employed as assistants by Henry Lawrence when he became the Resident at Lahore in 1846 following the First Sikh War, Allen decided to write profiles of Lawrence's 'Young Men', weaving their lives into a narrative of the pacification of the frontier during the years 1846-1856. The book reaches its climax in an account of the role played by the Young Men in putting down the Mutiny.

The principal players in this story are John Nicholson, Herbert Edwardes, James Abbott, Harry Lumsden, William Hodson, and Neville Chamberlain, with secondary roles allotted to John Coke and Reynell Taylor. Others receive mention also, with the understandable omission of Robert Napier - later Lord Napier of Magdala - who served as chief engineer of the public works initiated by Henry, but who did not play a role in the settlement and administration of the frontier districts.

Henry Lawrence had always kept his eye out for talented officers, and was thus able to select with some dispatch the men who would become his lieutenants. Their zeal for military glory, their dash and independence, extraordinary courage, evangelical piety and exceptional ability mirrored his own nature, and consequently they seemed to him to possess - as he believed he also did - the proper balance of attributes needed to bring the frontier tribes to heel, and to bestow a modicum of administrative order. As with Henry, some of them came well supplied with large and touchy egos. During the years of his Residency (1846-1849), Henry encouraged an independent style of governance, but found that even his less than stringent demands for obedience were sometimes flouted. After annexation in 1849, the Young Men - and Henry himself - found themselves under increasing pressure from John Lawrence and

the new Governor-General Dalhousie to pay more attention to administrative duties and team play. Henry's departure from the Board of Administration in 1853 was a blow to his Young Men, some of whom were prepared to depart with him. John had to work hard to retain the loyalty of Henry's soldier administrators during his subsequent efforts to leaven the necessarily individualist and militarist requirements of holding down a frontier by infusing a higher standard of administrative competence and accountability.

Allen is very successful in catching the flavour of his soldier sahibs' rough and ready brand of settling disputes and dispensing justice on the frontier, a mode of operation closely bound up with the regular excercise of martial prowess against tribes who challenged the new order imposed in the frontier districts by the Young Men. Herbert Edwardes established his reputation during the Residency period by bringing centralised authority to Bannu, and enhanced his reputation by his vigorous response to the uprising of 1848. James Abbott imposed a patriarchal authority on Hazara during the early days, and John Nicholson, perhaps the most self-willed and arrogant of the group, made his mark in a variety of locations. Peshawar was a focal point, and claimed the attention of several of Henry's assistants, including his brother George Lawrence, Edwardes, Chamberlain, and Nicholson. There the Corps of Guides - the first official irregular force, created by Henry Lawrence - was actually recruited and realised as a fighting force by Harry Lumsden, and later commanded by William Hodson, who moved on to found his own Hodson's Horse. During the Mutiny, the Young Men's reaction to its outbreak in the Punjab was, in contrast to the waffle of the senior commanders elsewhere, swift and decisive, and their contribution to the successful assault on Delhi was of crucial importance, especially in the case of Nicholson.

Allen is an accomplished writer, and weaves a lively story out of these adventures. His portraits of the Young Men are vivid and mostly well-rounded. He is especially good on military matters, and knowledgeable and informative about the Pakhtuns of the frontier. I would, however, pose a query about his treatment of Abbott during the Sikh uprising of 1848-49. Allen accepts without question Abbott's account of his dealings with the eventual rebel Chattar Singh Attariwala on the eve of the uprising, and criticises Frederick Currie - at that time the Resident in Lahore - for dismissing Abbott's version of Chattar Singh's intended perfidy. There is, however, another and more generally accepted view of the matter: Abbott's obsession with perceived conspiracies is well documented, and his rallying of Muslim tribes to attack the Sikh chieftain and *Nazim*, combined with the stripping away of his title and his *jaghirs*, pushed Chattar Singh further along the path of rebellion. Abbott's actions influenced his son Sher Singh's decision to desert the British cause, aided also by Currie's rejection of Attariwala ambitions by refusing to proceed with Dalip Singh's already agreed-upon marriage to Sher Singh's sister.

Allen quite rightly chooses to make only minimal references to the Lawrences in the context of his primary focus on the Young Men. However, two

matters touching on the Lawrences require correction. The first is that neither Henry nor John lived in Anarkali's Tomb, but rather in the house next to it that had been occupied by General Ventura, and evolved from the Residency into the Punjab Secretariat. Henry had the house expanded in order to house himself and a couple of assistants, and lived in a tent while the work was being done. Anarkali's Tomb provided work space for clerks. The second is that John Lawrence was indeed relieved as Acting Resident by Currie, but, having stayed on for a period to complete his administrative work, returned by choice and inclination to Jullundur, where he could exercise full control under direct rule. There is a third minor semantic slip: John is buried in Westminster Abbey, not Westminster Cathedral.

These are small matters, of course, and do not detract from Allen's achievement in bringing to a wider audience an entertaining and informative picture of Lawrence's Young Men.

Harold Lee
Grinnell College

V. G. Kiernan (translated) *Poems from Iqbal: Renderings in English Verse with Comparative Urdu Text,* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.xxviii + 304. Price not mentioned, (hb), ISBN 0-19-579-185-1.

Frances W. Pritchett and Asif Farrukhi (translated and ed) *An Evening of Caged Beasts: Seven Postmodernist Urdu Poets,* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.xxxiii + 248. Price not mentioned, (PB) ISBN 0-19-579-145-2

The two volumes under review feature Urdu poetry in English translation – the first is a selection of Iqbal's poetry and the second is a selection of seven modern poets from Pakistan. From Iqbal to the present day, Urdu poetry has travelled a long way and its contours have changed substantially both in its thematic concerns and stylistic preoccupations. The second volume offers telling illustrations of this.

Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) was one of the most prominent and polemical philosopher-poets of Asia. Born at Sialkot in the present-day province of the Punjab in Pakistan, he was educated at Lahore and then later at Cambridge University. Trained in different philosophical strands of thought in the Orient, his sojourn in Europe made him sensitive to multiple currents of western philosophical thought. He was greatly influenced by Nietzsche, Bergson, Whitehead as also by Jalaluddin Rumi, Ibn-e Khaldun and other Muslim medieval thinkers. Besides, Islam occupies a dominant place in his philosophical inquiries and events and personalities from Islamic history function as tropes for understanding issues and their deeper significance.

However, his understanding of Islam is not of a religion that is frozen in the past but one which is capable of revitalisation and renewal. In his celebrated lectures published under the title *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* he asserts:

> thought and deed, the act of knowing and the act of creating are identical... The world is not something to be merely seen or known through concepts but something to be made and remade through continuous action.

The present selection has been culled from his complete works in Urdu and Persian. The volume has been divided into five parts ... *Bāng-i dāra, Bāl-e Jibril, Zarb-i Kalim, Armaghān-i Hijāz* and *Payām-i mashriq* - each part deriving its name from the collection from which the original poems have been chosen. The sections within the parts have been arranged according to themes and forms.

Iqbal's poetic *oeuvre* in Urdu and Persian, even as this selection demonstrates, offers great thematic variety. His concerns remain always lofty, epical and magisterial, his gaze never shifting to the problems of everyday life, to the warmth and complexity of human relationships in the domestic sphere. He was deeply interested in the issues that exercised the best minds - Free Will and predestination, change and consistency, the meaning of life, progress and evolution, body-soul dialectics, conflict between reason and emotion. He was convinced about the great dignity of human beings, particularly his *mard-i momin*. If God is the Supreme Creator, man is certainly a co-creator with God. Human beings can hold their heads high because of their achievements in the world to which they were banished from paradise. In the poems of *Bāng-i darā* as elsewhere he describes the role played by men as prophet, philosopher, thinker, scientist, reformer, inventor, astronomer, martyr, iconoclast and so on. His famous poem 'A New Altar' (*Nayā Shivāla*, pp.20-21) celebrates the triumph of humanism over obscurantist religious practices.

Iqbal believed in the great potentiality of poetry to rouse people to action when they are mired in stasis, complacency and the grossest materialism. He puts himself at a vantage point from where he addresses and argues with God on almost equal terms which, but for the seriousness of the import and his rhetorical sweep, would be considered blasphemous. This is evident in the opening lines of the very first ghazal of *Bāl-i Jibril* (Gabriel's Wing) in the second part:

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> When, to leave earth, I gathered what was mine,
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As evident from the above, for Iqbal, the primary concern was the message and not the medium. He was not overly preoccupied with the formalistic/stylistic aspects. His overt didacticism sometimes mars the quality of his poetry. However, he has been successful in moving profoundly a generation of people who were/are stirred by the vigorous lilt of his poetry. The more thoughtful among his readers are drawn by the philosophical content of his poetry. In fact, he is among the very few poets from the East who made a decisive impact on readers in the West.

The English translation of his poetry by V.G. Kiernan is fluent, and at points, even inspired. He has been successful, with the exception of occasional losses that are inevitable, in conveying the import of the original in an appropriate idiom and verse form. In addition to the translation, helpful notes have been appended at the end for more meticulous readers. It is a pity that such an immensely cherished book has been spoiled by the poor reproduction of the Urdu-Persian original on the facing page that is often so blurred that one can barely read it.

The second volume is a nicely produced anthology of poems by seven contemporary poets from Pakistan. The editor characterizes them as 'postmodern', though with some qualifications. One should be extremely circumspect about using fancy critical jargon from the west while discussing and evaluating our literature. Do we have a postmodern society, like some developed countries in the west have, or are we still struggling with attaining different degrees of modernism? If literature, in this case poetry, emanates from the lived experiences of people in society, how far is it valid or meaningful to talk about postmodernism in the context of the literature of the subcontinent when there is no consensus even in the West about it, if the writings of its votaries like Jean François Lyotard and Baudrillard are any indication? Instead of the postmodernist celebration of bricolage and fragmentation of sensibility, all the poets featured in the volume display a kind of modernist angst, pessimism and resistance to traditional mores and modes. All this is just to caution the unwary reader who might expect a certain kind of treatment seeing the notion of postmodernism foregrounded right in the title of this anthology. The poetry

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showcased here deserves attention on its own merit and could have done well without the dubious packaging of postmodernism.

The editor locates the birth of this new kind of poetry 'sometime in late 1970s and early 1980s' when poets began to use a kind of idiom markedly different from their predecessors. As opposed to the traditional metrical pattern, these poets began to use a language that was closer to prose where objects retained their 'thingness' instead of being mere symbols of abstract notions. The highly ornate and stylized structures of the classical tradition were replaced by directness and simplicity. All the poets share this tendency to experiment with language that suggests a break with the earlier poetic diction, though in some the expression has become more vivid and visual, the imagery more detailed and the experimentation bolder. Often a word has been used to create an atmosphere and provide an insight into a culture; foreign words have been used liberally and alien terms/genres have been taken recourse to if they conform to the aesthetics of a poem.

However, it cannot be said that it always works. Sometimes the poets tend to be repetitive, reducing the poem into a catalogue of items named. But when it does work it is refreshing as a breath of fresh air as one can see in Afzal Ahmed Syed's 'I Invented Poetry', Sarwat Hussain's 'A Poem Can Start from Anywhere', Tanveer Anjum's 'What Happened This Time.' The three women poets selected here carry on the tradition established by their predecessors, like Fahmida Riyaz and Kishwar Naheed, of questioning the patriarchal values that are heavily loaded against women. Some of the poets, e.g. Afzal Ahmed Syed, had traumatic experiences of war, exile, displacement and state-sponsored terrorism that make their poetry instinct with a special poignancy. A poem like 'A Death Sentence in Two Languages' can only come out of such experiences. Then, self-reflexivity and intertextuality mark some poets, for instance, Sara Shagufta's poems of '*Saugandhi*' sequence have been woven around the imagined persona of the protagonist of Manto's short story, *Hatak*. The series is typical of her in the sense that it depicts woman as the victim and the survivor which is a consistent leitmotif in many of her poems, as can be seen in this anthology as well. The poem 'Half a Room' illustrates the jocular irreverence with which she treats established icons of art and culture in her effort to carve out, 'writing from the very edge of the precipice', her womanist's vision. There are poets who speak from the margins, not only defined by gender but geography as well. Sarwat Hussain, considered by some to be the most important poet of the generation, is known for his poems that celebrate Sindhi culture, though in the present anthology culturally rooted poems have not been selected for their resistance to translation in English. If Azra Abbas' rough-hewn idiom combines artistic elegance with the challenges of the quotidian life, Tanveer Anjum's poems are juvenalian efforts still struggling to find a distinct voice and exploring her subjectivity. Zeeshan Sahil, known for his powerful and poignant poems about Karachi brings his own stamp in the treatment of his subject. From his earlier poems which revelled in a kind of bitter-sweet love and innocence of

childhood, he has progressed to a maturer vision of pitiless irony. He weaves his narrative through a disarmingly simple style where irony enters almost imperceptively. One rarely comes across such a powerful combination of child-like wonder and adult cynicism. Even a short poem like 'Place' illustrates this.

Frances Pritchett has achieved both accuracy and readability in her translation of the poems. In her 'Translator's Introduction' she describes the circumstances under which the translations were carried out that have certainly been the most advantageous. More of such collaborative efforts will help Urdu literature gain greater visibility and a worldwide readership.

M. Asaduddin
Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

Naureen Talha, *Economic Factors in the Making of Pakistan (1921-1947)* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000) xi + 220 pp. $15.00 (hb), ISBN 0-19-579184-3.

Economic 'neglect and indifference,' Muhammad Ali Jinnah declared, 'has constituted the biggest single justification for our demand for Pakistan' (p. 126). In this book, Naureen Talha sets out to demonstrate the critical importance of economic factors in the making of Pakistan, particularly in influencing the educated and commercial Muslim elites who played such a critical role in Pakistan's creation. She argues that these elites faced severe economic insecurities as they attempted to compete with emerging Hindu professional and commercial interests under British rule. As these insecurities heightened in the years after 1935, with the Hindu-dominated Congress Party gaining increasing power, these Muslim elites turned toward the concept of Pakistan as the key to gaining economic independence. The 'overwhelming majority of Muslims,' she writes, came to believe 'that their jobs, economic enterprises, lands, and homes would not be safe if the Hindus with their vast majority ruled over independent India' (p. 162).

As a study of the rhetoric of economic competition and economic insecurity shaping the Pakistan movement, this book has much to offer. Talha usefully highlights the ways that long-standing Muslim demands for better representation in the government services in British India fed in the late 1930s into support for the Pakistan movement. She also analyses Jinnah's important connections to Muslim commercial leaders, who influenced the League's growing (if half-hearted) interest in economic planning as the Pakistan movement developed after 1940. Talha also provides an interesting analysis of the debate about Pakistan's economic 'viability' in the years immediately before partition.

As an analysis of the relative significance of economic factors in explaining the Pakistan movement, however, the book is of limited value. Talha's analysis suffers from two major shortcomings. First, she offers little in the way of a

framework of analysis that would allow us to understand the relationship between economic factors and other elements shaping the demand for a Muslim state. She generally follows the instrumentalist interpretation of religious solidarity, arguing that the political invocation of religion during the Pakistan movement simply masked underlying economic grievances. But she offers virtually no theoretical justification or empirical support for this position. Her conclusions seem to rest, rather, on the simple assumption that all movements are at root economic, and that the Pakistan movement in this respect must be no different from any other. Evidence of economic insecurity among Muslim supporters of Pakistan thus becomes simple proof for her of the primacy of economic concerns in shaping the Pakistan demand. For a careful analysis of the relationship between religious and economic motivations in the mobilization of support for Pakistan, one must look elsewhere.

Second, and much more serious, her interpretation is undermined by her failure to analyse carefully the critical differences in economic interests *within* the Muslim community of British India. Though she briefly alludes at various points to differences in economic interests separating Muslims on the basis of class, province, and urban/rural residence, these are never substantively treated nor taken seriously in her analysis. Indeed, she often writes as if the 'Muslim community' was itself an economic actor, rather than an idea uniting in various contexts Muslims of widely variant economic interests. While she acknowledges focusing her analysis on urban Muslim professional and commercial groups, she often seems to assume, without analysis, that their interests reflected those of the 'Muslim community' as a whole.

Particularly problematic - and relevant for those with an interest in the Punjab - is her failure to analyse the distinctive configurations of economic interests that marked each province and shaped the provinces' differing responses to the Pakistan movement. For the Punjab, of course, such an analysis is critical, for economic issues played a significant part in the 1930s in assuring the primacy of the Unionist Party among rural Punjabi Muslims, whatever the interests of the professional and urban classes. Economic issues - in particular, rural indebtedness - helped in these years to undercut potential support for Jinnah and Pakistan in the Punjab, a fact quite contrary to the thrust of Talha's analysis. After the mid-1940s, as Ian Talbot and others have shown, rural economic grievances were increasingly used against the Unionist Party, and in support of the Muslim League. But to explore the complex ways that economic grievances supported shifts toward Pakistan, these grievances need to be analysed against the backdrop of earlier Unionist primacy - and within the distinctive framework of provincial political and economic divisions - which Talha does not do (for the Punjab or any other province).

Talha's failure to explore carefully the economic divisions among Muslims, and the distinct patterns of economic relationships shaping the various provinces, thus seriously limits her analysis. It also undercuts her ability to assess the role played by the Pakistan concept itself in bridging economic

divisions and defining a vision of economic independence for India's Muslims. This is not to deny her achievement in illustrating the important role that economic issues played in shaping the rhetoric of the movement for Pakistan. But an analysis of the larger role that economic issues played in the Pakistan movement requires a more broadly based analysis.

David Gilmartin
North Carolina State University

Christy Campbell. *The Maharajah's Box: an Imperial Story of Conspiracy, Love and a Guru's Prophecy*, (London: HarperCollins 2000), xvii + 474pp. £9.99 (pb), ISBN 000-2572176.

It is now almost impossible to think of a Sikh with a more colourful life than Duleep Singh. Born into the Sikh royalty, trapped in murderous palatial intrigues of Lahore as a child, taken into protectorate as heir to the Punjab throne, exiled to Britain, embracing Christianity at fifteen, being portrayed in Buckingham Palace by court artists, offering the coveted Koh-i-Noor to Queen Victoria, sharing shooting parties with the Prince of Wales and finally dying in Paris as an 'impeccable foe of the British empire'. A rare Sikh, indeed!

It is not surprising, then, to find Punjab's popular bards singing traditional eulogies for the wayward prince whose failure to 'return to his homeland' tumbled the Sikh fortunes in the Punjab. Even more popular songs narrate the prince's separation from his mother, Jindan, for thirteen years. Much commented on in Punjabi writings, he is dismissed in Indian historical scholarship, perhaps because of his 'Punjab nationalism', harking back to the Sikh kingdom, strikes at the imputed unity of Indian nationalism, despite his ambiguous calls to all 'Hindustanees' for liberation. Sikh scholars have keenly portrayed him as a 'nationalist': thus the prince's correspondence with the government was edited by Ganda Singh as 'documents on freedom struggle'. In community oriented publications, he is portrayed as an unabashed hero of Sikh nationalism. Occasional British journalists have found him worthy for slinging mud at Queen Victoria by digging out royal archives for 'further sensations' about her protectiveness for this oriental prince.

A further spurt in Duleep's life has come from the Diaspora, especially the British Sikhs' enthusiasm for Elveden where locals complain of coach-loads of turbaned visitors descending upon their tranquil village to view the prince's erstwhile magnificent estate and place flowers on his grave outside a small but beautiful church. In 1993, on the first centenary, a Trust was formed to install a bronze statue of Duleep Singh at Thetford, unveiled by the Prince of Wales. At this crowded meeting, several community leaders yelled for Sikhs' right to independence, citing popular views of how the British had forcibly joined the Punjab with India by deporting their prince to England.

This new book by a *Sunday Telegraph* journalist, Christy Campbell, is the most comprehensive so far. Written in investigative style, it provides many new insights into the prince's life. Campbell's brush with the Punjabi prince came through an article as Swiss banks announced the return of all deposits seized by Nazis from the Jews. Among these, an account of Princess Catherine, daughter of prince Duleep Singh, puzzled Campbell. This news was picked up by Indian newspapers when several claimants offered themselves as rightful owners of the Maharajah's box in the bank. In his elusive search for the box's contents, Campbell met two such claimants, Beant Singh Sandhawalia - great grandson of Duleep Singh's cousin Thakur Singh - and Ranjit Kaur who claimed to be a descendent of Raja Sher Singh, and set about extricating the prince's story from community myths.

Born on 6 September 1838 as fourth acknowledged son to Ranjit Singh's fifth wife, Jindan, whose sexual and political intrigues led Lord Hardinge to call her the Messalina of the Punjab, Duleep Singh was installed as a minor-king in 1845 under British regency. Lord Dalhousie, however, found it convenient to annex the state of Punjab putting an end to an already disintegrating Sikh rule, deposing the child-heir with £12,000 pension for life. A year later, in 1850, Jindan was banished to jail, separated from her son to save him from her 'malign influence'. The prince's education was entrusted to Dr. Login, the young prince read 'Boy's Own Books' and with this new education, the adolescent prince embraced Christianity on 8 March 1853.

In 1854 he was brought to England where he was further educated at 'home', as university education for an oriental prince was thought over-indulgence and indeed the government of India was already looking at his frequent visits to Balmoral with apprehension. Queen Victoria became quite protective of the black prince allowing him easy access to the royal household. He befriended the royal princes and princess and he was painted by royal artists. In one such painting session, he was to hand over the Koh-i-Noor to his sovereign in July 1855. While the 1857 rebellion frustrated his plan to visit his native land, he returned to India in January 1861 and met his mother Jindan after some thirteen years. He stayed in Calcutta, at Spence's hotel, and the news of his return caught the fancy of Sikh troops returning from the second China war. They flocked to see their raja and shouted old Khalsa war cries. Lord Canning was so alarmed that he asked the Maharajah to leave Calcutta by the next ship and also allowed his mother to sail with him, with her many jewels and servants. His behaviour started showing signs of 'rebellion' under the influence of his mother who daily reminded him about his status as Ranjit's son and his royal possessions including the Koh-i-Noor. Jindan lived in London which must have seemed a strange city and though attended by her female attendants, her health deteriorated sharply and she died suddenly in August 1861. Duleep took his mother's body to the Godawari and cremated her as per Sikh rites. While returning via Aden, he got engaged to Bamba. Eventually he setled in Suffolk, buying an impressive estate at Elveden village. Leading the extravagant lifestyle

of a country squire, his finances were soon overstretched. His pleas for more money from the India Office began with an awareness of his wider claims on the Punjab. Despite Queen Victoria's advice and warnings from his friends and officials, he felt more enraged and hostile. He went to the British Museum in March 1882 in furious search for 'Punjab Papers' from which the famous letter to *The Times* was drafted on 28 August 1882.

By May 1886 he had effectively become a rebel and his first act was to reclaim his faith through baptism. Threatening several times to sail towards Punjab, his efforts to reach India were blocked effectively. Arrested in 1886 in Aden, he sent his family back to England, while he landed in Paris to issue several more proclamations against the British rule in India. By now he had fixed an emissary at Goa - Thakur Singh Sandhawalia - who handled his instructions and spread propaganda for his eventual return.

From Paris, he planned to seek assistance from the Czar so offering Russia a leading stick to beat British intentions in the Middle East. Campbell unmasks the Maharajah's journey to Russia in 1887, with a full display of spying network around him and highlights the diplomatic parleys of various government agencies involved. The scoop must be how the Maharajah travelled under a false British passport in the name of Patrick Casey - a leading Irish nationalist, eventually crossing the Russian border through the connivance of General Bogdanovich and Mikhail Kaktov, an influential editor of *Moscow Gazette*. There is much speculative material here: the intrigues of Russian diplomats, the role of French radicals, the watchful eye of British intelligence on every move of the Maharajah who pleaded unsuccessfully with the Czar for Russian assistance in Central Asia to liberate India from British rule.

Campbell quotes from the *Lahore Tribune*, regarding Punjab's English administrator's assessment of the prince's hold on the Sikh population. The worst fears of the Indian government were whether (if through some appalling intelligence failure, Duleep Singh did turn up on the Afghan border with the Czar's divisions and the Sikhs did rise in revolt), British India could be saved. Meanwhile the *Lahore Tribune* published several letters and other reports of unquiet among Sikhs, leading Sir Henry Mortimer Durant the foreign secretary to cable London on 22 July 1887, 'we can easily crush the united revolt of a nationality like theirs [Sikhs], living in a flat and open country, and unprovided with arms; but disaffection among the Sikh troops in the face of a Russian advance would paralyse our options and make our position a very critical one'. Though the Maharajah returned empty handed and dejected from Russia, his revolutionary phase was far from over. He briefed the *Standard* and *New York Herald Tribune* on his plans from Paris, by forming a 'League of Indian Patriots' with a manifesto to liberate India. His intrigues with Abdul Rasul, a Middle East agent, are brought out while Russian agents suspected his loyalty due to his new English bride, Ada Douglas Wetherill. His new alliance proved to Russians the 'insincerity of his protestations in favour of Russia'. His options dwindled sharply, he turned into a hard drinker, while his retinue increased with his wife's

mother and sister in Paris, and new eccentric visitors and fortune tellers passed through his cheaper apartments. Hence the move began for reconciliation with the India Office. He wrote a letter of pardon to her majesty. By now, he was very ill and died on 23 October 1893. There was no Sikh cremation, his body was interred in an English grave with dignity. The funerary train arrived at Thetford and the coffin was borne to St Andrew's church. Many high officials were present, and wreaths came from Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales.

Campbell's positioning of various places and persons is most impressive. He highlights his 'return to Sikh faith', his second marriage to Ada Douglas Wetherill, already pregnant with his first daughter on 28 April 1889, his many emissaries to Queen Victoria and his pleas to India Office for an increased pension, as well as his many small 'humiliations', and his acts of defiance and stubbornness are given full treatment.

In a final brilliant essay, Campbell puts together the jigsaw of Duleep's life, motives and circumstances. He speculates that despite all the intrigues and high drama involving Russia, European powers, the Indian government and the Punjab situation, his real motive might have been no more that escaping to Russia with Ada's love. This provocative summary should provide an immediate challenge to Duleep's future biographers.

Still, the Maharajah's eventful life is open to many interpretations. As the Sikh diaspora begins to assess its ambiguous relationship with its homeland, Duleep's furious search for Punjab's Blue Book at the British Museum, his blowing hot and cold over his religious heritage, his divided loyalties and lifestyle would find much resonance among diasporic Sikh youth. For many overseas Sikhs, Duleep's life as a rebel, a non-conformist and his efforts to return to Punjab reflect their own dilemmas and longing for a distant homeland. Even his ultimately unsuccessful rebellion, bursts of compromise and running away from Britain echo such sentimental journeys young Sikhs are likely to make while coming to terms with Britain as their new country. As Punjab's new diaspora artists grow in sophistication and wealth, Duleep's life will provide an eminent subject for film makers, while for some talented musicians, his colourful life amidst the British aristocracy and tragic end, would be an ideal subject of an 'opera' as attractive as '*Hir-Ranjha*' - Punjab's classic folktale. Despite Campbell's exhaustive and admirable account of Duleep's turbulent life, we have not heard the last word. The Sikh prince's flamboyant life-style and his wild cry for homeland will continue to haunt several generations, especially among the Sikh diaspora.

Darshan S. Tatla
Coventry University

P. Panayi, *The Impact of Immigration: A Documentary History of the Effects and Experience of Immigrants in Britain Since 1945*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) xi + 212pp. £12.95 (pb). ISBN 0-7190-4684X. £35 (hb). 0-7190-4685-8.

This is a very useful book for students interested in post-Second World War immigration to Britain and the experiences of post-war immigrants. It provides a wide range of official and unofficial documents which will be a valuable source of original material for students and whet their appetite to search further for original documentary evidence on the contemporary history of immigration.

The book begins with a discursive essay on immigration to Britain over the last 2000 years. The focus is very much on the variety of sources from which immigrants came and the contribution they have made to British society. There is some discussion of the role of academic research in explaining and analysing immigration and its results. It would have been worthwhile in addition for the author to have mentioned that immigration is a two-way process and that, while immigration has always taken place, Britain has historically been one of the major countries of emigration.

The extracts from documents presented in the book are organised around five major themes: immigration; geography, demography and economics; ethnicity; racism; and multiracialism. The documentary sources include extracts from oral histories, official documents and newspapers. The selection of documents has been made with great care so that oral histories of white ethnic minorities, such as the Poles, Irish and the Chileans, are included, as well as those of Jamaicans, Sikhs, Barbadians and East African Asians. The range of topics covered is very broad, covering immigration experiences, housing problems, youth unemployment, discrimination, experiences of racism and cultural pride. The selection of documents available for inclusion is vast, so that the author has had to be highly selective and subject specialists will miss important documents in their area; for example, a political scientist would miss extracts from Cabinet Minutes, the 1965 Government White Paper on Immigration from the Commonwealth, and the Crossman Diaries. However, teachers will find a wide range of valuable documentary sources in this book.

Z. Layton Henry
University of Warwick

Andy Bielenberg (ed.), *Irish Diaspora* (Harlow: Longman, 2000). 368pp. £14.99 (pb), ISBN 0-582-36997-5.

This collection of essays deliberately uses the term 'diaspora' to undermine the old-fashioned distinction between the 'real Irish' who stay at home and the not-so-Irish emigrants who leave home, and it presents us with a more accurate

image of the Irish as a dispersed people. This term also implies that complete assimilation is not the only option for emigrants, and that the diaspora remains Irish. As we might expect from people dispersed all over the globe, the experiences of the Irish diaspora have been quite diverse. Irish Catholics and Protestants often received a very different welcome, and most of the articles treat them as separate groups; educated and trained immigrants were always treated better than unskilled labourers; and the level of tolerance in the host-countries varied considerably. The contributions to this book vary from the analysis of general statistics to the reading of private letters. They are fascinating episodes from an enormous unwritten epic, and my only complaint is the absence of a bibliography that would have told me where to go next in my reading.

Britain experienced a huge influx of Irish migrants during the mid-nineteenth century as a result of the Famine, though most of them ultimately moved on to Canada and the United States. During the twentieth-century Britain became the favorite final destination of Irish migrants (largely because of immigration restrictions elsewhere), and the new migrants of the 1980s included many highly-qualified young people. Ireland was, of course, a part of the United Kingdom until 1922, and even after independence citizens of southern Ireland were free to live and work in Britain. Protestant migrants from Ireland tended to assimilate completely, but Catholic migrants faced considerable prejudice. This hostility was particularly virulent in the nineteenth century, but varied in accordance with the demand for their labour and with local traditions of tolerance or sectarianism. Negative stereotypes were based on the male unskilled labourer, and Irish women were strangely ignored. The global and multi-cultural London of the 1980s brought a new atmosphere of acceptance, and allowed immigrants to be more visibly Irish.

In America Irish Protestants (who outnumber Irish Catholics there by two to one) continued to identify themselves as 'Irish' until the middle of the nineteenth century. At this time, there was considerable prejudice against Irish Catholics, partly because of the rise of Protestant fundamentalism in the 1820s, but more so because of the sudden influx of desperately poor Irish Catholic immigrants at the time of the Famine. As a result, Irish Protestants started to identify themselves as 'Scotch-Irish,' even though many of them were descended from Anglican or Catholic immigrants. It was generally assumed that Irish Protestants were naturally more successful, but by the early twentieth century Irish Catholics had in fact outstripped them. In a 1990 survey, most Irish Protestants chose to describe themselves once again as 'Irish,' thereby establishing a non-sectarian Irish identity, an achievement that has eluded their original homeland.

Although Irish Catholics came from a rural background, they ended up as city-dwellers in Britain and America. In the British dominions, on the other hand, many of them were farmers. Land was cheap in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and farming communities of Irish Catholics established themselves there. Irish Protestants had always succeeded in agriculture

throughout the British empire, and they quickly assimilated with other British Protestant settlers. Whatever their religion, Irishmen consistently acted with the usual imperial brutality towards the subject populations. Irish Catholic Nationalists conveniently ignored parallels with subjects of a different race, while Irish Protestant Unionists took pride in seeing their Orange Order expand throughout the empire as an agency of imperial loyalty.

This book is to some extent a celebration of the Irish diaspora, but if it proclaims the history of this diaspora, it implicitly questions the existence of southern Ireland as a truly independent state. For the past five centuries, Ireland has been an integral part of the global economy, and in spite of the political independence of southern Ireland, both parts of Ireland continue to perform their traditional function of supplying that global economy with labour.

Like the Irish, the Sikhs have an agricultural background, a tradition of service in the British army, and a diaspora throughout America and the former British empire. The Irish experience suggests that although the Sikh diaspora will develop an identity that is both Punjabi and Western, its complete assimilation is not necessary for economic and social success. It also suggests that if racism and bigotry are amusing blood-sports for some inhabitants of a host-country, they will in the long run be powerless to prevent Sikhs attaining success in their new homes.

Henry J. Walker
Bates College, Maine

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.