

# INTERNATIONAL JOUNRAL OF PUNJAB STUDIES

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## **INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PUNJAB STUDIES**

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# Special Issue on the Khalsa Tercentenary

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## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PUNJAB STUDIES

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#### Editorial Note

1999 has been a year of celebration amongst the Sikh communities living throughout the world. This year's Vaisakhi marked the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Khalsa. Although the majority of the celebrations peaked during April and May, they have continued throughout the year. The main centre for these celebrations naturally focussed on the 'white city' of Anandpur Sahib where hundreds of thousands of Sikhs made their pilgrimage. Elsewhere, Sikh communities and organisations held nagar kirtans, sammelans, melas, seminars and conferences to celebrate the special occasion in their own localities. These celebrations were truly global in character and illustrated the resilience, vitality and vibrancy of the community right across the globe, negating earlier interpretations which questioned the future viability of the community. The Birmingham Sikh community, for instance, pulled off a real coup by betting the British Prime Minister to address its Vaisakhi convention. The diaspora Sikhs in Britain had another reason to reflect on this occasion. This year also marked the 150th anniversary of the annexation of Punjab which formally brought Punjab under the control of the British empire. British colonial rule was to have a profound effect on the future evolution of the Sikh community.

The Association for Punjab Studies, to make our own specific contribution, marked the occasion by holding an international academic conference on Khalsa identity at Coventry University in May 1999. We greatly acknowledge the financial sponsorship for this conference by the Council of Sikh Gurdwaras in Coventry. This special issue is an outcome of that conference. Five of the seven papers in this issue were originally presented at this conference. Papers by Ballantyne and Susan Stronge and Hajra Shaikh have been included because they provide important contributions to the main theme of this issue.

Papers included in this issue explore different dimensions of the Khalsa identity. The first four papers, by JS Grewal, Pashaura Singh, Darshan Singh and Gurbhagat Singh, explore the central ideas, differing and contested interpretations and comparative perspectives on the core components of Khalsa identity which reached its ultimate conclusion at Vaisakhi time in Anandpur Sahib in 1699. Ballantyne's paper attempts a bold synthesis between existing interpretations on the evolution of the Khalsa identity which emphasise either the 'internalist' or the 'externalist' perspectives. Barrier, using case material from north American Sikh communities, highlights the central concerns of diaspora Sikhs as they pertain to issues of tradition, power and location of authority within the Sikh panth. Barrier's paper also raises a number of important issues for scholarly research on Sikhs and Punjab with the emergence of highly networked and increasingly internet-using and internet-dependent Sikh diaspora communities. Finally Stronge and Shaikh's paper provides an interesting insight into arguably the best public exhibition ever held on the Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms. The article discusses the background to how the project of the exhibition was conceived, selection of material, negotiations and collaboration required with the main actors involved.

We hope that this issue proves to be a fitting tribute to the tercentenary celebrations.

## The Role of Ideas in Sikh History

# J S Grewal Institute of Punjab Studies, Chandigarh

This article examines the debate between WH MacLeod and his critics concerning the role of ideas and historical contingencies in the development of Sikhism. While accepting the importance of historical evolution in the latter process, the article takes issue with MacLeod's interpretations with regard to such issues as the development of the Khalsa identity. It argues that a balanced understanding needs to marry the principles of historical evolution with an appreciation of the operation of ideas and the continuously vital role of institutions based on ideology.

How did the Sikhs come into power? This was the question uppermost in the minds of those European writers who pioneered Sikh studies in the late eighteenth century. Guru Nanak and his followers appeared to them to be no different from Kabir and his followers, but Guru Gobind Singh and his Khalsa were altogether a different matter. They presented a unique trajectory in the Indian subcontinent, waging a long political struggle and coming into power as sovereign rulers. How was this to be explained? The first simple answer was that the hostility of the Mughal state provoked reaction and turned the pacifist Nanak-Panthis into the militant Khalsa. The preponderance of Jats in the Khalsa Panth was noticed, but only in the early nineteenth century was it seen as somewhat relevant to the explanation. J D Cunningham, writing between the two Anglo-Sikh wars, talked of 'race and religion' as the motivating force of Sikh history. He was the first British historian to postulate a close link between Sikh ideology and Sikh history from the days of Guru Nanak to the time of sovereign Sikh rule. By adding the factor of ideology to factors related broadly to environment, Cunningham introduced into Sikh studies a debate about causation in terms of ideology and environment. In recent decades this debate has become acute enough to be a major issue in the current controversy in Sikh studies. We propose to examine this issue in order to develop a meaningful perspective on the evolution of the Sikh Panth.

W H McLeod observes that the theory which has long dominated Sikh historiography on the issue of causation was first put forth by J D Cunningham in a rather stirring statement:

It was reserved for Nanak to perceive the true principles of reform, and to lay those broad foundations which enabled his successor Gobind to fire the minds of his countrymen with a new nationality, and to give practical effect to the doctrine that the lowest is equal with the highest in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes.

As a recent example, McLeod quotes Jagjit Singh:2

The Sikh movement was an organic growth of the Skih religion or the Sikh view of life. The founding of the Sikh Panth outside the caste society in order to use it as the base for combating the hierarchical set-up of the caste order, and the creation of the Khalsa for capturing state power in the interests of the poor and the suppressed, were only a projection, on the military and political plane, of the egalitarian approach of the Sikh religious thesis.

This view of the Sikh movement appears to McLeod to give too much importance to conscious intention and ideas to leave scope for the operation of other factors. McLeod's own suggestion is that the progressive development of the Panth 'must be explained not merely in terms of purposeful intention but also (and in significant measure) by the influence of social, economic and historical environment'.<sup>3</sup>

McLeod's treatment of the evolution of the Sikh community was meant to show the importance of social, economic and historical environment in early Sikh history. But he in turn has been criticised by others. Gurdev Singh, for example, attributes a number of propositions to McLeod to imply how preposterous they are. For McLeod, the ten Gurus never preached 'one set of religious doctrines'; Guru Amar Das created new institutions 'on the old Hindu lines, the very thing Guru Nanak had spurned'; from the time of the sixth Guru onwards 'the teachings of Guru Nanak were completely given up in favour of the militant pose' in response to socio-political situation; the arming of the Panth was not the result of any decision by Guru Harbobind but of Jat influx in the Panth; the growth of militancy was due primarily to 'the impact of Jat cultural patterns' and economic problems. According to Gurdev Singh, McLeod does not accept the traditional account of the founding of the Khalsa on the Baisakhi day of 1699. With 'compulsive reasons for scepticism', he suggests that the slate 'must be wiped clean and must not be reinscribed until we have ascertained just what did take place during the eighteenth century'. McLeod's view, the Sikh code of discipline (rahit maryādā) and symbols were evolved during the eighteenth century 'as a result of gradual growth' and not of any pronouncement by Guru Gobind Singh on the Baisakhi day of 1699; the doctrines of Guru-Panth and Guru-Granth were also evolved during the eighteenth century due to 'the need of cohesion' and not because of any explicit injunction of Guru Gobind Singh.4

The debate has become comprehensive enough to cover institutionalisation, militarisation, the Khalsa code of conduct, and the doctrines of Guruship. On all these themes, according to Gurdev Singh, McLeod stands refuted by the works of Jagjit Singh, Hari Ram Gupta, Ganda Singh and Harbans Singh. Before assessing their relative merit, it is obligatory for us to outline the views expressed by these historians.

1

For McLeod, Sikh history offers 'an unusually coherent example of how a cultural group develops in direct response to the pressure of historical circumstances.<sup>5</sup> For the historians like Harbans Singh, Khushwant Singh and Gokul Chand Narang, the development of Sikh community was marked by 'three major stages'. The first was the work of Guru Nanak who founded Sikhism and the Sikh Panth. The second stage was the work of Guru Hargobind who adopted military means in response to the manifest intention of the state to put down the Panth. The third stage began when Guru Gobind Singh fused the military aspect with the religious by promulgating the Order of the Khalsa on the Baisakhi of 1699 in view of the growing hostility of the hill chiefs and the Mughal authorities. McLeod points out that the process starts too late and ends too soon in this interpretation. It over-simplifies the events and over-emphasises their importance and significance. What is needed is a concept of development that takes into consideration 'a much wider range of historical and sociological phenomena' to discern 'a much more intricate synthesis'.<sup>6</sup>

According to McLeod, a large well with eighty-four steps (bāoli) dug at Goindwal in the time of Guru Amar Das (1552-74) was meant to serve as a tirath, or centre of pilgrimage, for the Sikhs. This should not be interpreted as a doctrinal change because the compositions of Guru Amar Das are 'in accord with those of the first Guru'. However, Guru Amar Das may be seen as forging bonds 'other than those based upon religious belief' to meet the needs of the second generation of Sikhs. Besides the pilgrimage centre, he provided 'distinctive festival days, distinctive rituals, and a collection of sacred writings'. McLeod thinks that Guru Nanak had 'rejected all of these'. His successor was compelled to return to them 'in different and more difficult circumstances'. These innovations must be seen as 'concessions to social needs not as a conscious shift in doctrine'. In one sense these were no innovations because Guru Amar Das did little more than 'reintroduce traditional Hindu customs'. McLeod goes on to add that the 'pilgrimage-centre is in Goindval. It is not at Hardwar, nor at Kurukshetra, nor at any of the other places which his followers might have visited'. He concludes that on the one hand the Sikh Panth was developing 'a consciousness of its own separate nature' and on the other it was forging links with the Hindu tradition.<sup>7</sup>

П

Another development of the time of Guru Amar Das, for McLeod, was an increase in the number of Jats. But he is prepared to 'allow a measure of doubt' on this point. He feels sure, however, that this development was taking place by the time of Guru Arjan (1581-1606). The evidence for this is the founding of the towns of Tarn Taran, Sri Hargobindpur and Kartarpur, all in Jat territory. The evidence for Jat influence in the Sikh Panth during the time of Guru Hargobind (1606-1644) is in the Dabistān-i Mazāhib. McLeod remarks that the Jats were attracted to the Sikh Panth because the Sikh Gurus rejected the theory of caste and raised Jats to positions of high authority in the new Panth. Their own egalitarian background/induced them to join a panth that was more

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egalitarian than the society around. McLeod puts forth the suggestion that the 'increasing influence of the Jats within the Sikh Panth' could be a source of fear for Jahangir and his subordinates, and their fear 'would not have related exclusively, or even primarily, to the religious influence of the Guru'.

The Jats used to bear arms. Their mere presence imparted to the Panth a militant appearance. Therefore, 'the arming of the Panth would not have been the result of any decision by Guru Hargobind', though he could have felt 'the need for tighter organisation'. In any case, the influence, which the Jats enjoyed, increased with the passage of time. Thus, the growth of militancy within the Panth 'must be traced primarily to the impact of Jat cultural patterns'. To this cause were added others later: 'economic problems', and the Shakti cult of the hills, the latter leading to 'yet another stage in the evolution of the Panth'. In Guru Gobind Singh's writings and in those which were produced at his court there are constant references to the mighty exploits of the Mother Goddess, one of the most notable being his own *Chandt kt Vār*. It is in the works of Guru Gobind Singh and 'in the developments which followed his death' that McLeod discerns the influence of the hill culture most plainly.9

Jagjit Singh, in his essay on militarisation, makes the general proposition that there were three turning points in Sikh history during the times of the Gurus: a break with the ascetic tradition, rejection of the caste structure and militarisation of the Panth. All the three changes represented departures from the prevailing tradition. 'Only a purposeful and determined leadership could have brought about the said departure'. He goes on to add that Jahangir maintains in his Memoirs that he ordered Guru Arjan's execution because of his blessings to the rebel Prince Khusrau. Furthermore, if the mere entry of Jat element into the Sikh ranks could arouse the fear of the authorities, a similar action should have been taken against the Miñās and the Handālīs whose following also included Jats. But this was not done. They did not challenge the political authorities of the day; nor did they have the socio-political concerns which the Sikh Gurus had.

The very idea of Jat dominance in the Panth is not acceptable to Jagjit Singh. He points out that there was only one Jat among 'the Cherished-Five' who were willing to lay down their lives for Guru Gobind Singh. When the Khalsa were divided into five fighting units in the early 1730s, two of them were headed by Khatris (and one by a Ranghreta). This does not suggest Jat dominance.11 Jagjit Singh does not accept the idea that the Jats who came to pay homage to their Gurus came armed. For example, when the Sikhs complained to Guru Gobind Singh that they were harassed on their way to Anandpur, they were advised to come armed. Jagjit Singh argues, further, that the Jats started joining the Sikh movement in appreciable numbers only after the Gurus decided to militarise the Panth. The initiative for a determined struggle against the state came from the Gurus, and not from their followers. It was the case of Sikh ideology influencing the Jats and not of the Jat character moulding the Sikh movement. The inspiration from Sikh ideology turned even the castes lower than the Jats into a fighting class. Obviously, 'the Sikh movement needed no goading from the Jats for its militarisation'.12

1

About the impact of economic conditions (the agrarian crisis) on militarisation, Jagjit Singh states that the responses of the Jat peasantry and lower castes to economic problems were not uniform. Nor did they produce the same or similar results. Moreover, the Sikh political struggle lasted for three generations and it was waged by the lower castes as much as by the Jat peasantry. What sustained their struggle was an ideology with revolutionary aims. It is idle, therefore, to trace the source of the Sikh revolution to 'sheer economic causes'. Equally pointless is the conjecture that the synthesis of the Devi cult with the Jat culture had something to do with the evolution of militancy in the Sikh Panth. The cult of the Goddess was not dominant in the countryside inhabited by the Sikhs. And where it was, there was no militancy. It

In the second part of his essay Jagjit Singh takes up the question of militarisation in a wider context. He can see no signs of any shared motivation in the Jat organisation 'which could urge the Jats for sustained action, much less for a political adventure'. The Jats of the Sikh tract 'lacked even the *gotra* solidarity beyond the village level'. There was a spirit of equality among the Jats, and it was reinforced by the *bhāīchāra* system of land tenure. However, this egalitarianism was confined to their clans. They conformed to 'the hierarchical pattern of the caste system', having no qualms about submitting to the higher castes or dominating the lower ones. Like the peasantry in general, they lacked political aspiration and initiative. 15

By contrast, what bound the Sikhs together in the Sikh Panth was 'the primacy of the Sikh ideals'. The creation of the Khalsa provided the 'real organisation base'. Recruitment to this order was voluntary. 'No caste or clan loyalties were involved, because no one could become a member of the Khalsa brotherhood without being baptised, and no one could be baptised without taking the five vows'. In Jagjit Singh's view the units called *misls* were not formed 'on the basis of caste or clan affiliation'. The Sikh egalitarian approach obliterated the difference of attitude towards both the higher or lower castes. The Sikh revolutionary spirit sprang essentially from the Sikh faith which 'stands for social and political equality'. <sup>16</sup>

Jagjit Singh comes to the conclusion that McLeod's hypothesis about the militarisation of the Sikh movement is untenable on more than one count. There is no reason to infer that Jats were the predominant element in the Sikh Panth when Guru Hargobind decided to militarise the movement; they were not predominant in the battles of Guru Gobind Singh and Banda Bahadur either. There is nothing to suggest that the Jats used to come armed when they came to pay homage to the Gurus. Economic distress by itself does not lead to militancy. The Sikh movement did not need the inspiration of the Devi cult to become militant. Sikh militancy was inseparable from the Sikh egalitarian ideology: it was geared to achieve the essential purpose of capturing political power.<sup>17</sup>

Ш

McLeod presents the traditional view of the institution of the Khalsa before offering his view. According to the Sikh tradition, Guru Gobind Singh reflected on the perils of his situation and the weakness of his timid followers, and he devised a plan to infuse a spirit of strength and unity. He summoned his followers from far and wide on the Baisakhi day of 1699 and they came in thousands. When the fair was in full swing he suddenly appeared before his followers and, with his sword raised aloft, demanded the head of any of his Sikhs. A hush fell upon the concourse and he had to repeat the demand. A loyal Sikh came forward and he was conducted into a tent. The thud of a descending sword was heard outside and the Guru reappeared with his bloodstained weapon to demand a second head. Another Sikh came forward and the process was repeated till the number reached five. When the Guru drew back the side of the tent, horror turned into amazement: the gathering observed corpses of five decapitated goats beside the five alive volunteers. 18

Guru Gobind Singh, in the traditional view, delivered a sermon on this occasion. He declared the five volunteers to constitute the nucleus of a new brotherhood, the Khalsa. Those who chose to join this brotherhood were to abandon pride of caste, the old scriptures and places of pilgrimage, the worship of gods and goddesses and the belief in avtars. They were to follow only God and the Gurus. A new baptismal ceremony was adopted by mingling sweets with water, stirred with a two-edged sword in an iron bowl. This amrit was administered to the five foundation members. They administered the same baptism to the Guru himself. All others who were willing to join the brotherhood and to accept its discipline were invited to take baptism and many thousands of all castes came forward to take it. The discipline promulgated at this time included dissociation with five groups of people consisting of all those who had at different times disputed succession to Guruship, together with their successors and followers, and all those who cut their hair. Various other prohibitions were enjoined, notably tobacco, meat from animals slaughtered in the Muslim fashion and sexual intercourse with Muslim women. Members of the new brotherhood were to wear the five Ks as symbols and to add 'Singh' to their given name. All women were to add 'Kaur'. Thus was established a powerful brotherhood which in unity, loyalty and courage was to struggle against overwhelming odds, survive the cruellest of persecution and ultimately rise to political supremacy on the ruins of the Mughal power and Afghan pretensions.19

To present his critique of the traditional view, McLeod says that at the end of the eighteenth century 'we find a clearly defined Khalsa Panth with well formulated religious doctrines, a coherent code of discipline and the strong conviction that it has been born to rule'. The eighteenth century was marked by warfare, disaster and eventual triumph. For its distinctive problems the Khalsa had to find distinctive solutions. The traditional explanation must be evaluated in the light of the historical situation from the institution of the Khalsa in 1699 to the capture of Lahore by Ranjit Singh in 1799.

'Traditions abound but so too do compulsive reasons for scepticism. What we do know, however, indicates that the traditions relating to the period of Guru Gobind Singh must be, in some considerable measure, set aside. The slate must be wiped clean and must not be reinscribed until we have ascertained just what did take place during the eighteenth century'.

McLeod does not mean that the entire tradition stands rejected. He feels sure that something certainly did happen on the Baisakhi day of 1699, and that 'some of the traditions will eventually turn out to be substantially accurate'. The fact that the Khalsa did eventually establish an effectual claim to represent the orthodox form of the Sikh Panth lends considerable support to the traditional hypothesis. However, every feature of the tradition cannot be literally and uncritically accepted.<sup>20</sup>

In McLeod's view, the whole of the Khalsa rahit or the code of discipline was not promulgated on the Baisakhi day of 1699. The question of five Ks, for instance, was not 'finally settled until well into the eighteenth century'. McLeod maintains that the Jat cultural patterns provided the 'five Ks', that is kesh (uncut hair), kanghā (comb), kirpān (dagger), karā (steel bangle) and kachh (a pair of short breeches). Uncut hair was a Jat custom observed during the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries, as earlier, by all Jats whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. The bearing of arms was a Jat practice that received ample encouragement from the events of the eighteenth century. With these two symbols may be paired the comb and the bangle respectively. The breeches are harder to understand in this context but it seems safe to assume that this symbol 'must also relate in some way to the same situation'.<sup>21</sup>

The complexity of Jat culture and contemporary circumstances accounts for the prohibitions which find a place in the Khalsa discipline. The prohibition of halál meat and intercourse with Muslim women was not called for in the 1699 situation. But it accords well with the eighteenth century struggle against the Mughals and, more particularly, against the Afghans. Presumably, the same situation accounts for the ban on the use of tobacco. More examples could be cited to support the view that the code developed during the course of the eighteenth century in response to inherited patterns and the impact of contemporary events, The Rahitnāmas invoke the authority of Guru Gobind Singh in order to acquire the sanction needed to enforce the code. All their contents cannot be treated as a record of the actual instructions of Guru Gobind Singh.<sup>22</sup>

According to Gurdev Singh, McLeod stands refuted by Hari Ram Gupta whose detailed account of the founding of the Khalsa is based on 'authentic contemporary and near contemporary evidence'. Unfortunately for Gurdev Singh's assertion, Gupta depends largely upon 'secondary' works. The contemporary authority of Sainapat is invoked but only to make the point that Guru Gobind Singh 'invited the entire audience' (supposed to be at Naina Devi) to attend 'the grand function' at Anandpur.<sup>23</sup> The early nineteenth century evidence of Bhai Santokh Singh is cited on the point that 'the tobacco leaf resembles the ear of a cow and so the Guru prohibited its use'. Bhai Nand Lal's authority is assumed to be contemporary and is invoked on the point that the

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Sikhs should not worship tombs, graves and relics of cremation.<sup>24</sup> It is absolutely clear that Gupta's account of the institution of the Khalsa is not based on contemporary or near contemporary evidence.

For Jagjit Singh, McLeod's hypothesis about the five Ks is no more than a conjecture. There is no evidence to suggest that the five Ks were features of the Jat culture. The keeping of kirpān and kesh was not a Jat characteristic. The Sikh movement could not have borrowed these features from the Jats. It is impossible to explain the disappearance of these cultural symbols from amongst the non-Sikh Jats of the Punjab and of the neighbouring states. In any case, revolutionary movements are not made by symbols; meaningful significance is given to symbols by revolutionary movements.<sup>25</sup>

About the Khalsa 'theory of authority', McLeod himself says that it is an 'informed conjecture'.26 He refers to the Sikh tradition in which the functions of the Guru after the death of Guru Gobind Singh were vested jointly in the body of the believers and the scripture. He suggests that this tradition possibly 'owes its origin not to an actual pronouncement of the Guru but to an insistent need for maintaining the Panth's coheision during a later period', 27 McLeod refers for explanation to the doctrine of the unity of Guruship which was evolved during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There was a line of successors deemed to be one person in ten manifestations in different bodies, a torch lit from another torch giving the same flame. The function of this doctrine was 'a simple extension of the first Guru's authority' and it did perform a cohesive role until the death of Guru Gobind Singh. In the literature of the early seventeenth century there are indications also of 'a developing doctrine of the Guru Panth, a doctrine which affirms that in the absence of the personal Guru, the local sangat, or congregation, within any area, possesses the mystical power to make decisions on his behalf. The death of Guru Gobind Singh made a radical break, raising the question of authority and, therefore, of the Panth's cohesion in an acute form.<sup>28</sup> After the failure of the personal leadership of Banda Bahadur, 'a new theory of leadership was needed'. The answer to this need was provided by the doctrine of the corporate and the scriptural Guru. McLeod goes on to add that during the eighteenth century it was the corporate aspect of the doctrine which possessed the greater importance and which served to impart a measure of cohesion to the community. Later, however, the doctrine of the corporate Guru 'effectively lapsed and an undisputed primacy was given to the scriptural Guru theory'.29

McLeod visualises a situation in which, like the Sikh sangats (congregations) the Khalsa jathas (armed bands) were widely scattered. Within both of them, the instrument of authority increasingly came to be identified with the group itself. 'The Guru was present in the sangat and the corporate voice of the sangat was accordingly the voice of the Guru'. The sangat provided a religious context and the jatha was 'a military extension of the same idea'. The military needs and the extension of the Khalsa influence shifted the Panth's primary interest from the sangat towards the jatha, and later towards the misl. 'As military and eventually political issues began to command an increasing attention, the doctrine was extended to cover the quasi-parliamentary sessions

of the Sarbat Khalsa'. The doctrine of Guru-Panth proved to be well suited to their needs. This doctrine found explicit expression in the institution of the gurmata, rooted in the theory 'that corporate decisions of the Sarbat Khalsa were to be regarded as the word of the Guru with the full force of his authority to back it'. Although essentially a response to military needs, the doctrine expressed in an unusually coherent form the more general religious doctrine of the Guru's continuing presence within any congregation of his disciples.<sup>30</sup>

Ranjit Singh extinguished 'the misl system' and replaced it with a strong and relatively centralised monarchy. The need of the doctrine of Guru-Panth was no longer there. The monarchy itself now assumed the cohesive role as the Sarkar Khalsa, or the rule of the Khalsa. In this situation the gurmata could only be regarded as a positive hindrance. As a result, the theory of the Guru-Panth quickly lapsed into disuse, leaving the issue of religious authority to the doctrine of scriptural Guru, the Guru-Granth. 'All other questions previously determined by reference to the corporate Guru were meanwhile appropriated by Ranjit Singh and later by his British successors'. The way for the ascendancy of the doctrine of Guru-Granth had already been prepared by the custom of adopting all gurmatas in the presence of the scripture during the eighteenth century itself. In the early nineteenth century, the scripture assumed a primary religious authority. 'This authority it has never relinquished and to this day it serves as the focus not merely of Sikh devotion but also of Sikh loyalty to the Panth. It still survives in situations which permit a growing neglect of the Khalsa discipline'.31

According to Gurdev Singh, McLeod's hypothesis of the doctrine of Guruship stands refuted by Ganda Singh and Harbans Singh. The earliest literary work cited by Ganda Singh is the Sri Gur Sobha written by Sainapat in 1711. A day before his death, Guru Gobind Singh responded to a question of his followers by announcing that he had 'bestowed his physical form upon the Khalsa' and that 'the Limitless and the Eternal Word was the True Guru'. The Guru's last message and his final commandment in clear words were that 'the Khalsa under the guidance of the Divine Word - the gurbani - was to be the future physical and spiritual representative of the Guru'. That the Sikhs accepted this creed is evident from the Rahitnama of Bhai Nand Lal (which is assumed to be authentic). The Guru himself states that his two forms were the Granth and the Khalsa. In the Gurbilās Chhevīn Pātshāhi (assumed by Ganda Singh to have been written in 1718), the author invariably uses the epithet 'Guru Granth'. In another manuscript in Ganda Singh's possession, related to the death of Guru Gobind Singh, the Sikhs are 'entrusted to the Sabda, the great Word, as given in the Granth Sahib'. 32

From the later writers Ganda Singh quotes Koer Singh to the effect that Guru Gobind Singh did not appoint anyone as his successor, that the entire Khalsa was entrusted to the 'protection of the Wielder of the Sword' (asiketu), and that the Khalsa should recognise Sri Granth as the ever-present darshan of the Guru. Kesar Singh Chhibber refers to the last commandment of Guru Gobind Singh: 'The Granth is the Guru; you hold the garment (seek the protection) of the Timeless God'. Sarup Das Bhalla states that 'Sri Guru Granth

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Sahib was recognised in place of the Guru'. The eighteenth century Persian and English writers cited by Ganda Singh refer to the end of personal Guruship after the death of Guru Gobind Singh. According to the *Umdat ut-Tawārīkh*, written in the reign of Ranjit Singh, Guru Gobind Singh himself declared that 'the Guru is Granthji'. Ghulam Muhiyuddin also attributes to Guru Gobind Singh the statement that 'there is no difference between the Guru and the Granth'. J D Cunningham mentions both the Khalsa and the Granth, followed by other later writers, including Macauliffe. The single statement of the Granth of the G

According to Harbans Singh, Guru Arjan enjoined the Sikhs to regard the Granth as equal with the Guru and to make no distinction between the two. The Word enshrined in the Holy Book was always revered by the Gurus as well as by their disciples as of divine origin. One day the Word was to take the place of the Guru. The line of personal Gurus could not have continued for ever. 'The inevitable came to pass when Guru Gobind Singh declared the Guru Granth Sahib to be his successor.' Ever since the passing away of Guru Gobind Singh, the understanding and conviction of the Sikh community has been that 'the Guru Granth is Guru Eternal'.<sup>35</sup>

Apart from the evidence of Bhai Nand Lal, Sainapat and Koer Singh, which is cited by Ganda Singh also, Harbans Singh cites new sources which are supposed to be contemporary or very close to the time of Guru Gobind Singh. One of these is the *Bhatt Vahī* to which Ganda Singh made only a reference. In the entry cited by Harbans Singh, Guru Gobind Singh places five *paisās* and a coconut before Sri Granth Sahib, bows before it, and then tells the *sangat*: 'It is my commandment: Own Sri Granthji in my place'. Another document, a letter of Mata Sundari in the village of Bhai Rupa, tells the Sikhs to believe only in ten Gurus (and not in Banda Bahadur and Ajit Singh) and to go in search of the Word 'upto the tenth king'. It is emphasised that the Guru 'resides in Sabda'. Harbans Singh infers that the *sabda* refers to the *Adi Granth*. 16

V

What do we make of this debate? A part of it can be viewed in terms of institutionalisation. McLeod starts his exposition with Guru Amar Das. We know, however, that Guru Angad composed  $b\bar{a}\tilde{m}i$ , like Guru Nanak, using the epithet 'Nanak' for himself. He regarded Guru Nanak as 'the Guru'. He kept up the congregational *kirtan*, enlarged the community kitchen (langar), and chose one of his own disciples as his successor. The adoption of Gurmukhi script for recording the compositions of Guru Nanak (and his successors) is never attributed to Guru Amar Das; it is attributed either to Guru Angad or to Guru Nanak. This background is ignored by McLeod on the assumption that Guru Angad introduced no 'change'.

When McLeod talks of the compilation of Gurbāni, adoption of distinctive festivals and rites, and the creation of a pilgrimage centre as 'innovations', his basic assumption is that Guru Nanak was opposed to institutionalisation – scriptures, pilgrimage centres, festivals and rites. And yet we know that Guru Nanak assumed the formal position of a guide, started

congregational worship with his own compositions, introduced the practice of community meal (langar), and appointed one individual as his successor, which distinguished him from the contemporary 'guides'. In other words, he rejected contemporary institutions only in order to clear the ground for his own. To assume that Guru Nanak opposed institutionalisation per se is to miss the basic significance of what he did in his lifetime. This is precisely what McLeod does – going against his own understanding of Guru Nanak's work at Kartarpur (Dera Baba Nanak) in his Gur Nānak and the Sikh Religion.

McLeod's critics assert that he ignores 'the unity of Sikh thought'. This criticism is misplaced because McLeod explicitly states that Guru Amar Das introduced no doctrinal change. The critics also point out that Guru Amar Das did not revert to Hindu practices. McLeod's use of the term 'Hindu' is unjustified in connection with what Guru Amar Das did. In the first place, what makes Goindwal a place of pilgrimage is not the well (bāoli) but the presence of the Guru, the kirtan of Gurbāñi, and the langar. The bāoli was needed because the number of Sikh visitors had increased. Goindwal, otherwise, was just like Kartarpur (Dera Baba Nanak) and Khadur – the central dharmsāl. The well makes better sense as an expansion of institutionalisation. As McLeod himself states, Goindwal was a characteristically Sikh place of pilgrimage. To have pilgrimage centres was not a peculiarity of 'Hindus'.

The institution of *dharmsāl* was intimately linked with the theology of Guru Nanak. It was the place of right belief, right worship, right disposition and right conduct – the place where merit in the eyes of God could possibly be acquired. The compilation of Gurbāñi, the adoption of new festivals and the introduction of new rites can similarly be seen as the extension of institutionalisation. If Gurbāñi was already used for congregational as well as individual worship, its compilation was only a logical step. The days of Baisakhi and Diwali were chosen for Sikh festivals not as a 'reversion' to 'Hindu' tradition but as alternatives to contemporary practice. One could participate in one or the other but not in both at the same time. The introduction of new rites was a corollary of the rejection of the traditional rites. The use of Gurbāñi in Sikh rites made them distinctly Sikh, imparting a new significance to them.

The question of militarisation involves, first, the question of the changing composition of the Sikh Panth in terms of the social background of its members. There is no way of knowing the numbers or even exact proportions. To start from the opposite end, Jat preponderance among the Singhs is found firmly established in 1881. The general statements of the early nineteenth and the late eighteenth century writers indicate Jat dominance. Among the Sikh chiefs of the late eighteenth century, there was one from a family of carpenters and another from a family of distillers. More than 90% of the Sikh chiefs were Jat. During the early eighteenth century, unless the lower castes were present in much larger and the Jats in much smaller proportion to their total numbers, Jat dominance in the Khalsa Panth is a certainty. Jat representation among the masands is mentioned by the author of the Dabistān-i Mazāhib in the midseventeenth century and Jats are mentioned by Bhai Gurdas also among the

eminent Sikhs of the Gurus. Coming after an overwhelming presence of Khatris among the prominent Sikhs, this evidence can be taken as an indication of the increasing number of Jats, but their proportion in the Sikh Panth in the early seventeenth, or the late sixteenth, century cannot be estimated from the evidence available at present. Both McLeod and Jagjit Singh agree that the Jat component began to increase from the time of Guru Hargobind. Whereas McLeod talks of the tighter organisation by Guru Hargobind, Jagjit Singh insists upon his new initiative. The crucial phase in the debate from the viewpoint of militarisation is the time of Guru Arjan. That is where the Jat 'martial tradition' enters as a crucial factor.

Did the Jats carry arms? McLeod's answer is an emphatic yes. But Jagjit Singh does not think so. There is credible evidence that the 'intermediary zamindars' of the Mughal empire used to keep armed retainers and Jat Chaudharis, who figure in the Ain-i Akbari, would belong to this category. But did they join the Sikh Panth? It is extremely doubtful. In every Jat village there would be 'the braves' who kept arms in their homes for local conflicts, feuds or collective defence. It is doubtful that they carried arms wherever they went. Therefore, the vital point to be determined is whether or not the Jat Sikhs carried arms with them when they went to see their Guru. There is no evidence on this point. Despite the martial tradition attributed to the Jats as a class, there is no indication that the Jat zamindars of the Mughal province of Lahore were zor-talab, that is, they had to be compelled by force to submit the revenues they collected. There is no indication that the Jats of the Punjab rose against the state except as members of the Sikh Panth. It would appear, therefore, that the response of Guru Hargobind was more important than anything else in the early 'militarisation' of the Sikh movement. It must also be remembered that Sikh ideology was not opposed to martial action per se.

McLeod's view that the Shakti cult of the hills blended with the Jat culture of the plains to produce one more synthesis to accentuate militancy is based essentially on the evidence of the *Dasam Granth*. The 'mother goddess' figures prominently in the *Dasam Granth* but so do Krishna and Rama. They symbolise legitimacy of the use of physical force in the cause of righteousness. For this purpose, the *Dasam Granth* invokes not only the Shakta but also the Shaiva and Vaishnava traditions. In any case, the *Dasam Granth* came to influence the beliefs and attitudes of Sikhs when militancy had been well launched. Finally, Irfan Habib, the historian who underlines the relevance of the agrarian crisis for the Sikh revolt also emphasises the relevance of religious ideology as the source of cohesion among the Sikh peasantry.<sup>37</sup> The evidence advanced by McLeod in support of the additional factors appears to have only a marginal relevance.

About the Khalsa *rahit*, McLeod is inclined to regard its most important features as a development of the eighteenth century. His view is formed on the assumption that the *Gursobha* was not composed in 171. However, if we accept this date as authentic, as most of the historians do, the situation changes rather radically. The *kesh* and the *kirpān* (as an item among the weapons of the Singhs) figure prominently in the *Gursobha*. We may agree

with McLeod that the kanghā and the karā can be paired with them. The kachh does not find mention in the Gursobha. But the Gursobha was not meant to document every detail. In any case, the kachh as well as the other four Ks figures quite early (in the Rahit-Nama published by McLeod himself).

McLeod's critics fall back on the *Rahitnāmas* to assert that the five Ks were promulgated in 1699. This does not meet McLeod's argument. What can be said against his hypothesis is that it does not make any distinction between the substantive symbols and 'formulation'. Evidence for the former is contemporary; evidence for the latter comes much later.

An integral part of McLeod's argument is that the five Ks came from the Jat cultural patterns, especially the *kesh* and *kirpān*, in the course of the eighteenth century but there is contemporary evidence for both of these. It may be added nevertheless that *kirpān* does not appear to have been popular with the Jats. Guru Hargobind was the first Guru to make it important. Apart from the Sikh tradition, the *Dabistān-i-Mazāhib* bears testimony to his swordsmanship. The evidence on the *kesh*, suggests that the Jats at one time used to keep their hair long. But no sanctity whatever was attached by the Jats to the hair. For Guru Gobind Singh, the sanctity of the *kesh* was all-important. That was the reason why the *kanghā* went with the *kesh* and so did the turban. The case of the *kachh* is even more decisive: the Jats, whether Hindu or Muslim or Sikh, dislike it even today. The *kachh* appears to be a novel idea in contemporary India.

There are some other elements of the rahit which, according to McLeod, were added in the eighteenth century in a-situation when Muslims were seen as the enemy: the ban on the use of tobacco and halāl meat, and the prohibition of sexual intercourse with Muslim women. The evidence of an explicit and emphatic ban on tobacco is there in the Gursobha. The practice of decapitating animals with one stroke (jhatkā) was an old Indian practice. It was observed by Guru Gobind Singh and the Khalsa. Even if the ban was made explicit later, it reinforced the existing practice. The ban on sexual intercourse with 'Muslim' women suggests not merely a state of armed struggle but also a situation in which the Khalsa could be victorious. This situation definitely emerged for the first time in the time of Banda Bahadur. Moreover, this ban was merely an extension of the Sikh injunction against extra-marital intercourse. Significantly, Qazi Nur Muhammad in the third quarter of the eighteenth century admires the Singhs specifically for the fact that they never molested the women of the vanquished. We can see that all the elements of the rahit seen by McLeod as adopted during the eighteenth century came actually earlier. No important symbol can be traced to the Jat culture. What we are left with is the general principle that the rahit as a whole evolved in time. In the Rahit-Nama published by McLeod there is the suggestion that, keeping in view the teachings of the Guru Granth and the known injunctions of Guru Gobind Singh, the Khalsa may add new items to the rahit. Conformity with the earlier tradition was the criterion of addition.

On the issue of the doctrine of Guruship, the essential difference between the early evidence used by Ganda Singh and Harbans Singh lies in the IJPS 6:2 152

latter's use of the Bhatt Vahi which makes explicit reference to 'Sri Granthji' in connection with succession. They both accept the authenticity of this source. However, the nature and character of Bhatt Vahis have not yet been examined critically to evaluate their authenticity. The use of the phrase 'Sri Granthji' itself is rather exceptional. In all the other evidence cited by Ganda Singh and Harbans Singh, explicit reference to the Granth Sahib appears later. In the earliest known evidence the term used is Shabad and not Granth. Ganda Singh and Harbans Singh themselves draw the inference that it refers to the Granth Sahib compiled by Guru Arjan. The use of the word shabad does enunciate the principle of scriptural Guru and includes the Adi Granth. In fact there was no Dasam Granth at the time of Guru Gobind Singh's death. However, Guru Gobind Singh had also composed bāñi and it was regarded as sacred by his followers. What was to be its formal status? This  $b\tilde{a}\tilde{n}i$  was included in the Dasam Granth, generally believed to have been compiled in the 1730s. Its existence presented a problem. For example, Kesar Singh Chhibber treats the Adi Granth as the Guru. But he does emphasise that the Book of the Tenth Master was entitled to respect and veneration. The respect and veneration given to the Dasam Granth was noticed by the contemporary observers. But the status of the Guru was given only to the Adi Granth.

Then there is the doctrine of Guru Panth. It appears to have been as important as the doctrine of Guru-Granth till the establishment of Sikh rule in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. McLeod rightly refers to the emergence of the idea of the sangat as the Guru before the time of Guru Gobind Singh. The injunction of Guru Gobind Singh can be seen as the culmination of this development. We also know that the Word was equated with the Guru from the very beginning, and that Gurbāni was equated with the Word much before the time of Guru Arjan. It is clear, therefore, that this doctrine, like the other, owes its distant origin to the days of Guru Nanak, and its immediate origin to an injunction of Guru Gobind Singh. The eighteenth century situation was conducive to their general acceptance and crystallisation.

Our analysis of the debate supports neither McLeod nor his critics. It does not refute the principle of historical evolution. Rather, it gives a significant dimension to the principle, refuting the notion of rupture. We also find that the application of this principle by McLeod does not find support from credible evidence. He tries to make a strong case for 'environment' at the cost of the role of ideas and creative responses but he remains unsuccessful. The principle of evolution itself demands close attention to both ideology and environment, not as mutually exclusive alternatives but in their mutual interaction. For a meaningful perspective it is necessary to see the operation of ideas and to appreciate the continuously vital role of institutions based on ideology.

### **Notes**

1. W H McLeod *The Sikhs: History, Religion and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 35-38

- Ibid, 39-40
- Ibid, 40
- Gurdev Singh (ed) Perspectives on the Sikh Tradition (Patiala: Siddharth 4. Publications, 1986), 9
- W H McLeod The Evolution of the Sikh Community (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 2
- Ibid, 3-5
- 7. Ibid, 7-9
- 8. Ibid, 9-10 and 12
- Ibid, 10-14
- 10. Gurdev Singh (1986), 327
- 11. Ibid, 328-31
- 12. Ibid, 331-39
- 13. Ibid, 339-41
- 14. Ibid, 341-42
- 15. Ibid, 342-54
- 16. Ibid, 378-79
- 17. Ibid, 380
- 18. W H McLeod (1975), 14-15
- 19. Ibid, 15-16
- 20. Ibid, 16 ad 19
- 21. Ibid, 15-52
- 22. Ibid, 50-53
- 23. Gurdev Singh (1986), 161-62
- 24. Ibid, 80-81, 170 and 178
- 25. Ibid, 378-80
- 26. W H McLeod (1975), 17
- 27. Ibid, 53-54
- 28. Ibid, 38-45
- 29. Ibid, 46-47
- 30. Ibid, 47-49
- 31. Ibid, 50
- 32. Ibid, 183, 186-87, 191-92, 193-94 and 196
- 33. Ibid, 194-98
- 34. Ibid, 198-210
- 35. Ibid, 211-17 and 223-24
- 36. Ibid, 217-23
- 37. Talking of the Sikh revolt, Irfan Habib says that 'religion almost entirely replaced caste as the cementing bond among rebel ranks', The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1526-1707 (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963), 342

# Formulation of the Convention of the five Ks: A Focus on the Evolution of the Khalsa Rahit

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The significance of the number 'five' is well established in the Sikh worldview. Indeed, it is held to be a sacred number. It is not surprising that the tradition of 'five weapons' and 'five garments' was well alive within the Sikh Panth at the inauguration of the Khalsa on Baisakhi Day 1699. Although the five substantive symbols were also there at that time, their formalization into the convention of 'five Ks' came later as the result of Singh Sabha's new defintion of orthodoxy. Thus the system of symbols related to the Khalsa Rahit evolved in response to the changing historical situation.

1

It is commonly understood that all Sikhs initiated into the order of the Khalsa must observe the Rahit ('Code of Conduct') as enunciated by Guru Gobind Singh on Baisakhi Day 1699 and subsequently elaborated. The most significant part of the Rahit is the enjoinder to wear five items of external identity known from their Punjabi names as the five Ks. These are unshorn hair (kes), a wooden comb (kanga), a miniature sword (kirpan), a steel 'wrist-ring' (kara), and a pair of short breeches (kachh). In Sikh self-understanding the five Ks are understood as outer symbols of the divine word, implying a direct correlation between bani ('inspired utterance') and bana ('Khalsa dress'). Putting on the five Ks along with the turban (in the case of male Sikhs) while reciting prayers symbolizes that the Khalsa Sikhs are dressed in the word of God. Their minds are thus purified and inspired, and their bodies girded to do battle with the day's temptations. They are prohibited from four gross sins: cutting the hair, using tobacco, committing adultery, and eating meat that has not come from an animal killed with a single blow (jhataka).

It should, however, be emphasized here that the current scholarship has questioned the assertion made by orthodox Sikhs that the convention of the five Ks originated with Guru Gobind Singh's own declaration at the Baisakhi of 1699. In his recent comments on 'Khalsa birthday bash,' for instance, Khushwant Singh makes the following observation: 'We are not even sure of the exact details of what transpired at Anandpur Sahib on Baisakhi (April 13) in the year 1699. I am pretty certain that the requirement of the five 'Ks' was not spelt out there: Sikh Gurus before Gobind Singh were wearing their hair and beards unshorn and to this day no one has been able to explain the significance of the *kadda* (steel bracelet) to me.' In a similar vein, W.H. McLeod argues that 'at the end of the [eighteenth] century the convention [of five Ks] was still emergent rather than clearly defined '2 In support

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of his thesis he gives two arguments. First, there is no clear eighteenth-century rahitnama testimony. Second, no one drew the attention of the early Europeans to the actual convention as such. Does this mean that those five items (now known as the five Ks) were not the part of Khalsa discipline in the eighteenth century? This was certainly not the case. We need to examine this issue in its proper historical perspective by posing the following questions: What is the significance of the number 'five' in the Sikh tradition? What is the significance of the Khalsa initiation ceremony from the ritual perspective? How did the system of symbols related to the Khalsa Rahit evolve? How and when did the formulation of the convention of the five Ks occur?

11

In order to understand the full significance of the issue of the five Ks let us put this enquiry briefly into a theoretical perspective which explains the place of ritual symbols in the human cultures. In this context, Victor Turner's insights of ritual symbols are quite helpful. In the first place, Turner argued that symbols are not timeless entities projected by society and reflecting the forms of social organization. Originating in and sustaining the dynamics of social relationships, they do not have fixed meaning; they can condense many meanings together. Inherently 'multivocal', symbols must be interpreted in terms of variety of positions they can occupy in relation to each other in systems of symbols. Indeed, symbols generate a system of meanings within which people act, think and feel. Secondly, Turner argued that human body is the source of symbols and systems of symbols, which are extended outward to organize and understand the social world. In line with Turner's view, Mary Douglas argues that human body is the most important symbol for social and ritual purposes. How the body is handled, presented, decorated, or contorted is a fundamental indicator of more embracing social values. A culture with a high degree of hierarchical grid as well as marked degree of groupism is apt to have very developed notions of bodily purity and impurity, which correlate in turn with a clear distinction between insiders and outsiders, a stress on loyality, and a socialization process that sees personhood as a matter of internalizing social values so as to become an effective member of the whole.3 Indeed, the human body is not merely a physical and biological reality confronting human consciousness as an external and independent entity, but primarily a cultural construct carrying social and cultural meanings and messages. Thirdly, Turner envisioned social structure not as a static organization but as a dynamic process. Accordingly, rituals do not simply restore social equilibrium, they are part of the ongoing process by which the community is continually redefining and renewing itself. In other words, the process of renewal and redefinition is part and parcel of the dynamic aspect of a community.4

Let us now begin our analysis with the significance of the number 'five' in Indic framework in general, and the Sikh worldview in particular. In Indain thought, human body is made up of the following five elements (tat): air (pavan), water (pani), earth (dharati), fire (agani) and ether (akas). There are five senses of action (panj karam indre) and five senses of knowledge (panj gian indre). Further, there are five vices: lust (kam), anger (krodh), greed (lobh), attachment (moh) and pride

(hankar) which lead to the path of evil and suffering in the world. There are five virtues: truth (sat), contentment (santokh), compassion (daya), duty (dharam) and patience (dhiraf) which promote the life of spirituality. In the teachings of the Gurus, the number five acquires further significance. In fact, it is regarded as a sacred or mystical number. In the Japji Guru Nanak describes the following five realms (khand) of spiritual development: the Realm of Duty (dharam khand), the Realm of Knowledge (gian khand), the Realm of Endeavour (saram khand), the Realm of Fulfilment (karam khand) and the Realm of Truth (sach khand). His conception of panch ('five') referes to the truly devout who win divine approval to become supreme as the leaders of men (panch paravan panch paradhan). In fact, Guru Nanak's ideal of panch later on became the inspiration of Guru Gobind Singh's selection of Five Beloved Ones (panj piare) on Baisakhi Day 1699.

Bhai Gurdas offers a detailed interpretation of the significance of the number five in the fifth stanza of his seventh Var (7:5). In particular, he elaborates the mystical presence of 'God among five devotees' (panchayan paramesaro), marked by the unstruck melody of 'five sounds' (panch sabad).8 Elsewhere, he explicitly refers to the tradition of 'five garments' (panj kapare) worn by his contemporary male audience. These were turban (pag), scarf (dupatta / angosha), a long outer shirt (cholara / ang-rakha), waist-band (pataka / kamar-kasa) and an under-garment (kachh / chadar). He also talks about 'all the weapons' (sai hathiari surama) worn by the brave who enjoy a particular reputation in the company of the village-council (panchi parves).9 Evidently this was the time when the Sikhs had already started bearing arms at the command of Guru Hargobind, and they had four skirmishes against the Mughal forces. The author of Dabistan-i-Mazahib attests to the fact that Guru Hargobind had seven hundred horses in his stable, and that three hundred cavaliers and sixty artillerymen were at his command all the time.10 It was this militaristic context in which the tradition of 'five garments-five weapons' (pani bastar panj shastar) came to the fore in the affairs of the Sikh Panth. The Punjabi phrase shastar bastar sajauna may be frequently heard from the Nihang Singhs even today when they get ready in the morning. Thus the tradition of weapons was part and parcel of Sikh life at Anandpur in the last decades of the seventeenth century.

On Baisakhi Day 1699 Guru Gobind Singh baptized the first 'Five Beloved Ones' (panj piare) who formed the nucleus of the new order of the Khalsa. These five volunteers who responded to the Guru's call for loyalty, came from different castes and regions of India. They received the initiation through a ceremony, involving sweetened water, stirred with a two-edged sword and sanctified by the recitation of five liturgical prayers. Interestingly, this ceremony was conducted with the use of the following five substances: (1) a double-edged sword (khanda) symbolizing the divine attributes of justice and grace; (2) a steel bowl (sarb loh da batta) symbolizing the 'unbending' nature of character and the courage of conviction; (3) water (jal) symbolizing purity; (4) sugar crystals (patashas) symbolizing the virtues of sweetness and humility; and (5) five liturgical prayers (panj banis) symbolizing the transforming power of the divine Word. Thus the Guru prepared the nectar of immortality (amrit) while sitting in the 'heroic posture' (bir asan), keeping the right knee on the ground and holding the left knee upright. The amrit was then given to the novice to drink it five times so that his body is

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purified from the influence of five vices, and five times was it sprinkled on his eyes to transform his outlook towards life. Finally, it was poured five times on his head to sanctify his hair so that he preserves his natural form and listens to the voice of his conscience. Throughout this whole procedure the initiated Sikh formally takes the oath each time by repeating the following declaration: *Vahiguru Ji Ka Khalsa! Vahiguru Ji Ki Fateh!* ('Khalsa belongs to the Wonderful Lord! Victory belongs to the Wonderful Lord!).

Three significant issues are linked with the first amrit ceremnoy from the perspective of ritual studies. In the first place, all those who chose to join the order of the Khalsa through the amrit ceremony were understood to be 'reborn' in the house of the Guru. They had undergone 'a sacramental 'passage', a death-like experience for their celestial vision of and interface with the [divine] Spirit -Destroyer and Creator at the same time.'11 They all assumed a new identity. The male members were given the new surname Singh ('lion') and female members were given the surname Kaur ('princess'), with the intention of creating a parallel system of aristocratic titles in relation to the Rajput hill-chiefs of the surrounding areas. From that day onwards, Guru Gobind Singh was their spiritual father and his wife, Sahib Kaur, their spiritual mother. Their birthplace was Kesgarh Sahib (the gurdwara that commemorates the founding of the Khalsa) and their home was Anandpur Sahib, Punjab. This new sense of 'belongingness' set them apart from the Hindu renouncers who made the following resolve at the time of initiation: 'I am no one's, and no one is mine.' In the majority of initiation rites, Mercea Eliade says, the rhythm is similar: an initial movement into death through which the previous existence is discarded and a culmination of the ritual in a reformation as well as a new creation in the image of the divine Being. He further maintains that whenever the rite of initiation is performed it is a reactualization of the primordial event.<sup>12</sup> Incidentally, whenever the amrit-ceremony takes place it is always conducted by five Khalsa Sikhs representing the original 'Five Beloved Ones' (panj piare). Also, the pattern of death and rebirth during the amrit-ceremony is singularly evident in the popular understanding of the Sikh community.

Secondly, the Guru symbolically transferred his spiritual authority to the Five Beloved Ones when he himself received the nectar of the double-edged sword (khande da amrit) from their hands and became part of the Khalsa Panth subject to its collective will. In this way, he not only paved the way for the termination of personal Guruship, but also abolished the institution of masands ('vicars'). The masand system begun by Guru Ram Das in order to raise revenues for the community was becoming increasingly disruptive. Several of the masands refused to forward collections to the Guru and involved themselves in creating a spirit of factionalism in the Sikh Panth. Thus all Sikhs were commanded by the Guru to abandon the authority of the masands and place themselves directly under his control. In addition, Guru Gobind Singh removed the threat posed by the competing seats of authority when he declared that the Khalsa should have no dealings with the followers of Prithi Chand (minas), Dhir Mal (dhirmalias) and Ram Rai (ramraias). In this context, Max Gluckman's study of ritual makes perfect sense. He argues that 'every social system is a field of tension, full of ambivalence, of co-operation and contrasting struggles.' As such, rituals exaggerate very real conflicts that exist in the organization of social relations and then affirm unity despite structural conflicts.

They have the cathartic effect of releasing social tensions, thereby limiting discontent and diffusing the real threat contained in such discontent. Therefore, the goal of the ritual is to channel the expression of conflict in therapeutic ways so as to restore a functioning social equilibrium.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, Guru Gobind Singh delivered the nucleus of the Rahit at the inauguration of the Khalsa to guide the life activities of the newly reconstituted Sikh Panth. By sanctifying the hair with the amrit he made them 'the official seal of the Guru' (kes guru di mohar hai). The cutting of 'bodily hair' was thus strictly prohibited (bajjar kurahit). The Guru further imposed a rigorous ban on smoking. In addition, he made the wearing of 'five weapons' (panj hathiar) such as sword, disc, arrow, noose and gun obligatory for the Khalsa Sikhs. This injunction must be understood in the militaristic context of the contemporary situation. In fact, the Shastar Nam-mala ('Rosary of the Names of Weapons') of the Dasam Granth celebrates the power of the weapons. Indeed, Guru Gobind Singh identifies Akal Purakh with the Sword: 'Thee I invoke, All-conquering Sword, Destroyer of Evil, Ornament of the brave...Hail to the world's Creator and Sustainer, my invincible Protector the Sword.' Here divinity is made manifest in the burnished steel of the unsheathed sword. The 'sword' (kirpan), therefore, becomes the prominent symbol in the Sikh doctrine and the amrit-ceremony of the Khalsa Panth.

Although we do not have any eyewitness account of the founding of the Khalsa, the near contemporary source of Kavi Sainapati's Gur Sobha (1711) informs us that the Guru required the Khalsa to observe the following three injunctions: (1) to leave their hair uncut; (2) to carry arms; and (3) to renounce the smoking of tobacco (hukah tiag).15 These three injunctions form the nucleus of the early Rahit. In particular, the performance of tonsure (bhadan) ceremony was to be abandoned. By this injunction Guru Gobind Singh drew a contrast between the Sikh bodily symbols and those of both traditional Hindu renouncer with his shaven head and the Muslim with his circumcised male organ. That is, the Sikh holy man, by contrast, has long hair, is married, and is uncircumcised. Patrick Olivele argues that there is a structural inversion between Hindu renouncers and Sikhs: 'The Sikh householder, the representative of a new form of holiness, stands, in structural opposition to two Hindu institutions: the ordinary householder because the Sikh is a holy man, and the renouncer because the Sikh affirms holiness within marriage and society. This dual opposition is symbolized on the one hand by the Sikh long hair and on the other by the turban that encloses and controls the hair and by the wellgroomed and waxed beard." It is no wonder that unshorn hair has acquired a central place in the Khalsa Rahit.

Ш

It is worth noting that the Sikh scholars frequently cite a hukam-nama ('commandment') which Guru Gobind Singh addressed to his followers in Kabul.<sup>17</sup> This was dated sambat 1756 (1699 CE), the very year of the founding of the Khalsa, and in it he refers to the necessity of bearing the five items, now referred to as the five Ks (although the phrase panj kakke is not exclusively mentioned even in this letter). Its authenticity is, however, questioned on the following two grounds. First, it lacks the Guru's seal and second, it is in 'direct contradiction to other early

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sources which make it perfectly clear that the five Ks were not among the Guru's instructions.' That is perhaps why this particular hukam-nama is not to be found in Ganda Singh's collection, Hukam-name. 19 From his authentic hukam-namas it is quite evident that Guru Gobind Singh gave the injunction to the Khalsa to wear five weapons: 'Appear before the Guru with five weapons on your person' (hathiar panje bann ke darsan avana). We have already noted that the tradition of 'five garments' and 'five weapons' was in vogue within the Sikh Panth at the time of the inauguration of the Khalsa. In this context, J.S. Grewal has pointed out that in the near-contemporary sources 'there are more frequent references to 'five weapons' than to five K's.' 21

In the eighteenth-century rahit-nama attributed to Chaupa Singh the five Ks are not mentioned as such, although there are numerous references to the uncut hair and the sword. Certain references to other items are found only in the scattered form. A later version of the Chaupa Singh rahit-nama does mention the five items which loyal Sikhs must embrace and three of these -- kachh, kirpan, kes -- figure in the five Ks. However, the other two items are bani (the sacred words of the scripture) and sadh sangat (the congregation of the faithful). Another eighteenth-century text, the Sarab Loh Granth, which awaits serious scholarly analysis, refers to kachh, kes and kirpan as three important 'signs' (mudras) of the amrit-dhari Sikh (kachh kes kirpanan mudrit gur bhagatan ramdas bhae). Each of them represents a particular symbol system, the kachh representing 'five garments', kes representing bodily symbols, and the kirpan representing 'five weapons'. Thus they acquired prominence as 'official insignias' (mudras) of the Khalsa Rahit during the eighteenth-century.

The observations made by the early Europeans on the contemporary Sikh institutions, manners, dress and customs offer valuable information on the nature of Sikh society late in the eighteenth century. For the most part they seem to have recorded what they actually saw in their personal encounters with the troops of the Khalsa army. Thus from the historical point of view their accounts constitute an independent witness to the Khalsa tradition in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. However, one must use them cautiously because their authors 'brought to bear on the subject of their writing the prejudices of a diverse culture.' For instance, when Major James Browne writes about the dark blue dress of the Sikh soldiers that 'gives them when collected in large bodies together, a very dismal appearance', he is imposing his own cultural values on entirely a different people having different cultural meaning of the colour of their dress. Ganda Singh's apologetic comment on Browne's observation runs as follows:

Guru Gobind Singh never ordered his Sikhs to put on the dress of any particular colour. The zealous Nihangs however patronized the dark blue colour used by the Guru during his escape from Machhiwara.<sup>27</sup>

Here Ganda Singh is trying to explain away the significance of the dark blue colour by associating it with the zealous Nihangs who may be following the tradition of Guru Gobind Singh. His primary concern is to make the point that blue colour is not really the part of Sikh orthodoxy. For the Khalsa Sikhs, however, the significance of

deep blue colour lies in the 'highest ideals of character' (nili siahi kada karani)<sup>28</sup> and the 'deepest urges in the life of spirituality,' as the blue sky reflects the highest horizon and the blue ocean stands for the depth.<sup>29</sup>

George Forster encountered two bands of Sikh troops on his journey, and he makes the following observation:

In this matter I speak from a personal knowledge, having in the course of my journey seen two of their parties, each of which amounted to about two hundred horsemen. They were clothed in white vests, and their arms were preserved in good order: the accoutrement, consisting of primary horns and ammunition pouches, were chiefly covered with European scarlet cloth, and ornamented with gold lace. 30

In the footnote, Forster elaborates on the meaning of 'white vests' as 'a long calico gown, having close body and sleeves, with a white skirt.' Here one encounters Khalsa soldiers wearing white dress with their usual weaponry. In Sikh understanding, the colour white stands for 'purity' in life. White dress has always been a part of the Sikh tradition.

There is still another observer John Griffiths, who wrote about 'Dominions of the Seeks' in his letter of 17th February, 1794 to Mr. Alexander Adamson. He comments on the dress of the Sikhs as follows:

They sometimes wear yellow, but the prevailing Colour of their Cloaths is deep blue; They make their Turbans capaciously large, over which they frequently wear a piece of pliable Iron Chain or Net work.<sup>32</sup>

Here the author mentions yellow, along with the prominent deep blue, as the popular colours of the Khalsa dress. It is the colour of sacrifice in Sikh mores. To tie a large conspicuous turban with a piece of iron chain or network is still a popular tradition among the Nihang Singhs of Punjab. It may have served the purpose of saving the head from the blow of a weapon during the warfare. It is not surprising to see Nihang Singhs carrying the small insignias of five weapons underneath their turbans even today.

The point to be noted here is that each European observer is speaking about a particular group of Khalsa soldiers whom he encountered. It is quite possible that his observation may reflect a partial view, based on an imperfect perception. One must be careful not to accept the observation of one author as a general statement on the Khalsa tradition late in the eighteenth century. The colour of the military uniform is a matter of necessity for the sake of identification during warfare. Different bands of the Khalsa soldiers may have adopted different colours for better organization. However, it may be noted that the three colours - deep blue, white and yellow - mentioned by the Europeans have always been traditionally associated with the Khalsa dress. Thus we have a first-hand independent witness to the 'weapons and garments' (shastar bastar) traditionally worn by the Khalsa Sikhs in the eighteenth century.

Almost all the early Europeans are unanimous that following an initiation ceremony the Sikhs refrained from cutting their hair, wore an iron 'wrist-ring,' and strictly avoided the use of tobacco. For instance, Forster writes: 'They permit the growth of hair of the head and beard, they generally wear an Iron Bracelet on the left hand and the use of Tobacco is proscribed among them.' Colonel A.L.H. Polier noticed 'a pair of blue drawers' as part of the few garments typically worn by the Sikhs whom he observed. William Francklin's following remark may draw our attention to the use of comb: '[A]fter performing the requisite duties of their religion by ablution and prayer, they comb their hair and beards with peculiar care.' In the context of the present discussion on the five Ks, one can assume that the sword (kirpan) must have been part of the weaponry worn by the Khalsa Sikhs of the eighteenth century, and the comb (kangha) would be concealed in their conspicuous turbans. Thus the five items, now known as five Ks, were already there in the eighteenth century, though they were not defined as such.

It is, however, important to note that the gur-bilas ('splendour of the Guru') literature such as Sainapati's Gur Sobha (1711), Sukha Singh's Gur Bilas Dasvin Patshahi (1798) and Rattan Singh Bhangu's Prachin Panth Prakash (1841) are completely silent on the convention of five Ks. True to their style these authors present the militant ideal of the Khalsa. Koer Singh's Gurbilas Patshahi 10 (early nineteenth century), for instance, mentions the following five items: 'One should always love the company of weapons, the Guru's word (gur sabad), kachh (underwear) and kes (hair). The wearing of sword (karad) make the total five, and one should never abandon them from the daily discipline' (Dohara: shastr mel gur sabad so, kachh kesan sad prem. karad rakhani panch ey tajai na kab hi nem36.). Thus it is not surprising that John Malcolm refers to a tradition of five weapons in his Sketch of the Sikhs (1812). He mentions that at the time of the Khalsa initiation 'five weapons' - a sword, a firelock, a bow and arrow, and a pike - were presented to the initiate.37 At the time of the annexation of the Punjab in 1849, however, the British put a legal ban on carrying weapons. In the light of this situation Baba Ram Singh had to ask his followers to carry a simple staff.38 One can assume that in order to meet this new situation the organizers of the Singh Sabha movement replaced the tradition of 'five weapons' with that of 'five religious symbols', known as Five Ks.

It is not surprising that M.A. Macauliffe, who faithfully offers Singh Sabha mode of interpretation, wrote in 1881 that

All orthodox Sikhs must have five appurtenances whose names begin with the letter K. They are spoken of by the Sikhs as five K's, and are --the Kes or long hair, the Kirpan, a small knife with an iron handle round which the Kes, thus rolled, is fastened on the head, the Kachh or drawers, and the Kara, an iron bangle for the wrist.<sup>29</sup>

Here, the 'Kirpan' no longer remains a 'weapon' worn diagonally across the right shoulder in a sash-like *gatara* (or 'belt'). Rather it is worn as a matter of religious conviction along with the long hair (kes) and concealed under the turban. Macauliffe's understanding of the ceremonial sword (kirpan), therefore, reflects the contemporary Sikh response to the British policy of banning the weapons. Similarly,

at the close of the nineteenth century Captain R.W. Falcon explicitly mentions the tradition of five Ks in his handbook for the use of regimental officers. 40 The British reinforced the legitimacy of the five Ks through its recruitment policy. In this context, N.G. Barrier writes: 'Only Sikhs with the 5 Ks could join the army and part of their initiation was baptism and a pledge to maintain 'orthodox' practices.' Thus the five items which were already there as a part of the Khalsa discipline, acquired new significance because of the Singh Sabha's new definition of orthodoxy. This is not surprising since every dynamic community is always involved in the process of redefinition and renewal. In this context, J.S. Grewal has compellingly argued that it is necessary to make a distinction between the formulation of the five Ks and its substantive prototypes. The formulation came later but the substantive symbols were there from the time of instituting the Khalsa.<sup>42</sup>

IV

Before we conclude the discussion on the five Ks, let us examine J.P.S. Uberoi's perceptive analysis of the symbolism of the five Ks. He maintains that the primary meaning of the five symbols lies in the ritual conjunction of two opposed forces. The unshorn hair, the sword and the implicit uncircumcised male organ express the first aspect. They are assertive of forceful human potentialities that are themselves amoral, even dangerous, powers. The comb controls the power of the hair, the steel bangle controls the power of the sword, and the underwear (kachh) the power of the uncircumcised male organ. Hence these three express the second aspect, that of constraint and moral discrimination. The combination of these two aspects may be elaborated in the form of three pairs of opposites as shown in Figure B. This model must be compared with the eighteenth-century system of Sikh symbols given in Figure A as follows:

Figure A

Three Insignias (trai mudras) of Eighteenth-century

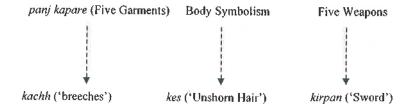
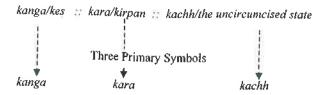


Figure B

### J.P.S. Ubeori's Model of Sikh Symbolism



From Uberoi's model (Figure B), kanga ('comb'), kara ('steel bangle') and kachh ('underwear') emerge as three primary symbols whereas the other two, kes ('hair') and kirpan ('sword'), are reduced to secondary importance because they are linked with 'forceful human potentialities that are themselves amoral, even dangerous, powers.' This hypothesis seems to be the direct opposite to the actual emergence of kachh, kes and kirpan as three mudras ('official insignias') of Khalsa Rahit in the eighteenth century as shown in Figure A.

It is important to note that Ubroi's emphasis on the uncircumcised state reflects the gender bias. Further, it is based on the assumption that the convention of five Ks originated from Guru Gobind Singh's declaration on the Baisakhi Day of 1699. Uberoi does not take into account the process of redefintion of the Khalsa Rahit by the Singh Sabha scholars who seem to have replaced the original tradition of 'five weapons' with that of the 'five Ks.' If the present illuminates the past in any historical analysis, then it will be instructive to note how Jarnail Singh Bhindranvale revived the original tradition of weapons in the recent past when militancy had once again come to the fore in the affairs of the Panth. He used to wear a revolver alongside the kirpan he wore in the sash-like *gatara*. The most interesting example of this kind of phenomenon may be seen from the modern weapons worn by the 'Five Beloved Ones' at a recent amrit-ceremony at Gurdwara Fremont in California. <sup>44</sup> The Khalsa Sikhs of California felt the need to display the weapons at the actual amrit-ceremony.

Furthermore, during the eighteenth century the underwear (kacch), unshorn hair (kes) and the sword (kirpan) enjoyed a particular place of prominence as 'three official insignias' (trai mudras) within the Panth. To these primary symbols, two secondary symbols (kangha and kara) were added to make the total 'five'. The sanctity of the number 'five' in the Sikh tradition may be seen in the contemporary example of the making of 'five Takhats' ('Thrones', five centres of temporal authority in the Panth) in the 1960s. This has happened during our lifetime, and we are witness to this historical phenomenon. When the name of the fifth Takhat at Damdama Sahib, Talvandi Sabo, was proposed, the Sikh community accepted it without any reservation. There was no opposition to the idea. Indeed, the significance of the number 'five' comes to light in this process. There is, however, no possibility of having a 'sixth Takhat' now. The process of formalization is complete. If the present illuminates the past, then it is important to keep this

historical analysis in mind all the time. Similarly, the full significance of the 'Five Ks' developed slowly within the Sikh Panth, although all the items were present since the beginning of the Khalsa tradition.

It is, therefore, crucial to understand the dynamic nature of the cultural phenomenon in which the meanings of certain symbols can change with the change in the historical context. Catherine Bell has ably demonstrated 'how the relationships between ritual and its context can generate a variety of changes in the structures, symbols, and interpretations of ritual activities.' She further argues that despite many popular preconceptions, ritual is not primarily a matter of unchanging tradition. On the contrary, some analysts now see ritual as a particularly effective means of mediating tradition and change. Indeed, it is a medium for appropriating some changes while maintaining a sense of cultural continuity. Ritual can only play such a role from within the system, that is, as a component of the system that is defined and deployed in ways that interlock with how tradition and change are viewed. It is not surprising that the amrit ceremony perfomed for the last three centuries can simultaneously affirm long-standing communal values of continuity and authoritative tradition while also allowing the Khalsa Sikhs to experience these values with different expectations and needs.

In sum, the formulation of the convention of the 'five Ks' became evident from the literature produced as a result of Singh Sabha's new definition of orthodoxy. Although these substantive symbols were already there in the early tradition, their formalization in the late nineteenth century enhanced their value. It is not surprising that the Sikh scholarly tradition has been continuously involved in the process of redefining the Khalsa Rahit in different historical contexts.

### Notes

Acknowledgement: I am grateful to Professor J.S. Grewal for his valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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- 4. The details in this paragraph are cited in ibid., 39-41.
- 5. For details on items related to number 'five' see Ramesh Chander Dogra and Gobind Singh Mansukhani, *Encyclopaedia of Sikh Religion and Culture* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1996), 353-57.
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- 8. Varan Bhai Gurdas 7:5. The 'five sounds' are described as follows: para, pasanti, madhama, baikhari and sabad-braham.
- 9. Varan Bhai Gurdas 36: 11. The explanation of 'five garments' (panje kapare) may be seen in Var 2: 10 (pagg dupatta cholara pataka parvan). Also see Kahan Singh Nabha, Gurshabad RatanakarMahan Kosh (Patiala: Bhasha Vibhag Punjab, 4th edn., 1981), 792.
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- 25. G. Khurana, British Historiography on Sikh Power in Punjab (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1985), 13.
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- 31. Ibid., 288.
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# The Khālsā in Comparative Perspective

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The institution of the khālsā, initiated by Guru Gobind Singh on the Vaisakhi – day on 30 March, 1699 at Anandpur Sahib has been viewed both by the Sikh and non-Sikh interpreters from different perspectives. The majority of western interpreters have seen it as a deviation from the peace loving spiritual path laid by the Primal Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak Dev. If the holy verses of Gurbani, the holy utterance of Guru Gobind Singh and the traditional Sikh sources are to be relied on, there is only one perspective to examine and evaluate the nature of khālsā panth ie the context of sacred communities that have emerged among the world religions such as the church, umma, sangha, etc. Drawing upon the parallels in the other sacred communities the present endeavour seeks to elucidate the nature of the khālsā panth including its inauguration, relation with the sangal, that is, the underlying unity in the changing events of history, method of initiation, code of conduct, identity and the purpose of creation

In the tercentenary year of the khālsā a reappraisal of the understanding of the nature of khālsā seems to be most appropriate. The khālsā, as we are well aware by now is the religious fellowship or the sacred community of the Sikhs as it came to be so designated after the initiation ceremony by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh on the Vaisakhi Day of 1699 at Anandpur Sahib (now in the Ropar District of Punjab).

Ganda Singh explains, 'the term khālsā is derived from the Arabic khālis (literally pure, unsullied) and Perso-Arabic khālisāh (literally pure, office of revenue department; lands directly under government management), and is used collectively for community of the baptised Sikhs. The term khālisāh was used during the Muslim rule in India for crown lands administered directly by the king without the mediation of jagirdars or manabdars'.

Further eleborating the implications of the term in the context of the Sikh community Ganda Singh says, 'the term khālsā, however acquired a specific connotation after Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) introduced, on March 30, 1699, the new form of initiatory rite *Khande dī pāhul* (rites by *Khandā* or double edged sword). Sikhs so initiated on that Vaisakhi day were collectively designated as khālsā....khālsā who belonged to Vāhigurû, the

Supreme Lord.

The phrase Vāhiguru ji kā khālsā became part of the Sikh Salutation: Vāhiguru ji kā khālsā Vāhiguru ji ki Fateh (Hail the khālsā who belongs to the Lord God! Hail the Lord God to whom belongs the victory). The khālsā in the above sense is God's own or chosen people. The community instituted by the founder of the faith, Guru Nanak was called Sangat (congregation, assembly) or Panth. According to Fauja Singh the term panth is derived from the Sanskrit Patha, pathin or pantham which means literally a way, passage or path and figuratively, a way of life, religious creed or cult. In the Sikh terminology, the word panth stands for the Sikh faith as well as for the Sikh people as a whole. Even after the initiation of the khālsā the term panth was not altogether dropped and the community is often referred to as the khālsā panth.

The institution of the khālsā has been viewed by both the Sikh and non-Sikh interpreters from different perspectives. The majority of the western interpreters have viewed the creation of the khālsā by Guru Gobind Singh as a deviation from the peace loving spiritual path laid down by Guru Nanak Dev. Wilson writes,

'The succession of the son of Tegh Bahadur - Guru Govind constitutes the most important era in political progress of the Sikhs. He, in fact, changed the whole character of the community and converted the Sikhs of Nanak, the disciple of a religion of spirituality and benevolence, and professors of a faith of peace and goodwill into an armed confederacy, a military republic'.<sup>4</sup>

A galaxy of the 'illustrious' Hindu scholars have not lagged behind in terming the creation of khālsā by Guru Gobind Singh as a great fall from the lofty spirituality of Guru Nanak. M.K. Gandhi in his Young India termed Guru Gobind Singh as a 'misguided patriot'. R.N. Tagore in one of his articles labelled the khālsā as a 'cantonment of mere soldiers'. J.N. Sarkar follows Tagore in his article on the Sikhs published in the April issue of the Modern Review, Calcutta, 1916. Not only does he follow Tagore but he also quotes him with some pride.5 In the electronic media and newspapers Guru Gobind Singh is often compared with Shivaji and Rana Partap as the protector of the sovereignty and unity of the country. In the assessment of Puran Singh, 'what was Shivaji but an ordinary soldier of Guru Gobind Singh minus his spirituality. Shivaji may be great politically but it is fetish worship if we raise him in the eyes of the nation as a spiritual genious'.6 The majority of the scholars conversant with the modern western scientific method of analysis have seen the creation of khālsā as a strategic move on the part of Guru Gobind Singh to respond to the growing challenge of the repressive regime of the Moghals. The Marxist Sikh scholars such as Kishan Singh,7 have perceived the creation of the khālsā as the inauguration of the prototype of a proletariat movement among the Sikhs. A

few earlier Sikh chroniclers<sup>8</sup> have represented the creation of the khālsā as a step to purge Sikh religious organisation (sangat) of the corrupt and rapacious practices of the masands (intermediaries between the sangat and the Guru). One prominent common feature of all these interpretations is their being reductionist in nature. No doubt, the reform, reformulation, purgation and fight against the tyrants are inseparable parts of the khālsā organisation but its basic concern remains the establishment of the kingdom of God, satiyuga, ram rajya, etc. at the initiative of God Himself. The above interpreters coming from diverse fields have attempted to measure the immeasurable vision of the Guru in the light of their own limited vision and understanding.

If the holy verses of Gurbāni, the sacred utterances of Guru Gobind Singh, the unbroken oral tradition of the faithful and the accounts of the earlier Sikh sources are to be relied on there is only one perspective to examine and evaluate the nature of khālsā panth that is, the context of the sacred communities which have emerged among the world religions such as the church, umma, sangha, varnāshrama system, etc. In the portrayal of the panth and the khālsā organisation, the umma, the varnāshrama system and other divinely ordained human organisations have been repeatedly mentioned by the Gurus and the traditional Sikh interpreters as the forerunners of the sangat, panth and the khālsā. The emergence of the panth and khālsā is related to the decline of the above institutions in performing their function in an impartial and just way.

If the khālsā is to be viewed in the context of religious communities developed among the world religions then a brief elucidation of the nature of religious communities seems to be in order. In his attempt to describe the nature of the church, the Dutch phenomenlogist of religion G.van der Leeuw has offered the following comprehensive definition: 'The church is therefore visible-invisible at once humanly organised and mystically animated, spiritual and cosmic'. The above definition of the church can be extended to the majority of religious communities in the world. The sacred communities have a dual character, they are at once divinely inspired and humanly organised. The sacred communities are grounded in the religious experience of their founders. According to Kitagawa:

Religious experience is one kind of human experience. However it is qualitatively different from other human experience in the sense that it is decisive. It often causes a new life a devaluation of all that preceded. Religious man is not satisfied with life as it is given; he seeks the fulfilment of life at the ultimate limit of life.<sup>10</sup>

At another place, quoting the well known theory of two types of relationships offered by Martin Buber, Kitagawa explains the nature of religious experience

in relation to other human experiences. He states:

There is a qualitative difference between religious experience and other kinds of human experience, which can be characterised in terms of Martin Buber's famous theory of two kinds of relationships: an 'I - It relationship' and an 'I - Thou relationship' and...we might say that in religion man experiences an intensive 'I - Thou relationship', using the term religion in the broadest sense. Religious man does not live in a different world: he views the same world from a different perspective - the perspective of an 'I - Thou relationship.<sup>11</sup>

In an attempt to relate the above mentioned character of the religious experience to the existence of religious fellowship, he explains:

Religious fellowship does not exist apart from human fellowship, because it is conditioned and coloured by other kinds of human experience and fellowship. The relationship between religious fellowship and other human fellowships is intricate and complex. On the one hand, religion tends to intensify or even transform human fellowships. On the other hand, religion often creates its own "holy communities" in the midst of and yet apart from other human communities. In some cases religion sanctifies one form of human community such as the family (as in the case of Confucianism) or tribe. <sup>12</sup>

In the modern desacralised world the secular societies tend to separate their fellowship from the holy communities. However, for the primitive or archaic man there was only one community, that is, the sacred community and his relation to this community was characterised by the 'I - Thou relationship'. Elaborating the point further Kitagawa says 'Arachaic man considered the earthly society a counterpart of heavenly society'. Following the interpretation of Mircea Eliade (Cosmos and History) Kitagawa relates that the earthly societies were replicas of the heavenly city, and the human community was the holy community in the sense that it was the extension of the celestial community.13 Concerning the essential nature of the sacred community, Kitagawa arrives at the following conclusion: 'the holy community participates in two societies, spiritual and empirical and it also recognises two histories of salvation and empirical history'. 14 The eschatological goals always form inseparable part of the religious fellowships. The religious experience imparts a depth dimension to the religious communities which is not found in any other secular or natural groups. Joachim Wach maintains in this context that:

as far as relationship of members of a religious group to each other is concerned, we may well expect to find a dimension of

depth to which a non-religious association will not always aspire. In most primitive religions a strong tie binds the members of a tribal cult together, and on the level of the great religions, spiritual brotherhood surpasses physical ties between brothers. A "father or mother in God", a "brother or sister in God", may be closer to us than our physical parents and relatives. There is no stronger tie possible between beings than their being related to each other in God. 15

One distinguishing feature of the religious community is its insistence on the requirement of initiatory rites for the novices or new entrants seeking membership of the community. Defining initiation Mircea Eliade maintains:

the term initiation in most general sense denotes a body of rites and oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a radical modification of the religious and social status of the person to be initiated. In philosophical terms, initiation is equivalent to an ontological mutation of the existential condition. The novice emerges from this ordeal a totally different being: he has become "another".<sup>16</sup>

According to Mircea Eliade the initiatory rites always follow a standard pattern that involves 'seclusion', initiatory tests and tortures, 'death' and 'resurrection', 'bestowal or imposition of a new name, revelation of a secret doctrine, learning of a new language'. Initiatory 'death' in the view of Eliade, signifies both the end of the 'natural' acultural man and the passage to a new mode of existence, that of a being 'born to the spirit', that is, one who does not live exclusively in an immediate reality. Thus the initiatory 'death' and 'resurrection' represents a religious process through which the initiate becomes 'another', patterned on the model revealed by gods or mythical ancestors.<sup>17</sup>

Along with these few similarities in the general nature of the religious fellowships and their methods of initiation, there are innumerable variations among them that derive mostly from the respective world views of their preceptors, the nature of authority, inner differentiation, attitude towards the world and a host of other ethnic, geographical, and cultural factors.

As we attempt to evaluate the nature of khālsā panth in the light of the observations above of the celebrated authorities in the field of history of religions, it does not leave an iota of doubt about the essential nature of the khālsā panth. The khālsā panth not only derives its existence from the vision and experience of the founder, as is the case with Christianity and Buddhism, but was actually instituted by the Guru himself on the Vaisakhi day of 1699. The creation of khālsā panth was not the result of any strategic move on the part of Guru Gobind Singh to face the repressive policy of the Mughal regime but a

logical culmination of the sangat or panth founded by Guru Nanak Dev. The khālsā was the result of a well worked out gradual process (sahije rachio khālsā) based on the knowledge dawned by the inspiration and order of the Eternal Guru. Is If the arming of the disciples created the khālsā then Guru Arjan had already asked his son Guru Hargobind to 'sit fully armed on his throne, and maintain army to the best of his ability'. If the fighting of the battles makes the khālsā the Sikhs of Guru Hargobind had already taken part in the battles and emerged victorious. If the call of the Guru to the Sikhs to offer their head makes the khālsā then Guru Nanak Dev has already created the khālsā:

Shouldst thou seek to engage
In the game of love,
Step into my street with they head
Placed on thy palm:
While on this stepping ungrudgingly sacrifice your head.<sup>20</sup>

The fourth Guru, Guru Ram Dass, had said:

To the holy preceptor shall I sacrifice my head, should the thrice-holy preceptor thus be pleased to accept this offering.

Lord Bestower, show grace that

Nanak in your embrace be held.<sup>21</sup>

Guru Arjan lays down the condition for entering into the path of discipleship as follows:

Accept first death as inevitable, and attachment to life discard; Turn dust of feet of all thereafter to us come.<sup>22</sup>

If we take into consideration the evidences of the fifth to twenty second stanzas of the first  $v\bar{a}r$  of Bhai Gurdas, <sup>23</sup> the sixth chapter of Bachittra Nātak, <sup>24</sup> and, innumerable verses of Gurbāni, it becomes absolutely clear that the primary object of the lives of the Gurus was to re-establish the true dharma and to reinvigorate and re-energise the forces of goodness and righteousness. The traditional religion had become estranged from the path of truth and God and corruption and degeneration had overtaken the religious institutions and practices of the people and the prevailing situation was in Guru Nanak's words:

This is the dark night of evil; The moon of truth is nowhere visible, nor risen<sup>25</sup>

Guru Nanak was invested with the mission by God to dispel darkness and

spread the light of truth:

I, an idle bard by Thee a task am assigned
In primal time was I commanded night and day to laud Thee
The bard by the Master to the Eternal Mansion was summoned
And with the robe of holy Divine laudation and praise honoured
On the holy Name ambrosial was he feasted
As by master's guidance on this he has feasted has felt blessed
Saith Nanak: By laudation of holy Eternal,
Is the Supreme Being, all perfection attained.<sup>26</sup>

In the words of Satta and Balwand, by establishing the panth Guru Nanak had started a royal dynasty:

Nanak started the royal dynasty within the firm citadel and foundation of truth.<sup>27</sup>

Bhai Gurdas has repeatedly maintained that Guru Nanak had started a new panth by the command of the Almighty:

'By means of divine word (shabad) he overcome the assembly (of) Siddhs distinguishing this way (Panth) from theirs'.28

'He caused his writ to run throughout the world and (so) inaugurated his holy Panth'.<sup>29</sup>

On the theme of Guru Nanak Dev's establishment of angat, panth and dharma, the Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, himself writes in the Bachittra Nātak thus:

In the family of those Bedis was born the Great Guru Nanak.

He bestowed peace on al Sikhs and protected them in all places.

He established this (Sikh) dharma in the Kali (age) and showed the way to all good people.

Those who came unto his path, their sins and worries were all taken by the Lord.

Pain and hunger never worried them.

They were never entangled by the snares of death.30

From the above cited passages it is quite evident that the panth/sangat was established by Guru Nanak. Later on the same sangat or panth was reconfirmed as the khālsā. Some of the sangats under the direct control of the Guru were designated as khālsā as is evident from the hukamnāmā of Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh Guru, 'the Sangat of the east is Guru's khālsā'.<sup>31</sup>

On 12 March, 1699 just 19 days before the creation of the khalsa, Guru

Gobind Singh in his hukamnāmā addressed to the sangat of the Machhiwara writes '... the Sangat is my khālsā'. 12

Bhai Gurdas II in his  $v\bar{a}r$  says while creating the khālsā Guru Gobind Singh reconverted the sangat into the khālsā, thereby giving the evil doers trouble.<sup>33</sup>

Sainapati, the author of *Sri Guru Sobha* also claims that the tenth Guru reconfirmed the sangat as khālsā:

'Guru Gobind Singh became pleased and the sangat came to be blessed.

Then he manifested the khālsā thereby removing all the bondages'.34

Bhai Sukha Singh also expresses similar views about the creation of khālsā:

'Wherever the beloved sangat of the Guru was, All of them came to be khālsā'.

In spite of all the efforts of trained minds to unravel the mystery of the creation of khālsā, over the period of centuries it still remains as the greatest mystery. There are as many views on the creation of khālsā as there are accounts devoted to describing it. However, the description preserved in the Bachittra Nātak, has been endlessly repeated by all the interpreters. It is as clear and yet as mysterious as any great revealed literature could be. The Guru is reported to have attained oneness with God through meditative penances on him. God blessed Guru Gobind Singh as His son and sent him to the earth by investing him with the mission of establishing and propagating the panth. In the words of Kapur Singh:

he unambiguously states that he, in essence, is an archetypal Form in the Mind of God, conceived by God and transformed by Him into Guru Gobind Singh, to found the order of the khālsā, to aid the cause of good and to thwart evil.<sup>37</sup>

All the earlier Sikh interpreters are unanimous in this view that Guru Gobind Singh created the khālsā at the instance of an explicit Divine Order. The khālsā emerged out of the delight of the primal *purakh* - Eternal God. The khālsā is the ordained army of God and the khālsā belongs to the Timeless one. The khālsā is the visible body of the Guru and the Guru always manifests himself in the body of the khālsā. The purpose of the khālsā is the same as the Guru's coming down to earth that is, to promote the forces of good and to destroy the evil root and branch. The khālsā is the Guru of Guru Gobind Singh and the guruship is bestowed on the Guru Granth Sahib and the khālsā. Before his departure from this mortal world the Guru promised his Sikhs that he would be

present among them wherever five Sikhs assemble. M.A. Macauliffe has recorded the last words of the Guru to the Sikhs as follows:

I have entrusted you to the Immortal God. Ever remain under his protection, and trust to none besides. Whenever there are five Sikhs assembled who abide by Guru's teachings know that I am in the midst of them. He who serveth them shall obtain the reward thereof the fulfilment of all his heart's desires. Read the history of your Gurus from the time of Guru Nanak. Henceforth the Guru shall be the Khālsā and the Khālsā the Guru. 42

The dramatic event of the choice of the five beloved ones (Pañj Piāre) by Guru Gobind Singh on Vaisakhi day 1699 at Anandpur Sahib is too well known to be taken up here for detailed description. It all happened before the sangat in an pen pandal (tent) on the occasion of the festival day. Five times the Guru asked for the head of any devoted Sikh and every time one after another arose with folded hands. They were taken into a nearby tent turn by turn. Each time the congregation assembled for the festivities heard a thud inside the tent and saw the Guru reappearing with the blood-drenched sword in his hand. After the fifth one was taken into the tent there were some dreadful moments of silence in the congregation. The congregation only sighed with relief when they saw the Guru coming out of the tent with the five beloved ones clad in new dresses of the same colour. The Guru announced in the congregation that they were his five beloved ones. Then he prepared khande, bate da amrit (the baptism of double edged sword and steel vessel) and administered this to the five beloved ones. The method of preparing the amrit and its administration is too well know to be repeated here. After the Guru baptised the first five Sikhs he changed their names by affixing Singh, meaning lion to their earlier name. They were given a new salutation: Vāhigurû ji kā Khālsā Vāhigurû ji ki fateh (the khālsā belongs to Almighty God and to God belongs the victory!).

They were taught to recite the credal formula (mûlmantra) and selected holy compositions of the Gurus at the set hours of the day.

They were told that their rebirth into this brotherhood meant the annihilation of their family ties (kulnās) of the occupations which had formerly determined their place in society (Kritnās) of their earlier beliefs and creeds and of ritual they observed. Their worship was to be addressed to none but Akal, the Timeless One. They were ever to keep the five emblems of the khālsā - Kesh or long hair and beard, Kanghā comb tucked into the kesh to keep it tidy in contrast to the recluses who kept it mated in token of their having renounced the world; Karā a

steel bracelet to be worn round the wrist of the right hand; Kachhā, short breeches; and kirpān a sword. In the rehit or code of conduct promulgated for the Sikhs on that day were the four prohibitions, that is, the cutting or trimming of hair, fornication or adultery, halal meat or flesh of animal slaughtered with the Muslim ritual, and tobacco.<sup>43</sup>

According to the Sikh code of conduct (Sikh Rehit Maryādā) prepared by the Shromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar, the Sikhs after baptism are told:

From now on your existence as ordinary individuals has ceased, and you are members of the khālsā brotherhood, your religious father is Guru Gobind Singh (the tenth and last Guru, founder of the khālsā brotherhood) and Sahib Kaur your mother. Your spiritual birthplace is Kesgarh Sahib (birthplace of khālsā) and your home Anandpur Sahib (the place where Guru Gobind Singh inaugurated the khālsā). Your common spiritual parentage makes you all brothers and you should all forsake your previous name (surname) and previous local and religious loyalties. You are to pray to God and God alone, through the scriptures and teachings of the ten Gurus.<sup>44</sup>

It is pertinent to mention here that no distinction is made in Sikh religion in the case of administering amrit to women. However, it is the term 'Kaur' meaning 'princess' that is affixed to their names. From now onwards the earlier Sikh initiation ceremony was discontinued and the Sikh institution of the masands was disbanded.

Having administered amrit to the five beloved ones Guru Gobind Singh presented himself before them to be baptised in the same manner. His wish was granted and his name was also changed from Gobind Rai to Gobind Singh. The khālsā became the Guru of Guru Gobind Singh. The expression 'hail hail Guru Gobind Singh himself Guru (himself) disciple'45 derives its inspiration from this moment. In the traditional Sikh literature the trials of the five beloved ones by Guru Gobind Singh is often compared to the ordeal of Guru Angad Dev by Guru Nanak Dev. At that time, only one Bhai Lehna emerged victorious and he was renamed Angad, (Guru's own body) and he was installed as the second Sikh Guru. Now all five emerged victorious and Guru Gobind Singh installed them as Guru for all times.

The khālsā is not a 'cantonment of mere soldiers' as surmised by R.N. Tagore. The ideal of the khālsā as found promulgated in the hymns of Guru Gobind Singh is as follows:

He whose mind dwells, night and day on the Ever-effulgent Light and who gives not a moment's thought to ought but the One,
Who wears Perfect Love, with Faith, and believes
not even mistakenly in fasting, tombs, crematoriums, and hermitages,
Nor in pilgrimages, nor customary charities, nor a set code of selfdiscipline,
And believes on One alone and not another

And believes on One alone and not another And when God's Light illumines perfectly his heart. Then is he known a khālsā, purest of the pure!47

It may be noticed that the khālsā initiatory ceremony follows the same paradigmatic model as explained by Mircea Eliade in his most comprehensive article. The ceremony involves the process of ordeals, death, resurrection and new life. The ceremony in the words of Mircea Eliade 'reveals to every new generation a world open to the transhuman; a world, one may say, that is transcendental'. The Sikhs have cherished this belief right from the time of the Primal Guru - Guru Nanak Dev: 'by taking new birth with the holy Preceptor is my straying in transmigration annulled'. So

From the foregoing brief description of the nature of khālsā it can be safely maintained that essentially the khālsā Panth is a religious fellowship and its primary aim is to promote and aid the forces of good and to lead mankind on the path of liberation. Along with this primary goal the khālsā has also been enjoined to engage in the sacred duty of destroying and defeating the forces of evil. The latter injunction has far-reaching religious, social and political implications but they cannot be taken up for elaboration in our present limited venture.

Now we can turn our attention to the question of the place of the khālsā among the religious communities of the world. In this context it is not possible to include the description of the nature of each religious community. However, it seems quite pertinent refer to the nature of the Buddhist sangha as an instance. From the following brief account the readers can draw their own conclusion concerning the nature of the khālsā in relation to the sangha.

The Buddhist religious community is designated as sangha. The sangha forms part of the three jewels of Buddhism, that is, the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. The term sangha means 'assembly', or 'multitude' and the term was used in north India at the time of Buddha for assemblies, by means of which contemporary tribal republics or confederations managed their affairs. The republican assemblies are brought into connection with the Buddhist community at the beginning of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* where the Buddha is represented as saying: 'As long as the Vijjians foregather thus often, and frequent the public meetings of their clan so long may they be expected not to decline but to prosper'. 51

The Buddhist sangha was established by Buddha himself when he accepted as his first disciples five men before whom he had preached his first

sermon in a park near Varanasi.<sup>52</sup> The Buddhist sangha in the wider sense of the word consists of four assemblies (*prisads*) they are monks (*bhikkhus*) nuns (*bhikkhunis*) male lay followers (*upasikas*). However, in the narrower sense of the word, sangha is the community of monks and nuns only.<sup>53</sup> The *Pratimoksa*, a part of the Vinayavibhanga text of the *Vinaya Pitaka*, consists of the rules of conduct of the monks and nuns.

The members of the Buddhist sangha were those followers of Buddha who having heard and received the Dhamma were prepared to leave behind family life and become wandering almsmen (bhikkhus). To become a disciple of Buddha means to leave parents and relatives, wife and child, home and property and all else as flamingos leave their lakes. Their own name for the community was bhikkhu sangha but by the non-Buddhists they were at first known as Sakya-puttiya-samanas, that is, wanderers (samanas) of the Sakya clan namely Gotama. In the Padhana-sutta from the Sutta-nipata the nature of the enlightenment of the Buddha is described as follows:

'And in me emancipated arose the knowledge of my emancipation. I realised that destroyed is rebirth, the religious life has been led, done is what was to be done, there is nought (for me) beyond this world... Ignorance was dispelled, knowledge arose, Darkness was dispelled, light arose'. 57

During his life time the Buddha was the highest authority but he declined to appoint a successor, saying that his doctrine alone should guide his followers. When his end was near he exhorted Anand, his close confidant to be 'reliant on the Law, taking refuge in the Law, not taking refuge in another'. Near the Kusinārā the Buddha uttered the following last words to his disciples assembled there:

'Decay is inherent in all component things, work out your own salvation with dilligence!' After his *Mahaparinirvana* the Buddhist community began to discover a deeper and greater significance in the person of Buddha. Not only was he the discoverer and teacher of the path, he was 'the actuality of the central doctrine, the one who has lived it and reached the goal'. 60

In the context of the relation of the khālsā to the Buddhist sangha the following submission of Niharranjan Ray seems interesting:

was the Buddhist Trinity - the Buddha, the Dharma and the Samgha - ever at the back of the mind of Guru Gobind Singh when he set up the Sikh Trinity: the God, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the khālsā? May be, it is an idle speculation, an accidental parallel, may be not. But the fact remains that what Guru Gobind Singh did has been to a very large extent

responsible for making Sikhism and Sikh society what it is today. He decided on a mission just as did the founder Guru, and both saw to it that their respective missions were carried out to their logical end.<sup>61</sup>

Commenting on the nature of the khālsā panth in relation to the Buddhist sangha and the umma J.P.S. Uberoi remarks:

The khālsā was to be, since its inception, a society for salvation and self-realisation, unitarian in vernacularist in culture and democratic in politics; this was in its nature, its constitution and its politics and its modernity of non-dualism. This historical event completed the three-fold identification of the godhead as the guru, the word as the guru and the congregation of the disciples as the guru. Each of them is an identification of the reciprocal embodiment and participation, so producing the archetypal Sikh trinity of Guru, Granth and Panth (the Way). In India perhaps this recalled equally the Buddhist trinity of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha; and the tree-fold equation in Islam of the unity of the godhead (tauhid) the scripture as the word of God (Kalami-Allah) and the community of the faithful (ummat) but I would not press the point.62

Both the authorities cited above have attempted to trace the archetypal similarity between the sangha, the khālsā and also the umma with a note of caution.

We can maintain by way of an interim conclusion that the broadest possible synthesis was attempted in the creation of the khālsā. By bringing together the spiritual and temporal, saniyyas and grihstha, worship and action, raj and yoga, unity and diversity, Guru Gobind Singh created a model that would light the path of many, many future generations.

#### Notes

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# Vaisakhi of 1699: Rupture of the Indian Grand Narratives

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On the Vaisakhi of 1699 when Guru Gobind Singh 'manifested' (Kavi Sainapati) the Khalsa he interviewed to treat the dyslexia both ideationally and surgically through a revolutionary semiotics and a detotalitive practice. The semiotics can be elaborately constructed from the Guru's compositions recited on the occasion to baptise the first five Singhs, called the Panj Piare (the Five Beloveds). The compositions according to Bhai Rattan Singh Bhangu's Parath Parkash (1841) were: Chandi di Var, the invocation in the Bachittra Natak, 32 Swayias. and possibly the Mul Mantra. The revolutionary dimension of the compositions is related to the definition of God for shaping the mind and body of the khalsa, by constantly 'deferring' (Derrida) God's identity. The Guru has critically used the Hindu, Islamic, Yogic, Buddhistic perspectives to re-define, enlarge and destabilise the definition and at the same time given recognition to the different perspectives accepting their inadequacies pushed to silence. In the ritual of amrit touched by the two-edged Khanda symbolising both the creative and dismantling powers of the Life-Principle, the Radiant Divine, the Guru announced the need to end the practice of gradation. First the Guru baptised the panj piare and then in all humility prayed to them to baptise him. In this practice he initiated a life that is inherently detotalitive relying on multi-input but fiercely opposed to hierarchy and unicentering.

The high sacred drama that Guru Gobind Singh enacted on the Vaisakhi of 1699 at the time of initiating the Khalsa by baptising the first Five Beloved (*Panj Piare*) has several dimensions. The most significant one related to the originality of the Khalsa is the new narrative that the Guru gave by culminating and extending the thought of his predecessors. From the works of Lyotard, Adorna, Horkheimer and Bourdieu we now know that a narrative is not only an organised practice of life. From this angle, a narrative has a social and political intention to interpolate a culture and its members.

Guru Gobind Singh's court poet Sainapati who completed his work Sri Gur Sobha in 1711, only three years after the Guru's death, says that the Guru 'formed' the Khalsa Panth to overcome a 'crisis': Sankat nivarbe ko Khalsa

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banayo hai<sup>1</sup>. That crisis or sankat was the inadequacy of the prevalent narratives leading to repression, overall decadence and ruefully blocking personal and cultural growth. The economic structure and state institutions had also become static checking all such activity as could initiate an industrial revolution and cause a liberative ideological explosion like that of the Enlightenment. The two predominant grand narratives that had negatively 'disciplined' (Foucault) and blunted spontaneous blossoming, for which the Gurus used the word 'vigāsu,' were the Brahman-centred Brahmanical and the Allah-centred Islamic. Both the grand narratives had done 'symbolic violence', to use this expression of Bourdieu, by which he means 'the power to impose... the arbitrary instrument of knowledge and expression'.<sup>2</sup>

At the moment of the aptism ritual, according to three scholars: Rattan Singh Bhangu the author of *Sri Gur Panth Parkāsh* completed in 1841, Koer Singh the author of *Gurbilās Pātshāhi 10* completed in 1751, and Sainapati, Guru Gobind Singh recited several compositions of his own. Those were *Jap Sahib*, *Chandi di Vār*, 32 Swayye, and the invocation of *Bachittra Nātāk*. Koer Singh clearly writes: '(the Guru) offered to them [the first initiates] the *Amrit* with several recitations of the bani: *pāth jor thin amrit pivāvaih*. The baptism ritual was performed to psychologically transform the common folk, make them Singhs (lions) and commit them to the new narrative that aimed at countering the symbolic violence of the two hegemonising grand narratives. The high points of the Guru's narrative are its meta-sign God or Akāl Purakh and the consciously intermixed lexicon.

The Guru's counterviolence was directed at the Brahmanical and Islamic narratives for their unitarian thrusts. Before elaborating the Guru's originality, it is appropriate to mention the problematics of these hegemonic narratives. The most representative text of the Brahaman-centred unitarian narrative that has produced a graded and hierarchical society, without plural growth was Sankara'a Brahmsutrabhāshya that summed up the essence of the Vedic and Upanishadic thought. Sankara's entire emphasis is on showing that Brahman is unitive. He says by citing the Chandogya Upanishad (VI.16). 'Unity is the One true existence while manifoldness is evolved out of wrong knowledge'.4 Elaborating on this idea and asserting it, Sankara then says that 'the highest Brahman cannot possess double characteristics',5 that is, unity and manifoldness. By citing Brihdaranyaka Upanishad he affirms that 'our text denies all plurality of forms'.6 About the inherence of cause and effect in the same Reality, that is Brahman, Sankar gives an example of 'threads' that weave a cloth. Sankara is so dogmatic about the unitive Brahman that he even objects to the Sphota, which is an intuitive revelation of meaning that goes beyond the words used for an object.7 Professor A. Rammurty, the author of Advaita: a conceptual analysis, calls this Brahman of Sankara as 'homogeneous' that does not reveal itself to different forms in multiple ways.8 Rammurty cites from the Brahmasutrabhāsya: 'Samyak jnanan eke rupe vastu tantratvai' which means in translation 'perfect knowledge of Brahma should be of one form because it is

objective'. Sankara's notion of Brahman keeps it as the unitive centre from which everything emerges but it does not allow autonomy to different interpretations, it is a regressive uni-hermeneutic approach directly related to the caste-system rooted in the Brahman. The famous Rig Vedic 'Hyma of Man' translated by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty reads as follows: 'His mouth became the Brahmin, his arms made into the Warrior, his thighs the people, and from his feet the servants were born'. Both Brahmanical philosophy and the graded caste system are rooted in the totalitive Brahma. Since Brahma is not manifold, it is undifferentiated and singular that cannot generate a model for multidimensional growth and differential revelation.

The totalitive model that had caused the multifaceted crisis in India could not be overcome with the Islamic model either. Islam entered India in the eighth century. Allah as elaborated in the Qur'an was the model for the state and society that Islam tried to push. The Qur'anic Allah is also dogmatically unitive. Sura 3.1 of Qur'an says 'Allah! There is no God? But He - the Living/The Self-subsisting Eternal'.11 Again Sura 37.4 proclaims: 'Verily, verily, Your God/is One'. 12 Edward Sell who published a pioneering book The Faith of Islam in 1880 and later on contributed an essay on Islam to The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics says that Mohammad had given stress on the 'Divine unity'. Muslim theologians have used the word tauhid for unity. By quoting Aba Abu Montaha, Sell mentions two kinds of unity: tauhiddu'r rubiya which means that God who creates and sustains is one, and tauhid'l uluhya which means worship only one God and look upon Him as the only object of worship.13 The idea of absolute unity about God is further affirmed by d'Ibn Khaldun whose Prolegomenes is quoted by Sell prohibiting all interpretations of 'ambiguities' as their meaning is known only to God. In his above mentioned book, Sell refers to the author of Risalahi-Barkavi who accepts seven attributes or Sifats of God: life, knowledge, power, will, hearing, seeing, speech. But at the same time the Mut'tazalites reject the plurality of coeternal attributes that 'conflict' with the idea of absolute unit. Allah demands total obedience and conforming to this absolute unit. For transgressors, Allah commands in Sura 2:191: 'Stay them'.14 This notion of the absolutely unitarian Allah does not leave room for multiple or differential revelation.

The radical break with the two grand Indian narratives that the Guru announced through the recitation of his compositions at the moment of the baptism ritual, was in the form of a new idea of God that organised and affected the entire Guru narrative. This God could be the model for a new society. The Guru's God in Jāp Sāhib is not unitarian and regressive, but of many forms. It is this multi-faceted Divine that the Guru salutes when he says: 'Namo sarab rupe'.' The Guru also salutes Him because He is 'sarab kale'.' It means that God lords over several temporal orders. The implication is that the visible temporal order of human history is only one, there may be several other orders elsewhere, as for instance have become possible after our contemporary speculation on numerous universes.

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In contradistinction with the Brahmanical 'eka rupe' and the Islamic 'tauhid' that articulate the absolute unity and totalitivity of God, Guru Gobind Singh's God is detotalitive. He has many expressions, forms, and temporalities. He is 'sarab rupe' and 'sarab kāle'. It is not surprising, then, that the Guru considers the songs of different people and cultures sung in praise of God, as equally authentic. In Akāl Ustat (In Praise of the Timeless) that was not recited at the baptism ritual, the Guru's acceptance of the many songs of the Divine is pronounced He says: 'Persians, Europeans ....and the soft bodied of Makrant, sing your songs. Bhakhri, Kandhari, Gaurs, Gakhars, and the people of Gardex, and those who live on air and concentrate on Your Name'. The Guru here refers to the people of Europe, USA, Afghanistan and Sindh Sagar, all articulating through their different expressions and hermeneutics. In the Swayye 'The Vedas, Purānas, Qur'ān have all exhausted when the Guru says: themselves in God's praise, He still exceeds their visions and thought', the Guru critically accepts the texts. He thinks the 'Siddh-yogis also have become helpless after their rigorous meditations on God',18 but He still transcends. The significant aspect of these statements is that the Guru, despite God's transcendence, recognises the multiple ways of thinking and contemplating Him. In fact in the same text, a little below, the Guru calls God as 'Siddha Swarup', that is, with the form of a Siddha-yogi. In Jāp Sahib the Guru has described Him as 'Jog Joge' and used several words of the Siddha-yogic parlance like 'vibhût', 'alakh', 'abhekha', 'adhut', etc. The Guru has also saluted God in this text by using the Buddhistic notion of dhyan (concentration) when he says: 'Namo dhyāne.<sup>19</sup> It is not only the idealistic and ascetic visions of God that the Guru recognises but also the materialistic one of the pre-Aryan Lokāyata tradition when he says: 'Namo bhog bhoge' which means 'Salute Him who is the supreme enjoyer'.20

In the Bhagwati Chhand and Bhuyang Paryāt Chhand of Jāp Sāhib the Guru has used dozens of names, adjectives and attributes of God that are from the Qur'anic and other Islamic sources. When in the Swayye and other compositions the Guru mentions the limitations of these different narratives, he is pointing out their exclusivist and unitarian approach that makes them closed narratives. By recognising the limited validity of these narratives, the Guru has not only developed a multi-perspectival and open narrative but also defined God multi-paradigmatically. The constantly defined and delayed definition does not assign any stern form to God like that of the Jewish Yahweh who proclaimed: 'I AM WHO I AM'. In a way the Brahmanical, Qur'anic Islamic, and Jewish Gods share their absolute unity and uni-paradigamtic way of defining the Divine Identity. The Guru's method rather, to use an expression of our contemporary philosopher Jacques Derrida, is of 'difference', that is of difference and deferment.21 The Guru has gathered the different perspectives and visions to define the identity of God that actually has been kept constantly undefined to project the non-egoic and flexible God who could remain open to difference. In the idiom of Ernest Laclau, it can also be said that to save God

from absolute unity, the Guru revealed Him as an 'empty signifier' through multiple significations.<sup>22</sup>

The second important feature of the tenth Guru's God who refuses to be totalised into absolute unity, is His indifference to the caste hierarchy. Jāp Sāhib begins by revealing that God has no distinguishing features, caste, class or sub-caste.<sup>23</sup> Although Louis Dumont, the author of Homo Hierachichus holds that the Indian caste system was motivated only by the notion of 'honour' and not power, in practice the Hindu part of Indian society was tightly organised around the caste system depriving the lower castes of full growth and leading to overall social decadence. Sankara's Brahmsutrabhāshya unambiguously denies the lower castes access to the knowledge of Brahman. To end this gradation and restore to human beings what Emanuel Levinas calls 'infinity', <sup>24</sup> the Guru's God had to be non-hierarchical.

The third significant feature of the Guru's God that was passed on at the baptism ritual, was His form as 'Sri Kharag' or 'The Honourable Sword'. In Bachittra Nātak the Guru salutes the Divine as the 'most luminous', 'self-ignited' light that 'shines like the sun'. The Sword 'shatters evil thinking', 'comfort saints', and unblocks the universe to further evolve. The expression used is 'Srishti ubāran' 'Ubāran' means to reform and elevate, in other words, to liberate something from its repressive or blocking force. Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha explains 'ubāran' as 'to emancipate' in his Mahān Kosh. 'I

The Radiant Sword, then, acts in responsibility towards the well-being of the entire creation. In our postmodern idiom we can also say that the Divine as Sword is detotalitive. It breaks the shackles of history or the state apparatuses hampering growth and evolution. Chandi di Var that narrates the battle between the gods and demons is also to be understood as the drama of the Radiant Sword to liberate life. In the invocation of the Var the Guru says that the Akal Purakh himself is sitting and watching this play or 'tamâsha'.28 The battle is a play, because its purpose is higher, that is, to liberate the evolutionary but blocked life-forces. The ballad ends with the prayer of the Guru to the Divine to bless him with the power to do the 'noble deeds' fearlessly. The noble deeds extend to cosmic liberation, to justice in the highest sense of the word. John Rawls, the author of A Theory of Justice defined 'fairness' as the right to the most extensive liberty. The 'most extensive' can be extended to living with the forces of the Akāl Purukh, the Primal Being, that can be constrained neither by the gods nor by the demons. Both have only limited perspectives. Life is to be lived and organised beyond these limits. This is why the goddess Chandi after winning the battle disappears in the midst of the 'song and celebration' of victory leaving behind only the 'radiant sky'.29 Through this act, the goddess crosses even her own perspective, the perspective of the gods. No single perspective is enough, not even of the gods and goddesses, the Guru suggests.

Both Bachittra Nātak and Chandi di Vār set up practice in the battlefield as the way to disrupt the grand narratives because narrative and

practice or the social and political institutions generated, cannot be separated. The Guru understands that well. Koer Singh has repeatedly pointed out in his *Gurbilās* that the Guru had blessed the Khalsa with the Raj all over. The Akāl Purakh, causes battles and participates in them as the Sword and has been defined and re-defined through deferment, difference and many paradigms. For this reason, the battles do not remain the practice of the absolutely unitarian Allah of the Qur'ān or of the *eka rupe* Brahman of Sankara.

A very important aspect of these works narrating battles is that the Guru does not theorise much in them. With some words of invocation he goes straight to the battles and their fierce dynamism the description of which is done through an acutely binaric language, in the sense of Roman Jakobson. The language transforms and energises the reader along with modification of consciousness. In fact the multi-paradigmatically and constantly defined God causes the transformative dynamic action of the battlefield as an equally valid and necessary process to unblock the held up energies. For instance when we read the following explosive sound-combinations in the Bachittra Nātak with the background of the Guru's metaphysics of his multiple defined God, the tensions could cause bio and mental change.

Karrikai kamanam Jjannakai kirpanam Karamkar chutai Jhannkar uthai

The english translation will read as 'The bows twanged / The swords clashed / The battle sounds exploded / Martial music arose'.<sup>30</sup>

The Guru's composition of dynamic praxis in the battlefield established transformative practice with its own autonomy. It can itself be luminous, knowledge giving and knowledge causing, sorting chaos, killing demons and comforting saints. Levinas again, in our times, has told us that practice can also be a mode of 'metaphysical transcendence', in his sense, resistive to 'totality' or uniperspectival thinking and living that subordinates a person.<sup>31</sup>

In brief, I have suggested in this paper that on the Vaisakhi of 1699 the compositions that the Guru recited at the baptism ritual, gave a new, multiperspectival or multi-paradigmatic narrative that established a constantly defined or deferred God with no dogmatic identity. This open and multiple narrative established both God and practice in the battlefield as two signs that could be models for reshaping human beings and the society. The unitarian or totalitive narratives and their signs were ruptured by the Guru to usher in a era of detotalitivity that is our major concern and fascination at the close of the century. It is amazing that the thought first blazed in 1699 at Anandpur Sāhib.

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# Resisting the 'Boa Constrictor' of Hinduism: the Khalsa and the Raj

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Interpretations of the reconstruction of Sikh identity in the late nineteenth century have consistently stressed the central role of the British and their ideologies of 'racial determinism'. This essay argues for a reassessment of the British role and questions the importance of race in British discourses on Sikhism. Rather than being the product of scientific racism or the application of the Aryan invasion theory, British understandings of Sikhism were moulded by their views of both Christian history and the nature of popular Hinduism. These forces shaped the 'Sikhism as Indian Reformation' trope which was the dominant, but never hegemonic, view of the Sikh past.

1999 marked an important year for Sikhs around the world. As the West prepared to celebrate the end of the second millennium of the Christian calendar, Sikhs remembered important turning points in their own history. Not only did the community celebrate the tercentenary of the foundation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur on the Baisakhi of 1699, but 29 March 1999 also marked the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the annexation of the Punjab by the British. The neat symmetry of these anniversaries, three hundred years of the Khalsa and one hundred and fifty years of sustained contact with Britain (ninety-eight of these years as a colony), is not only striking in itself, but also reminds us that for at least half of the Khalsa's existence Sikhism has operated within the broader global contexts fashioned by British imperialism.

Of course Maharaja Dalip Singh, whose signature ultimately ceded sovereignty to the British, embodied the ambivalent, often painful legacy of this British-Punjabi relationship. After his arrival in England in 1854, under the supervision of the Scottish medical officer John Login, Maharaja Dalip Singh became a well-known public figure both in London and in Norfolk (where he had an estate at Elvedon); his fame was such that he led the 'foreign princes' at the wedding of Prince Edward and became a favourite of Queen Victoria

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herself. His fame and fortune in Britain was short-lived; after a protracted dispute with the East India Company and a resurgent interest in Sikhism (he had 'quietly' converted to Christianity before travelling to England), Dalip Singh was effectively exiled in Paris from 1886 until his death in 1893. He was buried alongside his wife and child at Elvedon and his grave has subsequently become a popular pilgrimage site for the British Sikh community.

In a recent article Simeran Man Singh Gell has identified Dalip Singh as an 'exemplar' of Sikh identity, in that his life enacted the difficulties of maintaining a distinctive identity in Britain while seeking acceptance as part of a broader 'British' community, a dilemma that many Sikhs of the diaspora continue to face.<sup>2</sup> Gell stressed the racial dimension of British understandings of identity, emphasising that the British held a positive estimation of Sikhs because they were seen to be a part of 'their [British] own Aryan race'. The British believed that Sikhs, unlike Bengalis or Tamils, exhibited a 'racial affinity' with the British, but at the same time maintained visible markers of identity that allowed them to be marked off as a separate from (and, if need be, inferior to) the British.<sup>3</sup> Gell thus argues that the British fostered the Khalsa identity formulated by Guru Gobind Singh, specifically the uncut hair and turban, as an embodiment of the martial traditions of Sikhism, but these traditions were now serving the military interest of the British.<sup>4</sup>

Gell's wide-ranging article is valuable for offering another perspective on the markers of Sikh identity, supplementing the work of Harjot Oberoi and J.P.S. Uberoi, but also for calling attention to the crucial role that relationships with Britain and British culture have played in the negotiation of Sikh identity over the last one hundred and fifty years.<sup>5</sup> This essay extends this project by focussing on one aspect of the British-Sikh cultural interaction largely neglected by Gell and more generally overlooked in the existing historiography: the role of British religious, rather than racial, frameworks in moulding their responses to and policies toward Sikhism.

I

It is widely accepted that the reordering of social relations under British domination led to a reformulation of Sikh identity, particularly through the efforts of both the British administrators and the Singh Sabha movement. Although many members of the Panth and popular historians of Sikhism see the Singh Sabhas as a manifestation of the spirit of the Gurus and a return to the true values of the Khalsa, most professional historians have located the reformers' activities within the cultural changes of the colonial period. Prior to Simeran Man Singh Gell's work on the 'Sikh look', Richard Fox, in his *Lions of the Punjab*, also argued that the British played a central role in constituting the orthodox 'Singh' [i.e. Khalsa] identity as they hoped a distinctive and loyal Sikh

soldiery would form a bulwark to British authority. Thus Fox's work was characterised by an 'externalist' approach, stressing the pivotal role of British colonialism but, unfortunately, neglecting the importance of military values and symbols in pre-colonial Sikh tradition and entirely overlooking the importance of the rahit-nama tradition. These analytical oversights allowed Fox to argue that the British promoted 'Sikhism as a separate religion and [the] Singh as a separate social identity', fashioning new identities and hardening the boundaries between religious communities.<sup>6</sup> Harjot Oberoi's Construction of Religious Boundaries was a welcome corrective to Fox's truncated vision of Sikh history and insistence on colonial instrumentality. While Oberoi noted that colonialism was an important cultural backdrop, he stressed the role of indigenous elites and propagandists in the reordering of indigenous identity along communal lines. This 'internalist' approach, focusing on developments within the Panth, detailed the clash between the Sanatan tradition and the systematised religious vision of the Tat Khalsa which inscribed clear lines between kes-dharis and other Sikhs by insisting on the maintenance of a cluster of new rituals and social practices as markers of community. The Construction of Religious Boundaries documented the undermining of an 'enchanted universe' of popular faith in the villages of the Punjab with a highly ordered pattern of practice and clearly delineated Sikh ('Tat Khalsa') identity. Thus, while Oberoi attacked Fox's neglect of earlier Sikh tradition and his overemphasis on the colonial state, he also identified British power as a profound rupture in the social history of the Punjab.

If we accept that important changes were enacted or at least unleashed by the colonial state, any history of the Khalsa and the Sikh identity must take the role of the British seriously. Unfortunately, although Oberoi makes effective use of a range of colonial sources in the Construction of Religious Boundaries, this work provides a limited insight into the cultural assumptions and values of the British. Unlike Gell's recent essay, he emphasised religion as a force which conditioned British responses to Sikhism. Following on from the work of P. J. Marshall and Romila Thapar, Oberoi noted that Europeans tended to construct images of Indian religions in the mould of Christianity, stressing that the 'isms' Hinduism and Sikhism were largely the product of the European intellectual frameworks of the late Enlightenment. However these frameworks are not delineated in detail: in The Construction of Religious Boundaries Punjabi values and traditions are anthropologised more consistently and rigorously than British mentalities.

Some valuable insights into British side can be gained from a rich body of material on the workings of British administration. P.H.M. van den Dungen, David Gilmartin, Andrew Major and Ian Talbot have made valuable contributions to our understanding of the process of British policy making and the shape of the colonial state. Clive Dewey has moved beyond a narrow focus on the workings of the Punjab administration to locate the 'Punjab school'

within the broader contours of official anthropology and the British tradition of political economy. His recent *Anglo-Indian Attitudes* is a rich intellectual biography of two key early twentieth century administrators (Sir Malcolm Darling and F. L. Brayne), which examines the interplay between faith, education, politics and local circumstances in moulding the 'official mind' of British imperialism.<sup>9</sup>

We need to extend this kind of research to recover the intellectual world of the British, to understand the function of, and tensions within, their cultural values and to approach the British side of the colonial encounter with the same sensitivity to differentiation and conflict that characterises the rich historiography on the interaction between Arya Samajis, Sanatanis, Tat Khalsa reformers and the various Muslim groups of the Punjab.

This essay seeks to reconstruct the cultural values and religious beliefs that shaped British interpretations of Sikhism with the hope that it can add some depth to the existing historiography of British-Sikh relations. Here the primary focus is on a key image that recurs through British interpretations of Sikh history and culture: Sikhism as an 'Indian Reformation'. This image was the product of the dynamic intellectual encounter between British cultural assumptions and the various beliefs and practices that could be found within Sikh traditions. The indigenous side of this encounter has been thoroughly explored, as historians of Punjab, particularly J.S. Grewal, Kenneth Jones, W.H. McLeod, and Harjot Oberoi, have paid close attention to the shifting composition of the Panth and the transformations within Sikh tradition which ultimately culminated in the reformulation of an 'orthodox' Sikh identity by the Singh Sabhas, but the British side of the equation requires further consideration. If the complex political, socio-economic and religious transformations accompanying British colonialism were responsible for a fundamental shift in Punjabi history, and Sikh identity in particular, we need a richer understanding of British mentalities and motivations. Most importantly we need to stress the dialogic relationship between indigenous and colonial agents, the mutual modifications and cultural transformations that arose of a dynamic colonial encounter.10 The complexity of this cultural encounter, characterised by congruence and accommodation as well as resistance, frequently eludes both 'internalist' and 'externalist' approaches to Sikh history.

The remainder of this essay focuses on the centrality of the Nanak as 'Reformer' trope in British interpretations of Sikhism and argues that this image was the product of both British interpretations of popular Hinduism and common Protestant visions of Christian history. But it is also clear while the Sikhism as 'Hindu Reformation' argument was a popular one, it never enjoyed undisputed hegemony: this essay also details influential evangelical attacks on Sikh tradition, polemics that reached an apex in Ernest Trumpp's introduction to his translation of the Adi Granth. These evangelical arguments insisted that

Sikhism was either simply part of a supposedly degenerate popular Hinduism or that Nanak's attempts at reform were only ever partially successful: either way Sikhism was seen as an impediment to the 'fertilizing stream' of the Gospel. These British concerns with religious identity and history must be explored if British influence was a factor in the hardening of religious community and the reformulation of Sikh identity in colonial Punjab.

H

Major James Browne, who served as Personal Agent at the court of Shah Alam in Delhi between 1782 and 1785, produced the earliest British account of Sikhism, *The History of the Origin and Progress of the Sikhs*, which was published in 1788 by the Company. One of his duties in the court was to collect information regarding the Sikhs who the British feared as a destabilising force in the Delhi hinterland. Browne garnered what information he could, relying heavily on a Persian text produced for him by Buddh Singh Arora of Lahore. On the basis of Buddh Singh's text Browne surmised that Nanak's religion appeared to bear that kind of relation to the Hindoo religion, which the Protestant does to the Romish. Browne's description of Sikhism as a reformed Hinduism established an interpretative framework which dominated Sikh studies until the early twentieth century. Sikhism was consistently seen as an improvement on the Hindu tradition, as it seemed to break away from the polytheism, idolatry and caste-sensitivities which British observers believed retarded the development of India's Hindu population.

Browne's interpretation was quickly confirmed by other British observers, most notably Charles Wilkins, whose sketch of Sikhism was also published in 1788.<sup>14</sup> For Wilkins, Nanak's reforming vision created a new religion grounded in a belief in 'one God, omnipotent and omnipresent'. Nanak's monotheistic teachings had a strong moral component as 'there will be a day of retribution, when virtue will be rewarded and vice punished'.<sup>15</sup> In the early nineteenth century the leading administrator and historian John Malcolm placed greater emphasis on Nanak's debt to the Hindu tradition, but once again Nanak was represented as a 'reformer' who sought to rid the Hindu tradition of the accretions of polytheism, superstition and idolatry.<sup>16</sup>

Once established by these three influential early texts, the 'Sikhism as Reformation' metaphor was one of the great stock passages in British analyses of Indian religion. Most importantly it was reiterated in J.D. Cunningham's sympathetic 1849 account of Sikhism. He argued that Nanak was the heir to a tradition of medieval Hindu reform in north India but Nanak's reform was more comprehensive, compelling and effective. While 'Ramanand and Gorakh had repeated that faith leveled caste, Kabir had denounced images and appealed to the people in their own tongue', these earlier reformers were, in Cunningham's

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view, 'so impressed with the nothingness of this life, that they deemed the amelioration of man's social condition to be unworthy of a thought.' Of all the Hindu reformers Nanak alone was able to 'perceive the true principles of reform' and the resulting reformed creed of Sikhism continued to be, in Cunningham's time, 'an active and living principle.' Meanwhile, the influential Sanskritist Monier Monier-Williams, whose works shaped Anglo-Indian and British understandings of Indian religious traditions, depicted Nanak's vision as a refreshing change from the 'degeneration' of medieval Hinduism. He noted that Nanak's compositions in the *Adi Granth* ('the Bible of the Sikhs') were 'promulgated about the time of our Reformation' and prohibited 'idol-worship' while 'teaching the unity of the Godhead pantheistically'. Although he thought that Sikhism was likely to succumb to the power of Hindu superstition, there is no doubt that he believed that Nanak's vision was a bright point in the darkness of modern Hinduism.

111

While these interpretations were always influenced by British access to reservoirs of indigenous knowledge21, they were also moulded by a complex set of assumptions about the nature of religion, the structure of religious communities and the pattern of Christian history. Within the existing historiography there has been a strong tendency to view British discourses on Sikh tradition and identity as a self-contained analytical field, reflecting the emergence of both 'Punjab studies' and 'Sikh studies' as areas of scholarly This is, however, a dangerous specialty within the modern academy. abstraction that dislocates British discussions of Sikhism from the broader contexts of British colonial knowledge, European understandings of Hindu tradition and the religious and social values of the British colonisers. It is essential to locate British understandings of Sikhism within these various intellectual and cultural backgrounds. These cross-cultural understandings must be seen as part of a larger body of Orientalist learning and a huge British (and European) drive to chart and explain the divergent cultural traditions incorporated into informal and formal empires.

Of course the 'Sikhism as a Reformation' trope inextricably linked Sikhism with the religious traditions of North India which Europeans came to know as 'Hinduism', even though Islam was a powerful force in shaping the cultural terrain of the Punjab. Sikhism was seen as an improvement of the increasingly degenerate forms of belief and ritual which were believed to characterise popular Hinduism. While late eighteenth century Orientalists praised the beauty of Sanskrit, the sublimity of the Vedas and the ancient wisdom of the Brahmans, they expressed doubts over the faith of masses. Luke Scrafton, for example, suggested that Brahman believed in a single Supreme

God and their monotheistic creed was pure and admirable. But these high truths were beyond the reaches of the simple folk who struggled to understand the subtle sophistication of monotheism. Thus the Brahmans relied heavily on images and idols, believing 'sensible objects were necessary' for teaching 'the vulgar' masses. <sup>22</sup> In a similar vein, Charles Wilkins argued although there was an elite Hindu belief in 'the unity of the Godhead', popular Hinduism was a crude and ignorant code based on 'idolatrous sacrifices'. <sup>23</sup>

This British opposition between Brahmanical and popular Hinduism drew upon the Brahmanical opposition between vaidik (Vedic - high) and laukik (popular - low) practice and reflected the degenerationist nature of Brahmanical understandings of history.24 But as Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism emerged as powerful forces in British culture, both at home and overseas, even the value attached to Brahmanical traditions was undercut. Although the Evangelical revival had its origins in the late 1730 and early 1740s, it was only in the 1790s that its vision consistently turned beyond the shores of Britain. William Carey's An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens (1792) was a rallying cry for the globalisation of Evangelical Protestantism through voluntary missionary societies which would carry the 'Good News' to Africa, Asia and the Pacific.25 Evangelical printing presses produced numerous pamphlets and essays identifying social and religious evils in distant lands - cannibalism in New Zealand, marriage by capture in Australia, slavery in Africa, foot-binding in China, polygamy in the Muslim world and sati in India. Within this literature polytheism, superstition and idolatry were now depicted as the core of Hinduism and overshadowed the vigour of the high textual tradition of Sanskrit.26 Hinduism, like all other heathen creeds, was perceived as a stronghold for Satan. This shift in understanding was signalled by Charles Grant's 'Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain' (1796). After returning from India, Grant wrote 'Observations' as an attack on British Orientalism and advocated an aggressive programme of Company sponsored Christianisation.27 Hinduism was a polytheistic creed whose Gods were given to sexual profligacy; worship was also tainted by signs of sexual corruption (as seen in temple prostitutes or the adoration of Shiva lingam); Brahmans ('a crafty and imperious priesthood') enslaved the masses and underwrote the despotic rule of Indian tyrants.28

The cultural authority of both Brahmans and late eighteenth century Orientalists such as Sir William Jones and Charles Wilkins was further undercut by James Mill's History of British India. Mill began by attacking Brahmanical authority. The language of Brahmanical Hinduism was characterised by an 'unparalleled vagueness' and their religion consisted of a 'multiplicity of fictions' marred by 'endless discrepancies'. To the 'objective observer' like Mill, Hinduism had 'no coherent system': in fact any systematic discussion of

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Indian religions, like that offered by Sir William Jones, was purely the product of 'imagination'. Mill dismissed Sanskrit accounts of Creation as a 'gross and disgusting picture of the universe' characterised by 'disorder, caprice, passion, contest, portents, prodigies, violence, and deformity. But Sanskrit texts, Mill argued, were not the best guide to the reality of Hinduism: what really should be examined was the 'wretched ceremonies [which] constituted almost the whole of its practical part.

Mill's utilitarian critiques of Hinduism and popular evangelical propaganda coalesced to create a new age where Indophobia undercut the Indomania of the 1780s.<sup>32</sup> By the 1830s Hinduism was routinely dismissed, especially by popular writers, as an assemblage of 'horrid rites' and a 'fabric of superstitions', and it was against this backdrop that nineteenth-century Europeans understood Sikhism.<sup>33</sup> For British observers, Nanak's attacks on idolatry, pilgrimage and slavish devotion to religious authorities echoed powerful strands in Protestant tradition, while the Gurus' rejection of caste embodied in the brotherhood of the Khalsa freed its members from an inherently conservative socio-religious institution that crushed innovation.

These interpretations of Hinduism and Sikhism were also moulded by British understandings of Christian history, the continued centrality of Protestantism in British identity and the importance of anti-Catholicism in the British imagination. Over the past fifteen years historians have paid closer attention to the role of religion in British history and numerous studies have documented the pivotal role of Protestantism in shaping the national character and as an idiom for articulating a common British identity after the Union of Wales, Scotland, and eventually Ireland.<sup>14</sup> Raymond Tumbleston has argued that after the break with Rome in the sixteenth century, 'England had to conquer its Catholic heritage to reinvent itself as a Protestant nation'.35 By the early nineteenth century British Protestants felt this need had become urgent as the gradual expansion of the Catholic (both Irish and 'native') population within Britain and the Bourbon restoration in France suggested a Catholic resurgence was at hand.36 The war against Catholicism was seen as a global battle which was fought in the South Pacific, in Asia, in Ireland and in the cities of industrial Britain: the power of the Pope had to be combated, the influence of the priesthood thwarted and the spread of idolatry prevented.37

These concerns shaped British reactions to Indian culture. Just as British Protestants attacked the Catholic veneration of the Virgin Mary and argued that Catholic belief in the intercession of the saints was idolatrous, they dismissed Hinduism as superstitious idolatry. Arguments condemning priestly power, the debauched sexuality of monasteries, and Catholic ritual sharpened in anti-Catholic debate were easily turned against popular Hinduism. British Evangelical missionaries, who were often in competition with their Catholic counterparts, believed their brand of Christianity would bring about moral and

religious regeneration in India, in the same manner that it was the perfect antidote to Catholic superstition and corruption: Evangelicalism would create an egalitarian, moral and religious society and as such was to be a vehicle for global reform and religious renewal. Claudius Buchanan, a Company chaplain and strong advocate of the evangelisation of India, argued that missionary activity was central to India's future: Christianity had to replace the abominable practices of Hinduism. Buchanan believed Hinduism was characterised by 'horrid rites' which were even more offensive than the 'inhuman practices' to be found among the 'savages' of New Zealand.<sup>39</sup>

Of course, as we have seen, many British writers perceived Sikhism as a vast improvement on the excesses of popular Hinduism and even the superstitions of Catholicism. The influential evangelical essayist and Judicial Commissioner of the Punjab Robert Needham Cust argued that on the basis of his teachings Guru Nanak 'must be considered truly Good as well as truly Great.' Nanak, in fact, was an instrument of God:

we cannot but admit, that he was one of those, on whom the Almighty has vouched safe special blessings...he laboured unceasingly...to reform the lives and religion of his countrymen, to break through the tyranny of Priestcraft, outward Ritual, and Caste. He taught that purity of thought, word and deed, abstinence from Lust, Anger, and Avarice, were better than feeding Brahmins, or making offerings at Temples.<sup>41</sup>

Although Cust believed that Nanak's followers failed to establish Sikhism as a fully independent religious tradition, he stressed that Nanak, like Luther and Calvin, attempted to break free from the excesses of idolatry and priestly-power of the established tradition.

The most influential statement of the 'Sikhism as Reformation' interpretation was formulated by Max Arthur Macauliffe. Macauliffe was posted to the Punjab as an I.C.S. officer in 1862 at the age of twenty five. In 1893 he resigned from the I.C.S. after a distinguished career in the Punjab administration where he served as a Deputy Commissioner between 1882 and 1884 and as a Divisional Judge from 1884. From the mid-1870s Macauliffe became interested in the ethnography and religious history of the Punjab. In 1875 he produced an article in the Calcutta Review on the shrine to Pir Sakhi Sarvar in the Suliman Mountains, which marked the beginning of a distinguished career, establishing Macauliffe as an important interpreter of Sikh tradition. Macauliffe's The Sikh Religion (six volumes, 1909) created a vision of Sikh scripture and history that has remained tremendously influential within the Sikh Panth.

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Macauliffe began the first volume of *The Sikh Religion* by asserting that: 'the fifteenth century was a period of singular mental and political activity. Both in Europe and India men shook off the torpor of ages, and their minds awoke to the consciousness of intellectual responsibility.' This passage echoed his earlier observation that a 'great succession of men, the Sikh Gurus' had transformed and purified the Hindu tradition. 'In them the East shook off the torpor of ages, and unburdened itself of the heavy weight of ultraconservatism which has paralysed the genius and intelligence of its people. Only those who know India by actual experience can adequately appreciate the difficulties the Gurus encountered in their efforts to reform and awaken the sleeping nation.'

The rhetoric of these passages is extremely revealing. Macauliffe manipulated stock Orientalist images (of Indian timelessness, lethargy, and cultural decay) to emphasise the strength and significance of Sikhism. Nanak and his followers were thus represented as a group animated by a newly discovered religious enthusiasm that allowed them to break out of the spiritual solemnitude of medieval Hinduism. These stock devices could be used to construct oppositions within Indian culture, in this case between Hinduism and Sikhism, as well as between India and Europe. Nineteenth century European understandings of non-European societies were rarely the product of a simple self versus other opposition, rather they were shaped by important historical frameworks and complex multi-point comparisons.

IV

Despite the strength and influence of this view of Sikh history it is crucial to recognise that it was not a hegemonic interpretation. Even in the Punjab, where of all regions in British India it appeared that the administration was unified by a common ethos and policy objectives, there was considerable debate over the nature of the indigenous communities. Although the majority of British observers praised Nanak as a reformer of medieval Hinduism, some Europeans suggested Sikhism was still too close to Hindu tradition to merit any In July 1851, soon after the annexation of the Punjab and the publication of Cunningham's sympathetic account of Sikhism, the leading evangelical periodical The Church Missionary Intelligencer offered a rather caustic assessment of the newly annexed region. This article was a battle cry for Christian proselytisation and its starting point was an attack on the desiccating effects of Sikhism: 'The inhabitants of the Punjab are like the lands around them, which are laying waste for want of irrigation. The Sikh religion cannot benefit them. It has been tried and found worthless.' Punjab's future without 'the fertilizing stream of the gospel' was bleak.45 Nanak's vision was 'crude and unconnected' and he was too 'latitudinarian' to wrench Punjabis free of 'the

polytheistic tendencies of the Hindu'. Sikhs were rapidly being absorbed back into Hinduism and the minimal progress made by Nanak was lost. The only hope lay in the gospel, which promised great spiritual rejuvenation and renewal.

Evangelical attacks on Sikh belief were extended by Ernest Trumpp, the most powerful nineteenth-century critic of Sikhism. Trumpp, a skilled Tubingen-trained linguist, was approached by the Secretary of State for India in 1869 to begin work on a translation of the Kartarpur Granth manuscript of the Adi Granth and the Dasam Granth.<sup>47</sup> Trumpp's inital enthusiasm for the project soon evaporated as he discovered that he was unable to decipher 'a considerable residuum of words and grammatical forms to which I could get no clue', concluding that 'native assistance' would be required.<sup>48</sup> Trumpp returned to India in late 1870 and immediately encountered further problems. The two Sikh granthis he had enlisted to aid him in Lahore warned that the Granth could not be translated 'in the literal grammatical way' Trumpp desired and were unable to help him with many of the difficult constructions and idioms.<sup>49</sup>

Trumpp decided that his slow progress was entirely the product of the decay of Sikhism: the Sikhs had 'lost all learning' and he believed that he was 'frequently...misled' by the granthis. <sup>50</sup> But these difficulties were as much a product of Trumpp's own arrogance and insensitivity as they were a product of a decline in the Sikh intelligentsia. Trumpp alienated the granthis at Amritsar by blowing cigar smoke over the pages of the Granth, which they of course believed to be the embodiment of the Guru! <sup>51</sup> After working for eight years, largely independently with limited lexicographical support, Trumpp concluded that the language of the Granth was 'incoherent and shallow in the extreme, and couched at the same time in dark and perplexing language, in order to cover these defects. It is for us Occidentals a most painful and almost stupefying task, to read only a single Rag'. <sup>52</sup>

This disappointment, combined with Trumpp's tense relations with the granthis, the difficulties he faced in translating a heterogeneous text of various dialects into his non-native English, and his financial squabbles with the Indian government did not incline Trumpp to create a positive image of Sikhism.<sup>53</sup> He believed that Sikhism was a 'reformatory movement' in spirit, but it had completely failed to achieve anything of real religious significance. Trumpp argued that his translation would attract very few readers as 'Sikhism is a waning religion that will soon belong to history'.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, he suggested that the Adi Granth did not actually represent or shape 'the popular notions of the masses'. While the Sikh intelligentsia only had a partial understanding of the Granth, the 'vulgar' Sikhs were not interested in its 'lofty metaphysical speculations' as their religion was 'concrete and adapted to their every-day wants'.<sup>55</sup> He noted that the 'vulgar' did not observe many of the 'rahit-namas' (codes of conduct) injunctions: for example to recite an ardas before starting

work and recite the *rahiras* when eating the evening meal.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, for Trumpp, the *rahit-namas*' injunctions regarding relations with Muslims revealed 'a narrow-minded bigotry and a deep fanatical hatred.'<sup>57</sup> In fact, Trumpp argued, the Sikh 'reformation' was short-lived and 'soon ended up in a new bondage, which was quite as tiresome as that which they had thrown off'. This bondage was the 'martial spirit' inculcated by Guru Gobind Singh's Khalsa, a military brotherhood largely composed of 'rude and ignorant Jats'. The Khalsa was not the brotherhood of the 'pure' as its members 'surpassed their fellow-countrymen in all sorts of vices and debauchery, to which they added a rapacious and overbearing conduct'.<sup>58</sup>

Thus Trumpp struck at the heart of Sikh history and identity. He minimalised the impact of Nanak's teaching, ridiculed the Jats who increasingly dominated the *Panth* (community), questioned Sikh morality and dismissed the *Adi Granth* as an obtuse and juvenile work. Early in his project he rejected the possibility of working on the *Dasam Granth*. Trumpp left Lahore in early 1872, according to Lepel Griffin, the Officiating Secretary of the Punjab Government: 'unwilling to undertake the translation of the Granth of Guru Gobind Singh, which he considers a work which would not repay translation, and which would be, from its puerility and difficulties of style, so distasteful to him as to make it impossible for him to complete the translation.'<sup>59</sup>

Trumpp's work was the most influential attack on the positive view of Sikhism arising out of the 'Sikhism as Reformation' argument. As N.G. Barrier has pointed out Trumpp's unapologetic dismissal of Nanak and Sikhism had a more influential effect. His text provided a powerful call-to-arms for a newly emerging Sikh intelligentsia, who were striving to clearly delineate Sikh identity and represent Nanak's 'Reformation' as a clean break from the Hindu tradition. And, of course, it was Trumpp's harsh assessment of Sikhism that was an all important catalyst for Macauliffe's sympathetic account of the Khalsa tradition in his *The Sikh Religion*.

V

These debates surrounding Sikhism as an 'Indian Reformation' not only reflected the continued influence of Christianity on British historical consciousness in the post-Darwinian age, but also reflected a widespread belief amongst colonial administrators that there was a 'cultural congruence' between Sikhs and the British. While Simeran Man Singh Gell has suggested that this was largely underpinned by a belief in the shared Aryan origins of Punjabis and Britons and, in a similar vein, David Omissi has stressed the centrality of colonial racial ideologies in shaping recruitment of Sikhs, this essay has established that perceived similarities between Sikhism and the Protestant tradition were even more influential than racial ideas.<sup>61</sup> For British observers

Nanak's attack on priestly authority and promulgation of a monotheistic faith that to some degree resembled Protestantism, the Khalsa's repudiation of caste and its war against the 'Oriental Despotism' of the Mughals exhibited beliefs valued by the British. In comparison to the weak, effeminate Hindu and the treacherous, tyrannical Muslim of the popular British imagination, Sikhs appeared rational, proud and independent: values often evoked in nineteenth century discussions of British history and identity. Of course, one could rightly argue that there were profound dissimilarities between Nanak's vision of God and Luther's, and that Sikh and Protestant visions of religious authority diverge at important points: but the reality of cultural congruence was not as important as the perception of cultural congruence. Much historical writing on imperialism and cross-cultural understanding has emphasised the construction of rigid and essentialised hierarchies of 'self' versus 'other' and this emphasis on 'radical othering' can obscure the importance of (or least the perception of) shared values and histories in cross-cultural understandings. 62

In colonial Punjab, there was one very important vision shared by Tat Khalsa reformers and British administrators: their understanding of 'popular Hinduism' as corrupt and degenerate. As this essay has already demonstrated, the British believed that popular Hinduism was an all-consuming jungle which threaten to stifle the reforming impulses evident in more 'rationalistic' movements such as Sikhism. British scholar-administrators and Tat Khalsa leaders alike feared the decay of Sikhism. The British recruiting officer R. W. Falcon noted the 'great slackness there is at the present time in taking the pahul (Khalsa initiation rite), very many who call themselves Singhs...omit to take the pahul though adopting the surname and keeping some of the observances.'63 Another British official reported with concern that the Sikhs in his district were 'given to eating large quantities of opium, drinking bhang, and smoking charas.'64 While, in a similar vein, the missionary Henry Martyn Clark noted in Panjab Notes and Queries that he had encountered a group of seasonal-workers who observed the injunctions of the rahit at home, but would cut their hair and openly smoke when they were working away from their villages. Surely this was evidence of the decay of Sikhism?65

This brings us back to Macauliffe and his relationship with the Sikh elite. Macauliffe insisted that Sikhism was a distinctive religion and that its history was characterised by a constant battle against Hinduism. Popular Hinduism, he argued, was like a 'boa constrictor of the Indian forests....it winds round its opponents, crushes it in its fold, and finally causes it to disappear in its capacious interior.' Sikhism was threatened with this same fate: 'the still comparatively young religion is making a vigorous struggle for life, but its ultimate destruction is...inevitable without state support.'66 This argument dovetailed nicely with the agenda of the Sikh reformers, who Macauliffe worked closely with, who were proclaiming 'ham hindu nahin' (we are not

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Hindus). The proclamation of a leading Sikh periodical that as a result of Macauliffe's translation 'the promiscuousness in Sikh ideas will vanish, and Tat (pure) Khalsa will begin to start on a new career' reveals the close interdependence of the two views.<sup>67</sup>

These shared visions, more than any broad racial ideology, conditioned the British use of military recruitment as a means of preserving the Khalsa identity. R.W. Falcon's 1896 army manual enshrined this official understanding, suggesting that recruitment should be aimed only at those 'Sikh tribes which supplied converts to Sikhism in the time of Guru Gobind Singh, who in fact formed the Singh people': more recent converts were to be avoided as they could not be considered 'true Sikh tribes'.68 The ultimate test of 'Sikhness' was whether an individual maintained the external symbols of the Khalsa: 'Singhs, the members of the Khalsa; these are the only Sikhs who are reckoned as true Sikhs....The best practical test of a true Sikh is to ascertain whether calling himself a Sikh he wears uncut hair and abstains from smoking tobacco.'69 The various non-kes-dhari (sahaj-dharis, shaven monas and patit Sikhs) groups who might have identified themselves with (elements of) the Sikh tradition were to be avoided. Khalsa Sikhs were 'true' Sikhs and Khalsa Sikhs alone could be relied on to exhibit the true values of a warrior. Falcon mapped these martial qualities across the different regions of Punjab, warning officers away from eastern and southern regions where the 'Hindustani type' was prevalent and against those regions where Sikh identity was 'very diluted by Hinduism'. 70 Once recruited Sikh troops were placed in Sikh regiments, kesdhari Sikhs who were not amrit-dhari were required to undergo the Khalsa's khande ki pahul initiation rite and all Sikh troops were to maintain the external symbols of their Sikh identity and to accept the authority of the granthis appointed by the Army to perform Sikh rituals.71 British officers believed that a sensitivity to religious identity and the fastidious maintenance of that identity was central to the esprit de corps of the Sikh troops and to the general effectiveness of the Indian Army, a force which was increasingly reliant on the ability and loyalty of its Sikh soldiers.

VI

Thus, rather than 'making a culture' (as Fox suggests) the British were intent on fostering a Khalsa tradition revivified by the new class of educated and energetic urban reformers driving the Singh Sabha movement. Within the dominant interpretative frameworks deployed by the British, these reformers were heirs to the reforming spirit that was at the heart of the Sikh tradition. For the British the 'Indian Reformation', like the European Reformation, was an ongoing process not some distant historical fact. The gains that the Khalsa had made needed to be carefully guarded, least they be swallowed and destroyed by

the relentless pressure of the 'boa constrictor' of Hinduism. Historians of colonial Punjab need to retain a sensitivity to the complexity of, and conflicts within, colonial ideologies and mentalities. This need is particularly pressing now, as advocates of a 'Khalsacentric' model of Sikh history attack several leading historians of Sikhism as 'Eurocentric, Colonial, Racist and Imperial Scholars' incapable of 'understand[ing] and evaluat[ing] the mystic writings of the East'. 72 A careful attention to the development of both Indian and 'western' historiography and the cultural assumptions and motivations of all historical agents in the Punjab will hopefully undercut such simplistic stereotypes. 'Khalsacentric' approaches to Sikh history still must treat the motivations of the British (not to mention Hindus, Muslims and others who identify themselves as 'Sikh') with the same care and analytical rigour which will hopefully characterise their approach to the history of the Khalsa. The tercentenary of the Khalsa and one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of British colonialism would be an appropriate time to seek greater tolerance for (and productive crossfertilisation between) a diverse range of methodologies and interpretative approaches to the Sikh past.

#### **Notes**

- 1. See Michael Alexander and Sushila Anand, Queen Victoria's Maharajah: Duleep Singh, 1838-93 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980).
- 2. Simeran Man Singh Gell, 'The Origins of the Sikh "Look": from Guru Gobind to Dalip Singh', *History and Anthropology* 10,1 (1996), 37-83. Note that the surname is correct, 'Gell' is not a misspelling of 'Gill' as some readers might initially suspect.
- 3. ibid., 75-9, quote is at 75. This is a rather problematic argument as the 'Aryan' origins of the Sikhs, but especially the Jats (who, according to W. H. McLeod, dominated the Panth from the time of the sixth Guru, Hargobind), was hotly debated by British ethnographers. Frequently the Jats were seen to be the descendants of Scythians rather than Aryans. Sir John James Hood Gordon, who praised the military ability of the Sikhs, stressed that the martial nature of the Khalsa was largely attributable to the Scythian origin of the Jats. He argued that the Jats carried a Chinese-style Buddhism and a 'manly independence' to India that was not to be found amongst other Indian races. J.J.H. Gordon, The Sikhs (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1904 [1883]) 13-21. Gordon's emphasis on this Scythian heritage was maintained by A. H. Bingley, who saw the Jats as 'Scythian immigrants': A. H. Bingley, Sikhs: their origin, history, religion, customs, fairs and festivals (New Delhi: Sumit Publications, 1984 [1899]).
- 4. 'By keeping the spirit of Sikhism alive [through fostering the Sikh look], the British could kill two birds with one stone, not only would the Sikhs fight the battles of the British against the Afghans now their only remaining adversaries

- but it would also bring about the identification with their own rule, that had served Ranjit Singh so well.' Gell, 'The Sikh "Look", 70.

- 5. For Oberoi see note 7 below. The most recent version of Uberoi's paper is 'Five Symbols of Sikh Identity', *Religion in India* T. N. Madan ed., (Oxford University Press: Delhi, 1999), 320-334.
- 6. Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: culture in the making* (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1990), 140-3, quote is at 140. It is important to note that Gell's argument is more refined than Fox's, insofar as it places greater emphasis on the importance of pre-colonial traditions, where Fox's monograph offers a very brief discussion of the foundation of the Khalsa and makes no mention of prescriptive tradition of the *rahit-namas*.
- 7. P.J. Marshall, The British Discovery of Hinduism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Romila Thapar, 'Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity', Modern Asian Studies 23 (1989), 209-231; Harjot Oberoi, The construction of religious boundaries: culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh tradition (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6-14. These arguments have been extended, with particular regard to British evangelical interpretations of Hinduism, by Geoff Oddie's important study: "Orientalism' and British Protestant missionary constructions of India in the nineteenth century', South Asia 17:2 (1994), 27-42.
- 8. P.H.M. Van den Dungen, The Punjab tradition: influence and authority in nineteenth-century India (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972); David Gilmartin, Empire and Islam: Punjab and the making of Pakistan (London: Tauris, 1988); Andrew J. Major, Return to empire: Punjab under the Sikhs and British in the mid-nineteenth century (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1996); Ian Talbot, Punjab and the Rai, 1849-1947 (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988).
- 9. Clive Dewey, Anglo-Indian attitudes: the mind of the Indian civil service (London: Hambledon, 1993). Also see Clive Dewey, The settlement literature of the greater Punjab: a handbook (New Delhi: Manohar, 1991); Harold Lee has made a similar contribution for an earlier period in his recent essay in IJPS on the paternalism of the 'Punjab School': 'John and Henry Lawrence and the origins of Paternalist Rule in the Punjab, 1846-1858', International Journal of Punjab Studies 2:1 (1995), 65-88.
- 10. This dialogic model was developed in the South Asian context by Eugene F. Irschick, *Dialogue and history: constructing South India, 1795-1895* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
- 11. At least two works pre-dated Browne's account, but both can be dismissed as having limited impact on European knowledge of the Sikhs. In September 1606 Father Jerome Xavier, the Portuguese envoy to the court of Jahangir, wrote a short and vague account of Guru Arjan's imprisonment and death at the hands of the Mughals. But this account provided European readers with no

substantial information about the Sikhs: Xavier did not use the term 'Sikh' and did not provide the name of the persecuted Guru. Colonel Antoine Louis Henri Polier produced a more substantial account of the Sikhs around 1780 that was presented to the Asiatic Society of Bengal in December 1787 as a paper entitled 'The Siques or History of the Seeks'. Two shorter works by Polier on the Sikhs were published in the Asiatic Annual register: 'An Extract from a Letter of Major Polier', The Annual Asiatic Register 1800 (1), 32-5 and 'Character of the Sieks, The Annual Asiatic Register 1802 (2), 9-12. Polier's 'The Siques or History of the Seeks' is reproduced and discussed in Ganda Singh, 'Colonel Polier's Account of the Sikhs', Panjab Past and Present 4:2 (October 1972), 232-253.

- 12. Buddh Singh Arora collaborated with Lala Ajaib Singh Suraj of Malerkotla to produce his Persian history Risalah dar Ahwal-i-Nanak Shah Darvesh. Browne's account was essentially an abridged translation with a brief and rather vague introduction to Sikh polity together with 'a political chart' appended to the end of his account. For a discussion of Browne's work, the textual history of Risalah dar Ahwal-i-Nanak Shah Darves and a reprint of Browne's text see Ganda Singh ed., Early European Accounts of the Sikhs (Calcutta, 1962).
- 13. Ganda Singh ed., Early European Accounts of the Sikhs, 13-4.
- 14. Charles Wilkins, 'Observations and Inquiries concerning the Seeks and their College, at Patna', Asiatick Researches 1 (1788), 292. Wilkins travelled from Calcutta to Banaras in 1781 and briefly visited the birthplace of Guru Gobind Singh, Takhat Sri Harmandir Sahib (he termed the Gurdwara a 'College'), at Patna. Wilkins delivered his findings in a paper describing the Sikh presence in Patna and their religion to the Asiatic Society in 1784.
- 15. Wilkins, 'Observations', 392.
- 16. John Malcolm, Sketch of the Sikhs; a singular nation who inhabit the provinces of the Punjab (London, 1812).
- 17. J.D. Cunningham, A history of the Sikhs H. L. O. Garret ed., (Lahore 1915 [2nd edition 1853]), 34.
- 18. ibid., 34,11.
- 19. Monier Monier-Williams, *Hinduism* (London: S.P.C.K., 1877), 142n. Monier-Williams also described the *Adi Granth* as 'the first Sikh bible', presumably to distinguish from the *Dasam Granth*: Monier Monier-Williams, *Brahminism and Hinduism or Religious Thought and life in India based on the Veda and other sacred books of the Hindus* (3rd edn., London: J. Murray, 1887), 161.
- 20. See his account of his visit to Harmandir Sahib and his reflections on the all-encompassing power of Vaishnavism; ibid., 177-8.

- 21. See C.A. Bayly, Empire and information: intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780-1870 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 22. Luke Scrafton, Reflections on the government, & c., of Indostan: and a short sketch of the History of Bengal, from the year 1739 to 1756 (Edinburgh, 1761), 5.
- 23. Wilkins carried on to call Brahma 'the Almighty' and describe Brahmans as 'Unitarians'! Charles Wilkins, 'The Translator's Preface', from the Bhagavat-Geeta', Marshall ed., European Discovery of Hinduism 193-4.
- 24. For a discussion of Hindu understandings of time see A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1967), 320-1.
- 25. Brian Stanley, The Bible and the Flag: Protestant missions and British imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Leicester: Inter-University Press, 1990), 56
- 26. Here it is important to make one very important observation. There was a significant divergence between some of the material published in Britain and that found in the private diaries and personal correspondence of the missionaries themselves. Material printed in England for the English market tended to be more sensational, as it functioned as Evangelical publicists attempted to raise money, galvanise support and popularise their religious mission.
- 27. Thomas R. Trautmann, Aryans and British India (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), 101-3.
- 28. Charles Grant, 'Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, particularly with respect to Morals; and on the means of improving it.-Written chiefly in the Year 1792', Appendix to Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company with Minutes of Evidence Volume 1, Great Britain Parliamentary Papers 1831-(734) VIII.
- 29. James Mill, The History of British India. Fifth edition with notes and continuation by Horace Hayman Wilson (10 vols., London: Madden, 1858), I, 229.
- 30. ibid., I, 267.
- 31. ibid., 1, 277.
- 32. Trautmann, Aryans and British India chap. 4.
- 33. For evangelical attacks on 'popular Hinduism' see William Ward, A view of the history, literature, and religion of the Hindoos: including a minute description of their manners and customs, and translations from their principal works (3rd edn., London, 1817-20).; Allan K. Davidson, Evangelicals & Attitudes to India 1786-1813. Missionary Publicity and Claudius Buchanan (n.p., 1990), 47.
- 34. Especially Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992).

- 35. Raymond Tumbleston, Catholicism in the English protestant Imagination: nationalism, religion and literature 1660-1745 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 202.
- 36. John Wolffe, The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain 1829-1860 (Oxford; Clarendon, 1991), 18-20.
- 37. Interestingly this battle was often seen in gendered terms: the clash between a vigorous masculine Protestant tradition and a weak effeminate Catholicism. This opposition fits well with my argument as the equation of Protestantism and reform with masculinity obviously informed British views of Sikhism in relationship to Hinduism.
- 38. Charles Grant's polemic against child-marriage, polygamy, phallus-worship and temple prostitutes, for example, echoed the tone and content of anti-Catholic pornography that attacked priestly celibacy and fantasised about sexual decadence in monasteries and nunneries. The introductory essay to the 1875 edition of Foxe's Book of Martyrs reminded British Protestants that prior to the break with Rome English 'abbots, priors, and monks kept as many women each as any lascivious Mohammedan could desire'. Ingram Cobbin, 'Essay on Popery', Foxe's Book of Martyrs William Bramley-Moore ed., (revd. edn., London: Cassell, 1875), xi.
- 39. Davidson, Evangelicals & Attitudes to India 1786-1813 47.
- 40. R. N. Cust, The Life of Baba Nanuk, the founder of the Sikh sect of the Hindu Religion in the Punjab. For the use of schools (Lahore: Chronicle Press, 1859), 7.
- 41. ibid. Cust's attitude towards Nanak seems to have hardened as his career progressed: see the brief biographical sketch of Nanak in his revised review (1890) of Trumpp's translation of the *Adi Granth* in *Orientation of Early Christian Missionaries in Asia and Africa* (Delhi: Daya, 1988 [1891]), 262-3.
- 42. M.A. Macauliffe, 'The Fair at Sakhi Sarvar', Calcutta Review, LX (1875), 78-101. Macauliffe's work on Sakhi Sarvar was extended by the R.C. Temple: see his 'A song about Sakhi Sarvar', The Calcutta Review, LXXIII (1881), 253-274. For more recent analyses of the worship of Sakhi Sarvar in nineteenth century Punjab see Harjot Oberoi, The Construction of Religious Boundaries 147-160 and 'The Worship of Pir Sakhi Sarvar: Illness, Healing and Popular Culture in the Punjab', Studies in History, 3 (1987), 29-55.
- 43. Max Arthur Macauliffe, The Sikh Religion. Its Gurus, sacred writings and authors (6 vols., Oxford: Clarendon, 1909), I, xxxix.
- 44. M. A. Macauliffe, How the Sikhs became a Militant People (Paris, 1905), selection reprinted in Panjab Past and Present, 26 (October 1982), 504.
- 45. C.M.S. Intelligencer, 2:7 (July 1851), 156.
- 46. ibid., 148.

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47. This manuscript believed to be the original copy of the *Adi Granth* was obtained, after much persuasion from Sadhu Singh Sodhi, who had previously refused to supply the manuscript to Ranjit Singh. The Granth was finally shipped in England, under the supervision of John Lawrence, and presented to the India Office Library.

- 48. Ernest Trumpp, The Adi Granth, or the Holy Scriptures of the Sikhs, translated from the original Gurmukhi, with introductory essays (London: W. H. Allen, 1887), v.
- 49. ibid., vi.
- 50. ibid., vii-vii.
- 51. N. G. Barrier, 'Trumpp and Macauliffe', *Historians and Historiography of the Sikhs* Fauja Singh ed., (Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1978), 169.
- 52. Trumpp, Adi Granth, vii. Trumpp's first task was to construct a vocabulary and grammar for the entire Granth on the basis of his first thorough reading of the text. Although he seems to have gained only limited support from the granthis, he did utilise three existing commentaries on the text: two which 'explained in a rough way a number of Hindui and deshi (provincial) words' and another which focussed on Arabic and Persian loan words. ibid., vi.
- 53. For Trumpp's demands for extra fees and the growing hostility towards Trumpp among the Punjab government see: Lepel H. Griffin to Secretary to Government of India, *Punjab Home Proceedings* October 1871, A/4 and C. U. Aitchison, Secretary to Government of India to Punjab Government, *Punjab Home Proceedings*, April 1872, A/15. Trumpp was consistently insensitive in the handling of his responsibilities in the Punjab. He wrote a scathing review of the Pushtu grammar prepared for the Government by T. P. Hughes of the C.M.S. mission at Peshawar. *Punjab Home Proceedings*, April 1872, A/27. Hughes recovered from Trumpp's stinging attack to write a sympathetic review of Trumpp's translation. T. P. Hughes, 'The Religion of the Sikhs', *The Indian Christian Intelligencer*, 2:6 (June 1878), 160-169.
- 54. Trumpp, Adi Granth, vii.
- 55. ibid., exii.
- 56. Trumpp provides examples of these 'prayers'. ibid., exii n.4-n.5.
- 57, ibid., cxv.
- 58. ibid., exvi.
- 59. Lepel H. Griffin, Officiating Secretary, Punjab Government to Secretary to the Government of India, *Punjab Home Proceedings*, April 1872, A/15.
- 60. Barrier, 'Trumpp and Macauliffe', 171.
- 61. David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: the Indian army, 1860-1940* (Macmillan: London, 1994), 10-34.
- 62. For a recent critique of the binary-models central to much post-Saidian colonial discourse analysis in the South Asian context; see Norbert Peabody,

- 'Tod's Rajast'han and the Boundaries of Imperial Rule in Nineteenth-Century India', Modern Asian Studies 30,1 (1996), 185-220.
- 63. R. W. Falcon, Handbook on Sikhs for Regimental Officers (Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1896), 21.
- 64. Gazetteer of Ambala District, 1883-437.
- 65. H. M. Clark, 'The Decay of Sikhism', Panjab Notes and Queries, 3 (1885), 20.
- 66. Macauliffe, Sikh Religion I, Ivii. In a similar vein David Petrie praised the colonial state for 'buttressing the crumbling edifice of the Sikh religion' but warned that the maintenance of a separate Sikh identity was an ongoing project. David Petrie, Recent Developments in Sikh Politics, 1900-1911, a Report (Amritsar: Chief Khalsa Diwan, 1911), 52.
- 67. Undated excerpt from The Khalsa, Macauliffe, The Sikh Religion, xi.
- 68. Falcon, Handbook on Sikhs 61-2.
- 69. ibid., 15.
- 70. ibid., 71-3, 98-102.
- 71. For a first-hand account of this see Vincent Eyre, The Sikh and European Soldiers of Our Indian Forces. A Lecture (London, 1867), 7-8. On the kes-dhari/amrit-dhari distinction see W. H. McLeod, Who is a Sikh?: the problem of Sikh identity (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 110-115.
- 72. S. Sodhi, 'Eurocentrism and Khalsacentrism', Invasion of Religious Boundaries. A critique of Harjot Oberoi's work Jasbir Singh Mann, Surinder Singh Sodhi and Gurbaksh Singh Gill eds., (Vancouver: Canadian Sikh Study and Teaching Society, c. 1995), 340.

# Controversy among North American Sikhs: Implications of Conflicting Views of Tradition and Power for Scholarly Discourse

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The continuing efforts of Sikhs in North America to evaluate their traditions in light of cultural challenges and changing political pressures has helped foster controversy over basic Sikh tenets and institutions. The legal system and an ever-widening communication network have been important in local and regional disputes, as have the spread of new organizations tied closely to militant groups operating both in the West as well as the Punjab. The controversies and new source materials resulting from attempts to control community values and institutions, including the internet, provide fresh opportunities as well as possible pitfalls for concerned Sikhs and scholars studying their traditions and contemporary life.

In the last decades of this century, Sikhs and the larger Punjabi community have spread beyond India to major centers throughout the world. The new opportunities, combined with changing immigration policies in western countries, have reinforced the prosperity of the homeland as well as that of Sikhs and Punjabis living abroad. The successes connected with this migration nevertheless have had a significant cost. Although all immigrant communities struggle with conflict generated by adapting to a foreign culture while at the same time maintaining roots and basic elements of their own traditions, the debate over the nature of that tradition combined with tumultuous events both in the host countries as well as in the Punjab have made Sikhs vulnerable to persistent instability and uncertainty about who they are, their origins, contemporary problems, and where to go in the future.

The interlocking of Punjabi cultural assumptions and Sikh traditions has contributed to tension and conflict. Face, or *izzat*, drives a competitiveness that affects unity and reasoned leadership, as well as influencing views of family honor, marriage, women, and social ranking. Equally as important is the persistent minority status of Sikhs, a sense of being under attack and vulnerable politically and culturally, not only

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in the Punjab and India but also in a diaspora context. The formative experiences of the Singh Sabha period, c.1870-1920, attempted to resolve issues of cultural boundaries/uniqueness as well as developing a strategy for Sikh survival. Nevertheless, despite reinterpretations of history and tradition, and a pattern of successful institution-building and strengthening networks among Sikhs, the Singh Sabha leaders did not and perhaps could not resolve issues that continue and even have intensified among Sikhs worldwide.<sup>1</sup>

This paper evaluates some of the central controversies among Sikhs in North America. It would be highly arrogant to assert that the available sources and my limited understanding of all dimensions of that unrest make possible a definitive statement. Yet the time clearly has come to initiate a discussion of matters familiar to Sikhs and scholars alike. The first section focuses on the process of adaptation, the persistent efforts to redefine and/or to make tradition meaningful. Attention is paid to creation and maintenance of institutions among Sikhs in North America, the role of western courts and legal assumptions which affect conflict resolution, and the expanding communication network that fosters a sense of identity as well as dividing Sikhs. The second section addresses several interlocking controversies. What is the nature of authority among Sikhs, in a local setting or gurdwaras, as well as traditions and institutions that seem to tie Sikhs together worldwide? What are the appropriate linkages of religion and politics, approaches to Punjab politics and the consuming debate over Khalistan? Most recently, what is the role of rahit maryada in such controversies, as well as the contentious and recently painful debate over the Akal Takht in Sikh public life. Approaches to such issues involve a re-examination of tradition and history, but that process in turn points to concerns in the concluding section. What are the implications of these controversies for scholarship, how do they generate new source materials, and what problems do those materials as well as the sensitivity of Sikhs to particular issues create for those trying to understand Sikhs in the contemporary world?

### Sikh Institutions and Networks in North America

In North America, Sikhs settled primarily in California and British Columbia. Working in agriculture and the lumber industry, they gradually built small communities supporting Punjabi culture as well as drawing appreciable racist attention from white neighbors. Some religious and political networks evolved, with links to organizations such as the Ghadar party or self-defense organizations in the Vancouver area, as well as Sikh associations that ran gurdwaras and engaged in local variations of the Singh Sabha movement flourishing back in Punjab. By the 1920s, economics and fear combined with strong anti-orientalist attitudes led to measures curtailing migration. In some areas, such as around Yuba City and Vancouver, a small residue of

Sikhs attempted to maintain cultural and economic links with the Punjab, while in others, intermarriage and absorption into the local culture tended to erode virtually any vestige of Sikh identity.

Changes in Canadian and U.S. immigration laws led to a new and sustained migration of Sikhs after the early 1960s. The highly professional role of the new immigrants created significant pockets of well-educated Sikhs throughout North America, centered in many metropolitan areas as well as important agricultural zones along the west coast. Upward mobility, professional attainments, and strategies that built upon family networks and resources (both in Punjab and abroad) resulted in Sikhs playing an increasing key role in public affairs. Sikhs organizations and institutions abounded, and within them, there emerged a pattern of competition and sometimes open conflict that involved personalities, ideology, and politics.<sup>2</sup>

Until the 1980s, these tensions tended to be sporadic and local. Sikh public life centered on gurdwaras serving a variety of fuctions throughout the diaspora. There Sikhs grappled with the problems of adapting to another culture while maintaining values and practices felt essential for cultural survival. Worship services, study groups on history and doctrine, and special committees or local conferences explored the meaning of Sikhism and the nature of Sikh identity. Disagreements based on personal or family history, evolving factions based on class or caste, and other local matters colored discussions and decision-making, but sharp divisions over ideology and especially Punjab politics rarely occurred prior to 1984. In the 1970s, for example, significant conferences in California and Toronto discussed Sikh history, traditions, and contemporary problems with calm, positive interaction among participants.<sup>3</sup>

The upsurge of religious and political militancy that characterized Punjab affairs in the 1980s had a mirror effect upon Sikhs in England and North America. Two important elements helped structure the ensuing tension and conflict among Sikhs. First, virtually all organizations and religious centers were incorporated as non-profit, non-political associations under state law. Each had a constitution and procedures, albeit often vague on specifics and frequently disregarded by founders who controlled programs and funds without serious challenges. The waves of controversy therefore involved not just the *sangat* or members of gurdwaras and other associations but also inevitably became enmeshed in the western legal system. Takeover attempts, factional contests, and assaults quickly became fodder for court cases that in turn inflamed the community, dragged out proceedings, and set the state for fresh contests of power. Courts often became the final authority and arbiter of conflict over elections, related doctrinal matters, and ultimately who had authority and could speak for Sikhs.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, Operation Blue Star, the Delhi riots, and militant action first in Punjab and then in diaspora politics fostered new types of organizations and communication networks linking Sikhs. Existing pan-Canadian associations, such as the Federation of Sikh Societies of Canada, already had been involved in attempts to unite the

community and focus on economic and political matters (most notably, the wearing of kirpans and turbans). They changed direction and tone in 1984, joined by a range of fresh, aggressive, and often contentious groups. The Babbar Akali movement associated with Sant Bhindranwale spread in Canada, preaching a message combining fundamentalism and calls for militant action. Alleged conspiracies led to systematic police crackdowns and except for public rhetoric, leaders and their followers either went underground or shifted operations to the Punjab.<sup>5</sup>

The most systematic attempt to mobilize Sikh militancy involved the World Sikh Organization. General Jaswant Singh Bhullar met with members of the Federation of Sikh Societies of Canada and contributed to the holding of an International Sikh Convention in New York, July 1984. American Sikhs already had begun organizing and joined with Canadians to form the World Sikh Organization, headed by Bhullar. The WSO drew heavy support from rising militants such as Didar Singh Bains and Gurmeet Singh Aulakh and in June 1986 joined with the newly formed International Sikh Organization to demand creation of Khalistan. Subsequently, a branch of the National Council of Khalistan was formed in Washington, D.C., controlled by Aulakh.<sup>6</sup>

The growing strength of the avowedly political movement changed Sikh life in three areas. Throughout the diaspora, militants began to take over local or regional institutions. This led to struggles over control of gurdwaras, associations, and the various networks already existing in California, Canada, and the U.K. In England, as Shinder Thandi has noted, the numerous factions and groups in Punjab politics were duplicated in local politics and for at least a time controlled many institutions. These in turn contributed to propaganda and funds for the militants in Punjab. In Toronto and Vancouver, the same pattern persisted, often involving contested elections and occasional violence. In North America, congregations and leaders associated with non-political or moderate positions came under attack, especially gurdwaras in Vancouver, Toronto, New York, Yuba City, Los Angles, Washington, D.C. and San Francisco.

Secondly, politics became intertwined with ideology and a sustained re-examination of historical and religious traditions. The new, militant leadership envisioned a Sikhism in danger not only from political but also scholarly attack, and acted accordingly. Reminiscent of the early Singh Sabha days and the events surrounding the Akali upsurge in the 1920s, the attempts to stamp out opposition, to delineate 'who is a Sikh' or a 'real Sikh', and in general to legitimize a particular view of Sikh tradition created new tensions and concerted efforts to discredit opponents and scholarship seen as dangerous to the Panth. Those holding Sikh Chairs or labelled as 'anti-Sikh' scholars came under a sustained barrage. The arguments over the concept of *piri-miri*, fusing religion and politics within Sikhism, gave local and national debate a new urgency tinged with a sense of desperation.

The heart of the militant strategy, and one of the most pervasive reasons for at least

short term success, involved an understanding of how to control the flow of information and communications. Fundamentalist and Khalistan activists created new networks and strategies to promulgate their message. This meant founding newspapers and journals, in English and Panjabi, whose approach to news and issues came to dominate the print culture within the diaspora. The World Sikh News, The Sword, the Indo-Canadian Times and Express News ed. by Tara Singh Hayer from Vancouver, and at least another dozen or so similar weekly or monthly publications, systematically attempted to influence perceptions of tradition, politics, and current events.<sup>8</sup>

Strengthening support groups within the community while marginalizing opponents, both internal and also western scholars associated with contrary positions, also led to several other key innovations in communication. Traditional Sikh ceremonies and honors became politicized. In the United States, for example, Congressmen friendly to the Khalistan cause received saropas and public acclaim in carefully orchestrated community events. Patrons instrumental in founding gurdwaras or contributing to Sikh non-political causes came under attack, and in those gurdwaras associated with Khalistan politics, honors now went instead to perceived champions of the Sikh cause. Annual celebrations and marches became politicized, sometimes with open conflict between various groups of participants.

The most striking innovation involved a variation of an institution popularized during the Singh Sabha period, the jatha and morcha ('moving groups' and marches). Besides creating their own publishing houses and scholarly institutes designed to nullify the opinions of opponents who often utilized academic conferences and networks, Canadian and American leaders held international seminars and conferences with agendas reflecting their orientation, and in November and December 1990, took a travelling seminar/conference on the road to mobilize Sikhs against the likes of Harjot Oberoi, Pashaura Singh, and W.H.Mcleod. The same publicists gave the same papers in a variety of settings, and then published the proceedings complete with personal attacks and charges of conspiracy. Like their Singh Sabha predecessors, the Khalistanis therefore mastered the art of utilizing print culture and tract warfare in the battle for minds and pocketbooks of the community.<sup>10</sup>

Although Khalistan and doctrinal debate remain part of Sikh life, in the last decade the militant message and support has dwindled. This can be attributed to both the public realization of the propaganda nature of the literature as well as changes in Punjab politics. At the same time, however, the networks that operated effectively in the 1980s have been supplanted by a much more pervasive and immediate means of communication, the internet. One cannot control the flow of information through email and websites, but the rapid multiplication of sources that instantaneously comment on news and issues, ranging from Khalistan and Punjab politics (Burning Punjab) to theological disputes, present Sikhs with almost too much information, and the problem of unsorting opinion and fact, perceived or real tradition. Even without traditional

journalism, Sikhs are linked as never before, with *The Tribune*, *hukamnamas*, and reports from organizations just a few clicks away. In this environment, a seminal event such as the tercentenary of the Khalsa takes on a new significance, with groups not only trying to control proceedings but also publicizing widely their agendas and interpretations of symbols and events.

# Controversies among Sikhs: Select Issues

Competition and conflict have been persistent in Sikh public life since the early stages of the Singh Sabha movement, c. 1875. Some of the political groupings and ideological divides found in the Punjab transferred to Sikhs in North America, in the form of organizations such as the Ghadar party or the followers of Teja Singh Bhasaur associated with Randhir Singh. Caste, region, family--all have been important ingredients in discourse and institutions, and yet almost every observer agrees that the events of 1984 served as a faultline that either revised old issues or injected new elements into Sikh public life. Things changed, dramatically. A substantial unsorting of allegiances and ideology occurred quickly, redefining boundaries around and between Sikhs, and creating a fresh wave of conflict that encompassed politics and cultural identity.

Sikhs frequently attempted to steer clear of the controversies, but leaders and publicists have involved the community as a whole in a series of publicly embarrassing and expensive court cases as well as criminal proceedings and hateful propaganda. Several interlocking controversies run through these local explosions. First, what is the relation between religion and politics in Sikh tradition and what are the legitimate uses of institutions such as gurdwaras and contributed resources in furthering a particular agenda? Secondly, can Sikhism survive without a separate state, Khalistan? Answers to these questions generally raise more basic, underlying issues that have been disputed among Sikhs for the last century- who is a Sikh, what are the relations between amritdhari/kesdharis and sahajdharis, and what symbols are essential and must be protected? Most recently, the nature of authority among Sikhs and how they conduct rituals and daily life have received attention in dramatic fashion, with assassinations, political maneuvering in the West and Punjab, and debate over rahit maryada and the Akal Takht. The perennial debates and divisive issues unresolved and lying just below the surface now have taken on a new significance.

Who should control gurdwaras and their role among Sikhs is a question that has led to court proceedings and disruption in many local communities. Legal battles in Yuba City, Los Angeles, Vancouver, Toronto, New York, Washington, D.C. and points in between continue to appear and reappear. Fighting involves either defending the legitimacy of founders who use constitutions and bylaws for maintaining control or new groups who insist on revising rules and changing authority patterns. Sometimes

there are abrupt takeovers, culminating in violence and a string of court cases; in other situations, guerrilla warfare leads to gradual change or stalemates that affect the sangat. Most disputes include some reinterpretation of Sikh tradition and a demand for widened public support of issues such as Khalistan, but the mixture of politics and ideology varies widely. Factions fight over whether services should focus on religious matters or be broadened to include political speeches and mobilization.<sup>12</sup>

In the Fairfax, Virginia, dispute, for example, the Khalistan Council made a concerted effort to use the gurdwara as a base of operations because of its proximity to D.C. An earlier effort in Maryland had been unsuccessful. Debate over the legality of an incorporated religious institution being used for political purposes went on for months, punctuated with inflammatory events such as personal attacks on a visiting exjathedar of the Akal Takht, Darshan Singh, because of his alleged betrayal of the Sikh cause. The dissident group then enrolled numerous members from outside, supporting their position, just before the deadline, and attempted to assert that the will of the sangat (temporarily with a Khalistan majority) should override the bylaws. Threats and fighting left the militants with temporary control, but after a lengthy and very expensive court battle, the original leadership was reinstated. Some dissidents remained, while others set up a new society.<sup>13</sup>

In Fairfax and other cases, anyone not supporting Khalistan was labelled a non-Sikh. In America, controversial Immigration and Nationalization Service proceedings fed into the conflict, as did heated rhetoric in papers and marches. In Canada, charges about the activities of militants in supporting violent activities, including the bombing of Air India Flight 182, intensified the efforts at aggressive defence of Canadian Sikhs as well as Punjab activities, a situation already made worse by racist attitudes and events publicized in the Sikh press. Khalistan as a dominant issue remains less important now, indicated by the growing moderation of former leaders of the WSO, but that could change if the political situation in the Punjab deteriorates. Certainly militant actions remain prominent in public demonstrations or in particular conflicts, as illustrated by recent violence in Toronto over speeches by controversial figures and the assassination of Tar Singh Hayer. Most notably, the Khalsa celebrations in April, 1999 became highly politicized in Punjab and several diaspora sites. 15

The issues raised about history, Sikh identity, and authority that underpinned the Khalistan debate nevertheless continue to engage Sikhs and drive public debate. Sometimes controversies over symbols, such as the kirpan and wearing of turban, lead to court cases which in turn highlight Sikh ambivalence as to whether

Sikhs must have uniformity in dress and belief. California Sikhs have been engaged in a campaign to permit wearing of ceremonial kirpans in the public schools. A few school boards, such as in the Yuba City vicinity, have worked out compromises about length and other precautions to prevent the symbols being used as weapons. Sikhs defending the position that no such limitations should be placed on religious symbols,

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however, have blocked similar rules in other areas. In North America, many of the older generation of immigrants did not place a priority on maintaining the 5Ks, a position now challenged across the board by groups methodically taking over gurdwaras and rewriting rules about governance. In Fremont, for example, the executive committee is enforcing a rule that clean-shaven Sikhs cannot play a leadership role, a trend also reflected in other gurdwaras. The courts tend to support such activities if they follow strict procedural rules.<sup>16</sup>

The strengthened *Amritdhari/kesdhari* position has not ended the struggles between competing groups. Western scholarship sometimes appears as evidence in the debates, or in court cases, because of the arguments used in terms of historical and religious precedent. The two 20th Century documents on the controversy provide either unclear or general definitions of who is a Sikh. The 1925 Sikh Gurdwara Act resulted from a compromise that accepted a broad view of Sikh identity. The Act defines a Sikh as one who 'professes the Sikh religion and who when challenged would affirm the following declaration: I solemnly affirm that I am a Sikh, that I believe in the Guru Granth Sahib, that I believe in the Ten Gurus, and that I have no other religion.'<sup>17</sup>

The version of the *rahit maryada* currently in circulation also skirts the issue. According to the document, those who are not *amritdhari* must agree with the details of the Khalsa ceremony and its importance, but they clearly are seen as Sikhs. Further complicating the matter of who is a Sikh and who should lead are other divisions within the community that partially account for factions, such as caste affiliation, class, or region (malwa, majha). These have led to splits and the formation of new gurdwaras in some instances (for example, Ramgarhia, Jat or non-Jat).<sup>18</sup>

During the last decade, the rahit maryada has appeared more frequently in the discourse and edicts circulating among Sikhs. Some gurdwaras in North America have incorporated respect for the maryada as part of their bylaws, primarily those organized or reconstituted recently, but most constitutions do not include such references. The problem is that the document's origins and legitimacy can be questioned. Earlier, the Chief Khalsa Diwan attempted to prepare a definitive statement but backed away because of controversy and divisions. Some wanted the rahit to reflect total amritdhari and khalsa control of all institutions, while others urged that definitions and details be constructed in such a way as to incorporate as many Sikhs as possible. The Diwan could not resolve the competing visions of Sikhism, either a relatively small, cohesive community with a strong identity but lacking numbers necessary for political influence or a broader grouping that could marshall more resources and be effective as a minority community.<sup>19</sup> In the 1930s, with Akali and growing amritdhari/kesdhari dominance, committees re-examined the issue and attempted to work out a comprehensive guide to Sikh life. Minimal public debate was reflected in the process, and even then, the SGPC only gave public support to the guide in 1945, probably because of the need to consolidate and activate Sikhs in preparation for independence. The resulting *maryada* therefore is very specific on rituals, but probably intentionally vague on major doctrinal points. In additional to not resolving the role of *sahajdharis* within Sikhism, it is unclear about who decides whether Sikhs are *patit* (sinners, a concept solely reserved for *amritdharis* who have broken their pledge) and whether they should be removed permanently from the panth. Except for one line at the end of the document which refers to respect for the Akal Takht and the possibility of appeal to that institution in disputes, the published 1950 version contains no details about procedures of enforcement, declaring individuals *tankhahiya* (outside the pale of Sikhism, seen by many as a form of excommunication), or appeals. The role of *sarbat khalsa* (large, representative community gatherings important in earlier Sikh history) and *panj piare* (the group of five dedicated Sikhs essential for baptism but also sometimes playing a role in judgements) are not addressed.<sup>20</sup>

The most contentious and potentially divisive element in Sikhs' struggle over identity and power increasingly has involved the nature and role of the Akal Takht in Sikh public life. Without reviewing the many twists and turns of how the leadership of the Akal Takht has intervened in Punjab and occasionally diaspora politics, the issue over its authority needs to be examined briefly because the central institution's character and prominence goes to the heart of the debate over the relationship of religion and politics in Sikhism, and also the institutional authority that Sikhs often desire but at the same time suspect because of the recent history of jathedar actions. Most Sikhs respect the Akal Takht as a primary seat of religious authority and a focus for Sikh politics. By issuing hukamnamas (edicts or writs), the Takht traditionally has provided guidance and limited religious discipline. The actual practices of those in charge of the holy seat, however, are so entangled with political intrigue, factionfighting, and questions about decision-making that the legitimacy of specific edicts and the qualifications of those issuing the pronouncements has become problematic. Although the Takht had issued occasional pronoucements since its creation in 1606 by Guru Hargobind, the creation of a jathedar (custodian, or from one perspective, a high priest) in 1921 and then institutionalized by the 1925 Gurdwara Act linked the institution with the politics of the Akalis and the SGPC (the Shriomani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee). At times the various jathedars have attempted to influence or even dictate political decisions in the Punjab, and sometimes they have been manipulated and used to legitimize the programs and policies of specific individuals and political parties.21

North American Sikhs probably were not concerned over the Akal Takht until the 1980s when two sets of interconnected processes made its decisions part of the diaspora experience. First, the expanded communication network centering on newspapers and now email and websites provided daily information on Takht activities and championed, or criticized, its decisions as critical for the future of Sikhism. The pervasive exposure combined with the jathedar's use of the media and the opportunity

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for extended tours to build support and to legitimize its role. Different groups either attacked existing or current *jathedars* for their policies or used their edicts to support local agendas ranging from Khalistan to power struggles in institutions.<sup>22</sup>

More immediately, in the last decade, the Akal Takht has become far more active in addressing controversies and in being involved in both major and minor issues. The major thrust has been to increase the power and independence of the Akal Takht, and to tie its support to clearly enunciated Khalsa and *amritdhari* principles. Pronouncements on politics and the relationship between religion and politics have become common, as have calls for Sikhs everywhere to acknowledge the supremacy of the Akal Takht and to build allegiance into new or revised constitutions. The expanded vision of the Akal Takht in protecting community interests also has led to an overall strategy of intervention in academic and religious debate only infrequently addressed earlier. The cascade of criticism against Piar Singh and Pashaura Singh led to Akal Takht intervention, as have calls for banning of controversial books and limits on scholarly discussion of controversial matters including the nature of the Akal Takht itself.<sup>23</sup>

Secondly, the new activist phase of Akal Takht interventions has led to involvement in local gurdwara politics in North America. In the Fairfax Gurdwara case, for example, a forcible takeover of the gurdwara by organized militants in 1993 led to court proceedings that went on for four years. Appreciating the weakness of their cause if the courts decided the matter on constitutional principles, the controlling faction presented a set of arguments allegedly based on Sikh principles. First, they argued that the sangat had the right to overrule any decision based on bylaws and legal election procedures. When the 'supremacy of the sangat' argument came under attack, an unsuccessful attempt to prove that the decision of an external review body (panj piare) favorable to their cause should be accepted as a traditional means of conflict resolution led to a most controversial tactic. The courts, it was argued, had no jurisdiction over the dispute because like the Catholic Church, Sikhs and their institutions were hierarchial in nature, with the equivalent of a Pope (the Akal Takht jathedar) and a universally accepted set of doctrines (the rahit maryada). Opponents argued that Sikh gurdwaras always had been independent, except when linked by specific legislation such as the 1925 Gurdwara Act), and were congregations with bylaws and procedures that could be addressed by the courts.24

Manjit Singh, the acting jathedar, indeed became involved in the matter, initially because the granthi asked for his suggestions about how to resolve the struggle peacefully. After a series of interactions, the Jathedar issued a strongly worded document (not a hukamnama) that said the controversy should be withdrawn from the courts and arbitrated in light of his decisions, which included insuring that in the future only gursikhs (initiated Sikhs) would lead the congregation. The ensuing court proceedings evoked a firestorm of debate throughout North America, and finally

culminated when the court decided that gurdwaras were congregational and that authority should be returned to those who originally ran the organization. Manjit Singh did not pursue the matter further, especially in light of his dwindling political base and a chorus of criticism about the wisdom of his decisions including that of the Fairfax intervention.

Jathedar Ranjit Singh accelerated active involvement in a wide range of issues, including diaspora affairs, upon his pardon and release from prison in 1998. He supported *amritdhari* control of all institutions, called for mass conversion of all sahajdharis, and collaborated with groups and institutions defending the Akal Takht as the supreme authority in Sikhism. Khalistani groups and militants in North America generally saw Ranjit Singh as a champion for their cause, particularly because of his link with violence during the earlier struggle and his role in the murder of religious opponents.<sup>25</sup>

The perennial conflict between moderates and extremists in Vancouver gurdwaras soon drew his attention, and Ranjit Singh issued controversial *hukamnamas* in those affairs. Specifically, he sided with the militants out of power in the Surrey, B.C. gurdwara who argued those in control were not legitimate because they condoned non-Sikh practices such as having chairs and tables in *langar* (community kitchens). Ranjit Singh ordered the majority on the executive committee to change the rules, and after local resistance, he excommunicated several including the editor of the influential and now moderate *Indo-Canadian Times*, Hayer. Hayer subsequently was assassinated, further inflaming the already tense atmosphere in Vancouver.<sup>26</sup>

Once again the authority of the Akal Takht became part of legal proceedings when the minority party called on the courts to remove the now excommunicated Sikhs from the executive committee, thus transferring power to the militants. The judge rejected the argument and called for fresh elections, which the moderates won. Most of the other British Columbia gurdwaras remain in the hands of similar groups, who almost universally reject the demands of the

Akal Takht and continue to have tables and chairs in *langar*, a serious challenge to the *jathedar* as well as a statement as to the impropriety of his pattern of intervention in local matters.<sup>27</sup> In early 1999, when the U.S. Consulate in New Delhi first issued and then cancelled the visa for a Ranjit Singh tour in America, supporters and critics of the *jathedar* again staked out positions. The U.S. government did not back down despite claims from Sikhs and their Congressional allies that the *jathedar* had the equivalent position of Pope among Sikhs and therefore should be shown great deference.<sup>28</sup>

Controversy surrounding the Akal Takht continues unabated, but in 1999, the majority faction in the SGPC supporting Chief Minister Badal and opposing the once all-powerful ruler of the organization, Tohra, took steps to force Tohra's resignation as well as challenging the influence of the Akal Takht and its recent aggressive actions including several key *hukanamas*. Punjab political maneuvering therefore once again

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has raised the level of rhetoric and conflict among Sikhs in North America, as elsewhere, and reopened old wounds relating to the nature of Sikhism, history, and current practices. Sikhs remain divided on the issue, with some (most notably organizations either linked currently or in the past to the Khalistan, militant movement) calling the removal of Ranjit Singh as *jathedar* an attack on Sikhism, while others registering public delight at his seeming demise.<sup>29</sup>

## Implications for Study of the Sikhs, Punjab

Although in general controversies often help frame academic scholarship, the tumultuous events in the Punjab and among Sikhs abroad during the last two decades raise especially difficult questions about new sources and the influences affecting research and scholarly dialogue. Confronting students of the Sikhs, and the region, is the flood of documentation and published material that that inevitably molds our understanding of recent history, politics, and culture. Whether discussing nuclear armament, partition, revivalism, support for terrorism, or the nature of a Sikh or Islamic state, the hardening and parochial positions linking officials with scholars are ever present. In turn, what are the problems of dealing with these sources, and what else do we need to know? The zeal and the partisanship reflected in the circulation of fresh materials also points to a broader issue, what are legitimate areas of inquiry and how do those and earlier approaches relate to increased awareness and sensitivity among Punjabis and particularly Sikhs? Finally, what can research and academic discussion contribute to debate among Sikhs and at the same provide data and analysis useful for scholars without a specific interest in the region?

First, the sources. Contemporary material on Sikhs can be broken into three categories. The first consists of academic studies from existing research institutes and publishers. Guru Nanak Dev University and Punjabi University systematically issue studies on Sikhs, supplemented by a series of works from Oxford University Press and Manohar Publications. The Punjab-produced volumes tend to avoid controversial issues or major re-evaluations of sources and themes, especially in times of inflamed public and political scrutiny. However, they constitute a useful collection of reprints and original works, often on the period of the Gurus or specific historical figures and events.30 Major journals such as Panjab Past and Present and others focussing on Sikh studies either have ended or appear sporadically. The International Journal of Punjab Studies from the U.K. remains the only venue for systematic publication of new articles and scholarly essays on the region. Much of the earlier impetus for large projects and journals came from individuals such as Dr. Ganda Singh, or in the case of the seminal Encyclopaedia of Sikhism (just completed in four volumes), Harbans Singh, J.S. Grewal and W.H.McLeod continue to generate precise and relevant scholarship, frequently published either by Oxford or Manohar. Several Delhi publishers have joined this group recently. The National Book Shop specializes in Punjab and Sikh topics, both reprints and new studies on politics, religion, and contemporary issues. Anmol Publications and Deep Publications tend to print selections of documents and essays, often reprints, but in the last year, they have released monographs with fresh data on Sikh gurdwaras, the Akali Dal, and Punjab/Sikh politics.<sup>31</sup>

Centers of Sikh and Punjab studies outside India are increasingly important in redefining the parameters of academic study. Besides the Punjab journal, a network of scholars in the U.K. have turned out substantial conference proceedings as well as two major bibliographies by Darshan Singh Tatla and Ian Talbot.<sup>32</sup> In the U.S., occasional monographs on Sikhs and the Punjab have been published, but at least on Sikhism, the most timely and reflective collections of essays have been presented at three Michigan Sikh Studies conferences and then published in volumes on the Sikh diaspora, transmission of the Sikh heritage, and this year, Sikh identity.<sup>33</sup>

Unlike the Singh Sabha period, when with a few exceptions, articles, tracts and books reflected partisan opinions

and were not scholarly, the books emitting from established institutions or publishers have created a widening pool of balanced albeit sometimes controversial research. The second major set of recent publications often replicate the earlier Singh Sabha pattern. printed matter attacking, defending or persuading others to accept a point of view. The Singh Sabha tradition of kandan-mandan is alive and well in contemporary Sikh studies. In Punjabi and English, the new materials respond to specific issues or a work or author judged to be 'dangerous' or 'anti-Sikh.' Some are ad hoc, printed by individual authors or supporting groups, while others result from collaboration and a set of quasi-academic institutes in major Sikh centers (especially in Punjab and California). Centers of Sikh Studies or Institutes of Sikh Studies have been quite common for the last ten years. For example, a network of such organizations organized conferences in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. in the 1990s, and then published the proceedings, an interesting collection of essays on controversial topics. Subsequent travelling seminars focussed more sharply on the work of W.H. McLeod, Pashaura Singh, and most heatedly, Harjot Oberoi. The resulting collections and monographs are argumentative, questioning both the motives and the scholarly findings of the targets.<sup>14</sup> The Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, also publishes two numbers annually of Abstract of Sikh Studies which reflect a similar purpose. Tract material frequently deals with political issues, either local conflicts or more generally, Khalistan and related developments in the Punjab, For example, the Sikh Educational Trust in Alberta has produced several works on recent Punjab developments, atrocities, and a review of Sikh political struggles for freedom. Although partisan and pro-Khalistan, the influential The World Sikh Review did offer a weekly platform for debate from many quarters, combining debate on politics and social matters.35

The third and most dynamic new source, the internet, now has become an expanding avenue for information and heated rhetoric, often substituting for prior tract efforts as well as the defunct *The World Sikh News*. In March 1999, for example, there were over 1500 websites associated with Sikhism, representing an array of individual and organized attempts to present ideas and spread a message. 'Burning Punjab', among others, reproduces news and evokes often emotional correspondence on issues such as the Akal Takht, atrocities, and prominent institutions and personalities. The Khalistan and connected sites issue bulletins, mobilize support, and attack opponents, as well as playing a role in organizing marches and events relating to celebrations such as the Khalsa Tercentenary. Other sites deal with *Rahit Maryada*, approaches to the Guru Granth Sahib, community affairs, background on individual gurdwaras, and a wide array of topics. Similarly, sites on Punjab culture, history, and communal relations discuss events and problems from other perspectives (Hindu, Communist and secular).

This crescendo of fresh opinion and research on Sikh and Punjab matters creates possibilities as well as dilemmas for broadening our understanding of contemporary and historical topics. Students of community affairs never have had access to such an array of data from so many sources. We now know more about more things, either from concerned scholars and publicists who generate hundreds of pages weekly, or from easy availability to news from the Punjab or on Sikh affairs through journal and newspaper websites. For example, a daily visit to 'Tribuneindia' sheds light on the myriad organizations and conflicts erupting over the last six months in the Punjab that focus on inter-Takht squabbles, fights over the newly formed World Sikh Council, or the perennial Badal-Tohra battles.

Tracts, quasi-academic volumes, internet documents, and readily available news accounts complicate the evaluation of source materials. Tracts, for example, provide bountiful information on how specific groups and individuals view history or controversy, but placing that data in a meaningful context is difficult. The background and perspective of patrons of seminars, publications, and new institutes must be factored into any attempt to use information. Often arguments are undocumented or tend to build in pyramid fashion upon earlier works. Since journals and newspapers frequently reflect partisan views, their importance as sources also must be questioned although at least the accounts do provide information on meetings, major events, and permit construction of timelines and a highlighting of issues.<sup>36</sup>

Internet material probably poses the most difficult questions of accuracy and validation. Certain patterns appear in specific sites, such as Khalistan, with many supporting documents from individuals and organizations. Unsorting where Sikhs stand on an explosive issue such as the authority of the Akal Takht, for example, can be illuminated by memorials and opinions found in certain sites, but contrary resolutions and publicized speeches also are available. Creating websites and

demonstrating opinion has become a major dimension of operating effectively in a quickly changing print culture, and thus, despite inherent problems, somehow must be weighed into the scholarly equation.

The controversial nature of the issues in the new sources also has implications for the environment of academic study of the Punjab and the Sikhs. Within a broad context, how one approaches the Unionist Party, the contributions of leaders to political alignments, and partition itself necessarily evokes passion and sometimes blame. Communalism and competing approaches to issues and history perennially affect scholarship, a pattern especially illustrated by discourse on the Sikhs. The message of the Gurus, the Guru Granth Sahib, martyrdom, the nature of the Khalsa, the historical relationship between religion and politics, and ultimately, what defines Sikhism and a Sikh - all these are not just scholarly issues but touch the very core of life around us. McLeod's research on Guru Nanak or my early and sometimes rather hasty judgements about the significance of the Singh Sabha movement evoked dissent and limited resentment prior to the 1980s, for example, but what might have been seen as uninformed or perhaps troublesome questions about tradition and identity quickly became framed as threats because of Operation Blue Star, the Delhi riots, and the aftermath of militancy, police oppression, and tragedies throughout the Punjab. A discussion of religious texts, the relationship between folk culture and Sikh values, the complexity involved in how Sikhs viewed their traditions in a new world colored by colonial assumptions and challenges - these could be seen and were portrayed as attacks designed to weaken Sikh solidarity, often in alleged alliance with Hindu politicians, government agents, missionaries or other groups of conspirators. Some Sikhs responded with heated verbal attacks and sometimes physical threats, as well as attempting to disrupt or challenge seminars or conferences that might include material judged to be anti-Sikh or a danger.37 The intellectual climate has been changing recently in the U.S., particularly since the subsiding of militancy and growing stability in the Punjab, but a frantic period of accusation and mobilization did injure several Sikh chairs in academic institutions as well as affecting the personal lives of scholars such as Harjot Oberoi, Piar Singh, and Pashaura Singh. How the upcoming Oxford monographs by Gurinder Singh Mann, Pashaura Singh, and Lou Fenech will be viewed and how specific interests will use or misuse their arguments remains to be seen.38

These recent experiences suggest a final issue, how can Sikh and academic concerns help focus issues and contribute to a better understanding of traditions and current affairs without intensifying antagonism and distrust? Recent developments suggest that Sikhs in fact are addressing the very issues that also interest scholars. If the historical record is clarified with appropriate documentation, Sikhs would benefit from perhaps new approaches as they attempt to understand their past and future course. For example, the *rahit maryada* keeps being mentioned in court documents,

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public presentations and internet arguments as a basic Sikh code over the centuries. with its latest formulation accepted almost uniformly as a legitimate document that answers basic questions concerning Sikh identity. With regard to the evolution of maryada, correspondents in journals and in the press have begun to question that assumption, in terms of details as well as the process from which the current document emerged in the 1940s. Only now being written into the bylaws of a few U.S. Sikh organizations, the specifics of ritual and intent vary and become central primarily when divisions occur and groups attempt to legitimize their positions by reference to tradition.39 In 1935, a limited number of Sikh intellectuals and religious leaders put together a set of principles and ritual observances, and although some organizations sent comments for clarification or correction, little attempt was made to evoke opinions from a variety of Sikh groups and associations. The SGPC did give the maryada its seal of approval in 1945 and circulated it widely in the 1950s. Sikhs and Sikh scholars know about the problems the Chief Khalsa Diwan faced in trying to prepare such a code, but little background information is available on the debate in the 1930s, the role of the SGPC, the 1945 decision, and the final printing. The evidence probably is in SGPC records and the newspapers of the period, and a thorough review of what happened might clarify what was included and excluded, as well as fuzziness on specific issues. If, as some argue, the maryada needs to be re-evaluated, modernized in light of contemporary problems, and then validated through an open, representative process, such documentation would be invaluable. A dialogue on basic historical events also would shed light on an equally controversial topic, authority and decisionmaking among Sikhs and the role of the takhts and especially the Akal Takht in framing issues and resolving disputes. Sikhs ultimately must decide for themselves an understanding of the Akal Takht and its leaders (especially the jathedar, first named in the early 1920s during the Akali movement and then appointed thereafter by the SGPC). However, balanced assessments of historical turning points, the role of specific jathedars, pre-1900 and current uses of hukamnamas, and so forth would shed light on such matters.

One could go on with an extensive list, including sahajdhari/kesdhari/amritdhari relations, women in Sikhism, and caste as a factor in both internal politics as well as larger arenas (especially in the U.K. and Punjab). Would such a dialogue between scholars (both Sikh and western) and the Sikh public be possible and beneficial? The experience of pre-1984 conferences suggests a positive answer, as does the recent 1996 Michigan meeting that reviewed almost every hot button issue facing Sikhs today without a major disturbance. A similar atmosphere permeated the proceedings of the Coventry Conference where a draft of this paper was presented and discussed. Sikhs in the diaspora, as well as those in the Punjab, struggle with the interaction of religion with personal law, alternative approaches to selecting leaders, and changes in laws and bylaws to meet contemporary needs. The ability and willingness of Sikhs reaching a

generally agreed upon perspective on the teachings of the Gurus and the nature of basic Sikh identity and institutions after Guru Gobind Singh largely will determine the parameters of this internal debate. Nevertheless, information and analysis from scholars should clarify the past, raise questions about tract and internet data, and focus on material that will aid in that critical process. Conversely, scholarship will be enriched by Sikh debate and decisions. The vitality of Sikhism derives from its roots as well as its commitment to respond creatively to new challenges. Sikhs' perspective on what is important and why will help scholars readjust their approaches and continue to produce a corpus of research questions and answers useful not only for India specialists but for all scholars interested in ethnicity, modernization, and the ongoing interface between religious faith and political action.

On a personal note, my work on the Singh Sabhas has been enriched immeasurably by my limited involvement as a scholar in the disputes currently facing Sikhs. I now ask new questions of historical materials, discovering both continuities and differences between the first two and last two decades of Sikh experience. In time, hopefully my newly informed view of how Sikhs earlier tried to deal with a difficult transitional period may in turn contribute positively to contemporary Sikh discourse

#### Notes, Background Information

- 1. Background on the Singh Sabha movement and issues in the following: Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); N.G. Barrier, *The Sikhs and Their Literature* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1970); also my interpretive essays, 'The Singh Sabhas and the Evolution of Modern Sikhism, 1875-1925,' in Robert Baird, ed., *Religion in Modern India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 3rd rev. ed. 1995), pp.192-223; 'Issues of Sikh Identity,' in Pashaura Singh and N.G. Barrier, eds., *Sikh Identity* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), pp.23-34.
- 2. The variety of sources and documents on Sikhs in North America are documented in Darshan Singh Tatla, Sikhs in North America (Westpost, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991); important sources include Bruce La Brack, The Sikhs of Northern California (New York: AMS Press, 1988); Narindar Singh, Canadian Sikhs: History, Religion and Culture of Sikhs in North America (Neapean, Ont.: Canadian Sikhs' Studies Institute, 1994); Norman Buchignani and Doreen Indra, Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985); and the various writings of Van Dusenbery and Karen Leonard, including her Making Ethnic Choices (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992). Also useful

are the essays and chapters on Canadian Sikhs by Hugh Johnston. For the linkage between homeland and the immigrant experience, see the life of Tara Singh Bains, ed. by Hugh Johnston, *The Four Quarters of the Night: The Life-Journey of an Emigrant Sikh* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995).

- For example, Jarnail Singh, et al, eds., Proceedings of the Sikh Conference 1979 (Willowdale, Ont.: Sikh Social and Educational Society, 1979); Mark Juergensmeyer, N.G. Barrier, eds., Sikh Studies: Comparative Perspectives in a Changing Tradition (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1979).
- 4. Cases dealing with gurdwara disputes, the kirpan, the turban, and other issues have occurred regularly throughout North America. Especially noteworthy are the decades of conflict in Los Angeles, Yuba City, Vancouver, and New York. On the most recent case and its implications, N.G. Barrier, 'The Fairfax, Virginia Gurdwara Case and Sikh Identity,' in Pashaura Singh and Barrier, Sikh Identity, pp.365-378.
- 5. A succinct history is in Narindar Singh, *Canadian Sikhs*. Also numerous articles on the Khalistan movement in *The World Sikh News* (henceforth WSN).
- 6. Background in Narindar Singh, Canadian Sikhs and short historical notes in the Khalistan website as well as various publicity tracts and sheets distributed from the Washington branch. Also relevant are affidavits and documents collected from across the U.S. for the Fairfax trial. A succinct review of the early role Khalistan played in the public life of Sikhs in North America is Arthur Helweg, 'Sikh Politics in India: The Emigrant Factor,' in Barrier and Dusenbery, eds., The Sikh Diaspora (New Delhi: Chanakya, 1989), pp.305-336. An interesting perspective is in Cynthia Mahmood, Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants (Philadelphia: U.Pennsylvania Press, 1996). On Khalistan and militancy, see the essays in J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, eds., Punjab in Prosperity and Violence (Chandigarh: Institute of Punjab Studies, 1998).
- Shinder Thandi, 'The Punjabai Diaspora in the UK and the Punjab Crisis,' in Pashaura Singh and Barrier, eds., The Transmission of Sikh Heritage in the Diaspora (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996), pp. 227-252.
- 8. Darshan Singh Tatla has prepared background on many of these journalistic efforts in a variety of bibliographies and critical notes. See, for example, his overview in Sikhs in North America: An Annotated Bibliography (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1991), pp. 161-71. On the earlier Sikh press and communications, Barrier, 'Sikh Emigrants and Their Homeland,' in The Sikh

- Diaspora, pp. 49-89; Barrier, 'Sikh Journalism,' in Harbans Singh, ed., The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism, v. 4 (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1998), pp. 161-66.
- The WSN had articles on such events almost every month. On the overall tension created by the movement, discussion in I.J. Singh, Sikh and Sikhism (New Delhi: Manohar, 1994), pp. 105-118.
- 10. See, for example, Jasbir Singh Mann, Invasion of Religious Boundaries (Vancouver: Canadian Sikh Study and Teaching Society, c. 1995); Planned Attack on AAD Sri Guru Granth Sahib: Academics or Blasphemy, ed. Bachittar Singh Giani (Chandigarh: International Centre of Sikh Studies, 1994). Many of the issues and controversies are weighed in J.S. Grewal, Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition (New Delhi: Manohar, 1998).
- The role of history, cultural conflict, and politics surrounding the events of 1984 are succinctly evaluated in Robin Jeffrey, What's Happening to India? (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1986). The growth of militancy is reflected in the interviews and contemporary accounts found in Mahmood, Fighting for Faith, and Joyce Pettigrew, The Sikhs of the Punjab (London: Zed, 1995). On Khalistan and California Sikhs, Bruce La Brack, 'California's Punjabi Century,' in Pritam Singh and Shinder Thandi, eds., Globalisation and the Region: Explorations in Punjabi Identity (Coventry: Association for Punjab Studies, 1996)
- 12. The press accounts of conflict at the Fremont Gurdwara in Los Angeles (details in *India West*, fall 1996) cover the history of conflicts over doctrine and Khalistan; useful background on the organizations in the area is in Karen Leonard, 'Second Generation Sikhs in the US: Consensus and Differences,' in Pashaura Singh and Barrier, *Sikh Identity*, pp.175-197. On another and persistent struggle in Yuba City, the most relevant documents are in the trial records of cases periodically reaching local courts. WSN also covered the conflicts in its community reports.
- 13. Background in Barrier, 'Fairfax Gurdwara,'
- 14. In addition to the account by Narindar Singh, Cynthia Mahmood has reviewed some of the actions of the Babbar Khalsa and the Sikh Students Federation, and public and official responses in Canada, in Fighting for Faith. Also background on perceptions of Sikhs and terrorism abroad in Z. Kashmerei and B. McAndrew, Soft Target (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1989) and Ian Mulgrew, Unholy Terror: The Sikhs and International Terrorism (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1988).

- Coverage in Vancouver and Toronto papers is extensive, but a review of recent events can be found in *India Today* (February 1999, the eruption of violence at the North York Gurdwara) and in the November and December issues of *India Today* (events and conflict at the Ross Street Gurdwara and the murder of Hayer). On Khalsa events, reports in *India Abroad*, *India Today*, and almost daily editorials and stories in the *Tribune*.
- 16. A unpublished review by John Spellman, presented at the 1996 Michigan Sikh Conference, has background on several of these cases. Also, his evidence in an Ohio case (background under 'kirpan' on the internet) and proceedings in an April 1999 case in Canada. On the Vermont gurdwara, Hollywood, accounts in *India Journal* (November 1996), *India Abroad* (January 1999), and *India West* (October 1996, February 1999).
- 17. The Sikh Gurdwaras Act 2(9). On the compromises and history of the Act, Mohinder Singh, The Akal Movement (Delhi: Macmillan India, 1978), and Selected Documents, Gurdwara Reform Movement ed. M.L. Ahluwalia (New Delhi: Ashoka International Pub., 1985). The Delhi Gurdwara Act passed in 1971 had a more restrictive definition, particularly with reference to voting and holding office. Background in Jitinder Kaur, The Politics of Sikhs (New Delhi: National Book Organization, 1986). On reform efforts, Surjit Singh Gandhi, Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1993) and the pioneering work of Kashmir Singh, Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 1991) and Law of Religiouis Institutions: Sikh Gurdwaras (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1989). One of the most comprehensive reviews of history and major issues is J.S. Grewal, Sikh Ideology and Social Order (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996).
- 18. Examples include gurdwaras in the New York City and Los Angeles vicinity. Parallel developments also have occurred in England, as documented in Arthur Helweg, Sikhs in England (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, rev. ed. 1986) and Sewa Singh Kalsi, The Evolution of a Sikh Community in Britain (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1992). Tara Singh Bains' autobiography contains detailed information on 'community strife' in a Canadian setting, Four Ouarters of the Night, pp.109-203.
- 19. Background in Barrier, 'The Formulation and Transmission of Sikh Tradition: Competing Organizations and Ideology, 1902-1925,' in Pashaura Singh and Barrier, eds., Transmission of Sikh Heritage, pp. 193-212. One of the most detailed treatments of the issues involving rahit is in Oberoi, Constructing; other useful background is in Nripinder Singh, The Sikh Moral Tradition (New Delhi: Manohar, 1990), pp.155-208. Translations and critical

- evaluations of rahitnamas are found in numerous articles and monographs by W.H. McLeod.
- 20. Although many of the details surrounding the discussion in the 1930s are unknown, one of the best sources on that period and overall issues about the rahit maryada is the Chahal website on the internet. Numerous scholarly and polemic articles on the subject also can be found in The Sikh Review, especially in the last two years. One useful source on Khalsa and Rahit is W.H. McLeod's collections of documents, Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1984); a readily available translation of the 1945 document is in W. Owen Cole and Piara Singh Sambhi, The Sikhs (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978, and subsequent editions in the U.K. and U.S.)
- Discussion and critique of the Akal Takht's recent history is in two books by Harjinder Singh Dilgeer, The Akal Takht (Jullundur, 1980) and Akal Takht Sahib (Edmonton, Alb.: Sikh Educational Trust, 1995, rev. ed.). Another valuable perspective is the Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia and Dilger ed. volume, Sri Akal Takht (Chandigarh: Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, 1994). Most of the standard histories of Punjab politics since the late 1970s emphasize the varying degrees of involvement of the jathedars with factions and specific campaigns. A fascinating but at times an unconnected and polemical overview of Sikh religious institutions and politics is Sangat Singh's The Sikhs in History (New Delhi: Author Pub., 1995).
- 22. The WSN, for example, would give full support to the Akal Takht in one issue, and then criticize specific decisions or policies in the next. The Khalistan webpage and 'Burning Punjab' exemplify attempts to identify Sikh religious leaders with a program or activity.
- 23. Various edicts and calls to the panth reflecting such themes were quite common in the *Tribune* news reports over the last eighteen months. A full account of Pashaura Singh's interaction with the Akal Takht is in his deposition during preliminary proceedings in a Michigan gurdwara case (this along with other documents available in Circuit Court records). Piar Singh's account, published posthumously (*Gatha Sri Adi Granth and the Controversy*, 1996) details the issues surrounding his case.
- 24. Reviewed in Barrier, 'Fairfax Gurdwara.' The WSN printed documents and extensive commentary on the Fairfax events. The detailed evidence of a former *jathedar*, Darshan Singh, questioned the wisdom and basis for Akal Takht intervention in a local matter. The claim that gurdwaras are not independent but belong to the sangat, and should be administered by the

- SGPC and the Akal Takht, is put forth by Ranbir Singh Sandhu, 'Are Gurdwaras Independent?', *The Sikh Review* (August 1994), pp. 34-39.
- See, for example, discussions in the Khalistan website throughout 1998 and 1999. Letters to Ranjit Singh, March 11, 1998; Khalistan Press release, February 1998. Also useful are the news accounts and reports in the *Tribune*, September and October 1998. Ranjit Singh responded to a supporting letter from Fairfax dissidents who set up their institution, putting forth a program in which the Akal Takht would be the sole arbiter in local disputes, and also set up rigorous *amritdhari* and puritanical expectations for leadership within a gurdwara. On support for the Akal Takht, see account of the *Tribune* (September 16, 1998) on the Sikh Intellectual Council's position that included monitoring of all T.V. channels with information on Sikhism and attacking seminars on decisions by the Akal Takht. In response, Manjit Singh's criticism of excessive hukamnamas and Ranjit Singh's improprieties (*Tribune*, September 21, 1998).
- India Today gave full coverage to the Vancouver situation, as did the Tribune and a variety of journals and newspapers circulating within the Sikh diaspora.
- 27. Reports in the Tribune and India Abroad, January-March 1999.
- 28. Khalistan Press Releases, January and February, 1999, Khalistan website. From the opposite perspective, the letter from Hardev Singh Shergill, President of the Roseville, California gurdwara, that Ranjit Singh is not a Pope and many Sikhs did not want him to tour because of possible violence. *India West*, January 29, 1999 and subsequent issues. Also his open letter to Congressmen, Feb 8, 1999, excerpts in *India West*, February 19, 1999.
- 29. For example, letters and resolutions in the 'Burning Punjab' website. The spectrum of Sikh opinion continues to be reflected in the letters and articles appearing regularly in *The Sikh Review*.
- 30. For example, a fresh edition of the CID report hitherto unpublished, The Ghadar Directory (1998), Paul Wallace and Surendra Chopra, eds., Political Dynamics and Crisis in Punjab (1988), Studies in Urban History ed. J.S.Grewal, Indu Banga (n.d.), Harish Puri, Ghadar Movement (1993), the B-40 Janam Sakhi (1980), translated by W.H. McLeod, and the four volumes on Gandhi and the Punjab edited by S.L. Malhotra, published by Punjab University. A comprehensive review of new publications from Punjab is in Darshan Singh Tatla and Ian Talbot, Punjab (Oxford: Clio Press, World Bibliographical Series, v. 180, 1995.
- 31. Recent volumes published in Delhi include Sharda Jain, *Politics of Terrorism* in India: The Case of Punjab (New Delhi: Deep and Deep, 1995); Kuleep

- Kaur, Akali Dal in Punjab Politics (Deep and Deep, 1999); V.K. Gupta, The Sikhs and Gurdwara System (Anmol, 1998); D.P. Sharma, The Punjab Story (Ashish, 1996); M.S. Deora's reference works and chronologies, Akali Agitation to Operation Bluestar (2vs. Anmol, 1991) and Aftermath of Operation Bluestar (2 vs. Anmol, 1992).
- 32. Tatla, Sikhs in North America and Tatla and Talbot, Punjab. Pritam Singh, Shinder Thandi, eds., Globalisation and the Region: 1996); Gurharpal Singh, Ian Talbot, eds., Punjabi Identity, Continuity and Change (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996).
- Sikh Diaspora (1988); Transmission of Sikh Heritage (1966); Sikh Identity (1998). The other major set of volumes are the monographs and proceedings sponsored by the Research Committee on the Punjab, Association for Asian Studies.
- Jasbir Singh Mann, Invasion of Religious Boundaries (1995); Planned Attack on AAD Sri Guru Granth Sahib (1994); Trilochan Singh, Ernest Trumpp and W.H. McLeod (Chandigarh: International Centre of Sikh Studies, 1994); Kharak Singh, et al, eds., Fundamental Issues in Sikh Studies (Chandigarh, Institute of Sikh Studies, 1992, and dist. Center of Sikh Studies, Santa Ana and Anaheim, California); Jasbir Singh Mann, ed., Advanced Studies in Sikhism: Papers Contributed at Conference of Sikh Studies Los Angeles, December 1988 (Irvine: Sikh Community of North America, 1989); Kasbir Singh Mann, eds., Recent Researches in Sikhism (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1992).
- Examples: India Kills the Sikhs ed. Dilgeer and Awatar Singh Sekhon (Edmonton: Sikh Educational Trust); The Sikhs' Struggle for Sovereignty ed. Dilgeer, Sekhon, A.T. Kerr (Edmonton: Sikh Educational Trust, 1992); The Sikhs, Past and Present (no information on the complete journal, volume 4 published in June 1994).
- 36. For example, the names and dates of death of specific Sikh militants in *India Kills the Sikhs* helps pinpoints episodes or important events that could be checked out against local papers such as the *Tribune* or *Ajit*. One especially useful volume in Panjabi and English, *Khalistan Di Lahir* ed. Professor Uday Singh, and published by the author, Bolton, Ontario in 1987, is a treasure trove of documents, correspondence, and personal accounts.
- 37. For example, a panel several years ago at the American Academy of Religion focussed on religious authority, texts and tradition. The group in California headed by Jasbir Singh Mann sounded an alarm, solicited a document from the Akal Takht that authorized their challenging any 'anti-Sikh' analysis as

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representatives of the Takht, and then proceeded to interrupt the seminar as well as afterward pursuing a strategy of attacking the AAR and questioning its academic standards.

Background on the Sikh chairs and Sikh studies issue in Joseph O'Connell,
 'The Fate of Sikh Studies in North America,' in Pashaura Singh and Barrier,

Transmission, pp.269-288.

On variations, Pashaura Singh, 'Obbserving the Khalsa Rahit in North America,' in *Transmission*, pp. 149-176. Within the last four months, *The Sikh Review* has published several letters and articles on rahit, Sikh and Hindu personal codes, possible problems arising from the *rahit maryada* and its potential need for revision, the legitimacy of intervention in local gurdwara affairs, and the extensive use of *hukamnamas*.

# The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms

### Susan Stronge and Hajra Shaikh Victoria & Albert Museum, London

This especially commissioned article provides interesting background information to the first international exhibition ever on the cultural heritage of the Sikhs of Punjab. It discusses how the main theme for the exhibition was selected, the main features of the exhibition, contents of a attractively illustrated book, which accompanied the exhibition, and the main organisations which supported and were involved with the exhibition in their own different ways. The article concludes with brief highlights of the educational programme that ran alongside the duration of the exhibition.

#### The selection of a theme

On March 25th 1999 the first international exhibition ever on the cultural heritage of the Sikhs of the Panjab opened at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The idea of putting on a Sikh exhibition had first been suggested five or so years earlier when Narinder Singh Kapany, Chair of the Sikh Foundation in the US, visited the museum and walked with me round the museum's main Indian gallery. Initially, the suggestion was that the V&A should lend some of the paintings published by W.G. Archer in his seminal monograph, Paintings of the Sikhs, to the Sikh Foundation's local museum, the prestigious Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. As time went by, however, it became clear that an exhibition with a Sikh theme should ideally take place to celebrate Vaisakhi 1999, and that the theme should be much broader. Discussions continued, and finally it was decided that the exhibition would be formulated and curated in London, with a part travelling to San Francisco - space constraints meant that this would necessarily be a reduced version of the London show.

The theme was chosen carefully: it had to be worthy of the significance of the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Khalsa and at the same time had to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, given that it would be the major exhibition on the V&A programme for the first half of the year. An exhibition devoted to the Sikh religion would present problems: Sikhism from its earliest times rejected religious imagery; paintings depicting, for example, the Ten Gurus vary widely in quality and until the later 20th century are usually small in scale;

and the Guru Granth Sahib, for obvious reasons, could not be part of a museum show. The character of the V&A's own collections finally led to the chosen theme: the cultural heritage of the Sikhs in the Panjab shown through paintings, textiles, precious stones, metalwork and other artefacts associated with the Sikh court. Inevitably, the primary focus would be on the extraordinary ruler who, in 1801, was made the first Sikh Maharaja of the Panjab: Ranjit Singh. His renowned Golden Throne is one of the museum's most treasured possessions and the collection has a number of portraits of Ranjit Singh and members of his court, mostly acquired in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as a remarkable group of Kashmir shawls of the kind used at the Sikh court as articles of dress but also as deluxe tent linings or floor coverings.

As the project developed, and the outline became clearer, other collections in London, the rest of the British Isles, India, Pakistan, North America, and continental Europe were approached for loans to enrich the exhibition. By the beginning of 1997, the overall structure of the exhibition was established and would provide a sweeping view of the history of the Panjab over the entire 19th century, illustrated through works of art.

### A tour through the exhibition

The opening section described aspects of Sikhism and concentrated on the holy city of Amritsar, allowing for the display an almost unknown series of views of the Harmandir by the Italian photographer Felice Beato. Although well known as a war photographer, and particularly for his studies of the Crimea and of Indian Mutiny sites, his close-up views of the entrance to the Harmandir and its causeway do not seem to have been exhibited since 1867. These were accompanied by an equally unknown study of the monument painted by an unknown artist of the Panjab in gouache and burnished gold, silver being used for the waters of the pool surrounding it. This was one of several loans from the Kapany collection, part of which had been donated to the Asian Art Museum before the exhibition opened. Paintings of the Ten Gurus were also included in this section, including an important painting of Guru Gobind Singh from the collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu which had been illustrated on the cover of Archer's book in 1966 though only in silhouette. The section also included rare gold Sikh coins from the British Museum and National Museum of India, with their Persian language inscriptions of Guru Gobind Singh and Guru Nanak, as well as chakras, or quoits, from the Metropolitan Museum, New York.

The next two sections of the exhibition were of crucial importance in establishing the cultural history of Panjab, the 'land of the five rivers', and the artistic traditions inherited by the Sikh courts. The first showed the arts of the province under Mughal rule and the significance of the royal city of Lahore which

became the capital of the Sikh empire under Ranjit Singh following his capture of it in 1799. Like the Mughal emperors, Ranjit Singh added Kashmir to his territory, and, like the Mughals, imported its luxury shawlcloth in large quantities. The Mughal style of painting profoundly influenced the work of artists all over the panjab, Lahore continued to be the major centre of metalworking it had always been under the Mughals, and, of fundamental importance, Mughal rule left behind the Persian language which continued to be used at the Sikh court as the language of diplomacy and administration, as well as for the official records of the court, its histories and literature.

In the Panjab Hills, very different artistic traditions were to be found in the Hindu courts, and different styles of 'pahari' [of the hills] painting were produced by families of artists whose descendants found new patronage under Sikh rule. The Hindu Hill Kingdoms section included their vividly coloured portraits of Pahari rulers or episodes from Hindu mythology, and, combined with the Mughal section, presented the essential introduction to the arts of the Sikh kingdoms.

The main parts of the exhibition concerned the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1801-1839). The paintings produced during this period are well known thanks to the work of Archer and scholars from India and Pakistan, notably M S Randhawa, B N Goswamy and F S Aijazuddin. Selecting portraits of the maharaja and his leading courtiers, in gouache and gold, or drawings with only touches of colour, was therefore relatively straightforward and brought familiar works together with others such as the painting of Ranjit Singh and his favourite courtier, Hira Singh, that had not been on public display before.

The spectacular centrepiece was the Golden Throne of Ranjit Singh, made for him by a Muslim goldsmith whose name, highly unusually, is known: Hafez Muhammad Multani. The presence of the throne underscored one of the most significant aspects of Ranjit Singh's rule: the religious tolerance that allowed the arts to flourish, with paintings and other artefacts being made by, and for, Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus and even Europeans.

Even more splendid than the throne were the jewels from the Sikh treasury: in the final weeks of the exhibition a long line of visitors was often to be seen waiting patiently to view them. They included the 'Timur Ruby' from the personal collection of Her Majesty the Queen, and an emerald belt set with diamonds and pearls from the Royal Collection, neither of which is thought to have been on public display before. Beside them was the original enamelled gold armband made for Koh-I-nur diamond and two other very large diamonds. The diamond's history is well known: it was taken from Lahore Fort in 1849 when the Panjab was annexed by the British, and with treasures such as the 'Timur Ruby', emerald belt and Golden Throne, was shipped to England where they have remained ever since. The Koh-i-nur was recut in 1854 but an exact replica was

made in glass, and this was set back into the armlet made for Ranjit Singh.

The provenance of all the precious stones in the exhibition was the same: having been looted from the Mughal treasury at Delhi in 1738 by Nadir Shah of Iran, they passed into the possession of the Afghan rulers, one of whom, Shah Shuja, was deposed and imprisoned in Kashmir, from where he sought the help of Ranjit Singh. His freedom was bought with the Koh-i-nur and he later sold his other famed jewels to the Sikh ruler. These included the stone usually called the Timur Ruby, but which is neither a ruby nor was it formerly owned by Timur, the renowned Central Asian ruler. It is a spinel, the gemstone collected avidly by the Mughal emperors and almost unknown in the west. This spinel is engraved with the titles of the Mughal emperors Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, and has a long inscription recording the fact the Nadir Shah took it from India to Iran, but nothing on it remotely referring to Timur. It does have a title, 'Lord of the Conjunction', used by Timur, but here it unequivocally refers to Nadir Shah; this, however, was misinterpreted by a British scholar in the early 20th century and led to the mistaken association.

Following on from the jewels, shawls, and delicate paintings in this section of the exhibition, the display took a military turn to reflect the strong martial traditions of the Sikhs. Here, the dramatic centrepiece was a cannon from Woolwich Arsenal that had been made in Lahore and was captured by the British in 1846 during the first Anglo-Sikh war. With its large gun carriage decorated with mother-of-pearl and brass inlays, the cannon dominated the space and pointed towards a long wallcase containing arms and armour and weapons associated with the Sikh court. Many of the pieces were on loan from the Royal Armouries, now in Leeds, and had been acquired from Lahore at Annexation. They included a rare example of the Sikh 'turban helmet', shaped with a rounded projection at the front to accommodate the long topknot of hair worn by Khalsa Sikhs; two more examples came from the Kapany collection..

The strength of Ranjit Singh's army - like the court, made up of Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims - rested on the bravery of its soldiers on the one hand, and on the superiority of its organisation on the other. Here, the employment of European generals was crucial and, again, the exhibition told a story that was at once fascinating and little known outside specialist circles. In 1822 two former Napoleonic officers arrived in Lahore in search of employment, having been forced to leave Iran in disguise when British influence made it impossible for them to continue in court service there. Ranjit Singh, having checked that they were not in fact British spies, realised that they could provide exactly the skills he needed and took the generals Jean-Baptiste Allard and Jean-Baptiste Ventura into his service. They settled down at court, took Indian wives, and became trusted members of Ranjit Singh's immediate entourage. They were later joined by individuals such as General Claude Auguste Court, another Napoleonic emigre, who brought with him

artillery expertise, and Allard and Court commissioned Lahori artists to paint pictures for them. One, a study of Allard, his wife and their children, vividly evokes the life of these Europeans at court.

In the 1830s, a number of English embassies to Lahore reflected the seriousness with which the British regarded the strength of the Khalsa army. They, too, left their artistic mark, notably in the form of sketches of Ranjit Singh and his leading courtiers made by Emily Eden, the sister of the Governor-General Lord Auckland, that were later printed in the book, Portraits of the Princes and People of India. Emily Eden and her companions also wrote accounts of their visit that make a lively commentary to her images: Ranjit Singh, for example, was described by her as a 'little grey mouse', who habitually sat on a western-style chair with one foot tucked under him. This is the posture she has chosen for his portrait which, curiously, was copied in miniature size by a court artist for mounting into the western-style 'orders of merit' of enamelled and jewelled gold, given by the maharaja to members of his inner circle and distinguished visitors.

Ranjit Singh died in 1839 after a reign of nearly 40 years, leaving seven sons by different wives, none of whom was a worthy successor to the 'Lion of the Panjab'. Two main factions, led by the Hindu Dogra brothers, and the Sikh aristocracy, fought for control but accidents and assassinations led to a rapid succession of rulers. After a stormy interval, Sher Singh became maharaja early in 1841 and his impressive figure was shown in a large oil painting by the Hungarian artist, August Schoefft, from Lahore Fort, where it is part of the Princess Bamba collection. He sits squarely on his father's golden throne, staring out at the viewer and arrayed in all the greatest jewels of the Sikh treasury: the Koh-i-nur and other large diamonds, strings of pearls, the 'Timur ruby', massive emeralds and rubies. But two years later he, too, was dead. Finally, the only surviving son of Ranjit Singh was the small boy Dalip Singh, who became maharaja at the age of five in 1843.

Watching the chaotic events in the Panjab were the British. As turmoil gave way to anarchy, British troops moved to the borders of the Sikh kingdom and the first Anglo-Sikh war broke out. The conclusion, the Treaty of Bhairowal in 1846 when Dalip Singh had to sign away the whole of Kashmir and allow the British to take over the administration of the kingdom, is recorded in a large painting which was borrowed from the British Museum and displayed with English views of the wars. The second war of 1849 settled the fate of the Sikh kingdom: Lord Dalhousie, whose life size portrait from the National Portrait Gallery dominates the section, annexed the Panjab to the British Empire on 29 March 1849 and ended Sikh rule.

The story of the young boy maharaja, told through photographs and paintings, was one of the most poignant in the exhibition. Separated by the British from his mother Rani Jindan, who was regarded as a dangerous influence, he was given into the care of a Scottish doctor, John Login and exiled to Fategarh, a

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remote provincial town in northern India. Here, he converted to Christianity and cut his hair short. He was given permission to travel to England and arrived in London in 1854, quickly gaining a royal audience and an invitation to stay with the royal family at Osborne. His friendship with Queen Victoria is recorded in photographs taken at Osborne and by the large portrait done by Franz Xaver Winterhalter, the court artist, on loan from Osborne House. Eventually, the young man married Bamba Muller, an Arabic-speaking girl whose mother was an Abyssian Christian and father a German banker and photographs depict them both in conventional Victorian dress and in slightly whimsical oriental garb.

The conclusion of the exhibition was the most difficult to formulate: the Dalip Singh interlude in London was a natural ending, but left the Sikhs of the Panjab in limbo. There was a considerable amount of interesting material available in the V&A and other collections dating to the second half of the 19th century, but which were difficult to shape into a coherent finale. Finally, Professor B N Goswamy, the distinguished Indian scholar and author of seminal works on painting in the Panjab, solved the problem and also gave the exhibition its name: the final part would show the continuing traditions of the Panjab and highlight the role played by the minor Sikh kingdoms, notably Patiala, in continuing to nurture the arts of the region. He suggested a large painting in Patiala's Shish Mahal museum, virtually unknown because published only in a blurred, small black and white photograph in an obscure journal, as the focal point of the section. At first sight, the painting seems to depict the procession of the Maharaja of Patiala, Narinder Singh, through the countryside. He rides on a golden throne, carried on a golden howdah by a gold-caparisoned elephant and with other gold-clad elephants nearby. A line of scarlet-turbaned Sikhs marches before him, with uniformed Sikh soldiers in the foreground. Yet, this is not a celebration of the majesty of the maharaja. He is himself merely a follower: the procession is in honour of the holy book of Sikhism, the Guru Granth Sahib, which is carried before the ruler in its own golden howdah. The picture could not have been a more apt summing up of the themes of the exhibition: unfortunately, despite the Indian authorities having given permission for the image to be used on the cover of the book accompanying the exhibition, it was decided just a few weeks before the opening that the painting would not be allowed to travel to London.

# The book of the exhibition

The book published to accompany the exhibition includes a catalogue of everything in the London show (as well as a few paintings and the dated shawl of Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu and Kashmir, that did not arrive from India) and therefore serves as a complete record of the London show. Published by V&A Publications, it was primarily conceived as a volume that would also stand

independently from the exhibition, providing a broad introduction to Sikhism, the history of the Sikhs in the Panjab in the 19th century, and to the different aspects of the arts of the period.

Leading writers and scholars were asked to contribute and to the editor's delight, all accepted: Khushwant Singh wrote the opening chapter, 'The Sikhs of the Panjab', Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh 'The Sikh Religion' and Patwant Singh 'The Golden Temple'. B N Goswamy contributed two chapters ('Painting in Panjab' and 'Continuing Traditions in the Later Sikh Kingdoms'). A S Melikian-Chirvani, of the National Research Centre in Paris and the leading authority on Iranian cultural influence in India, wrote a fascinating chapter on 'Ranjit Singh and the Image of the Past'. The military historian Ian Knight contributed the chapter on the Military Sikhs, and David Jones a new view of 'Maharaja Dalip Singh'. A direct lineal descendant of Ranjit Singh's court physician contributed a chapter on 'European Views of the Panjab': F S Aijazuddin still lives in Lahore and is the author of several books on the city, its art and history, and in particular a major book, 'Sikh Portraits by European Artists'. In addition, the V&A's own curators wrote chapters on 'The Arts of the Court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh' (Susan Stronge), 'Textiles in the Panjab' (Rosemary Crill), and 'Photography and the Romance of the Panjab' (Divia Patel).

# Sikh Support

Very early on in the planning stage, Sikh organisations and individuals heard about the V&A's exhibition and came in to discuss the project further. This led to invaluable support, practical help and advice, and the development of collaborative projects which will endure long after the exhibition has completed its tour and the exhibits have been returned to their owners.

The first group to contact the curator was the Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary Trust, established in 1992 as a charitable trust with the motto 'Bringing History and Cultures Together'. The trustees had reached a number of their preliminary cultural and educational goals and were now considering putting on an exhibition, commissioning David Jones, Curator of Ipswich Museum, to write an exhibition proposal with Duleep Singh as its focus. The V&A's independently conceived plan had a number of striking similarities to the Trust's, though a number of significant differences also, as the Duleep Singh section was inevitably given less prominence. However, the approach was sufficiently comparable for the Trust to decide to support the V&A's show, and the efforts of the Project Director, Harbinder Singh Rana, and his co-trustees were of crucial importance in many ways, notably in publicising the exhibition within the Sikh community, and in the development and implementation of a strategy to bring in large numbers of Sikhs from all over the UK.

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Another major organisation involved in different aspects of the exhibition was the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sawak Jatha (UK), who provided high-quality photographs of the Harmandir for the book, including the extraordinary floor design in pietra dura that had never before been published, and of Anandpur Sahib for the display outside the exhibition. In addition, they produced a video on Sikhism that was shown at the end of the exhibition, thus making a vivid link between the past and the living religion of today. A second video was later made available to us by the Nagaara Trust in New Delhi, and this was shown in the museum's main Indian gallery towards the end of the exhibition's run. Two of the Nagaara Trust's leading figures, Pushpindar Singh and Avi Singh Sodhi, also supplied photographs of the masses thronging Anandpur Sahib for Vaisakhi 1999 which we were able to display in the exhibition itself.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the exhibition was the involvement of a network of over 40 young Sikh volunteers. Organised by Navleen Kaur, they took it in turn to man a helpdesk in the main entrance of the museum. The intention was that they would help those visitors who spoke only Panjabi and who, never having been to the V&A before, would need help in negotiating its seven miles of corridor. The volunteers were invaluable, particularly at weekends when lines of coaches could be seen between the museum's main entrances on Cromwell Road and Exhibition Road, bringing groups from Gurdwaras as far away as Huddersfield, Leeds and South Wales. They also took on an unexpected additional role: their approachability and friendliness encouraged non-Sikh visitors to the museum to ask a huge range of questions on different aspects of Sikh history and religion, as well as all the normal questions to do with location of toilets, restaurant etc, that anxious visitors put to anyone looking remotely official on arrival in the vast V&A building. Given their enthusiasm and hard work, it was particularly gratifying that the volunteers were mentioned in the Early Day Motion of 15th July, 1999, put down in the House of Commons by John McDonnell, MP for Hayes and Heston, congratulating the V&A on the exhibition.

By the time the exhibition closed, it had been seen by 118,886 people. A significant proportion were brought to the museum for the first time ever because of the direct involvement of the Sikh community in the planning of the exhibition and its associated education programme.

# The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms: the education programme

It was decided at an early stage that the V&A should harness the energy and activity surrounding the 300th anniversary celebrations and the build-up to Vaisakhi in April 1999 within the Sikh community for the exhibition outreach programme. A number of approaches were developed to inform the community about the exhibition, including setting up a large mailing list, attending Sikh

festivals and events round the country, and seeking the involvement of individual Sikhs.

The first outreach by V&A staff to a major Sikh event took place on August 30 1998 at Thetford, at the invitation of the Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary Trust. The occasion was the unveiling of the bronze equestrian statue of the maharaja commissioned by the Trust, when 8000 people attended. The museum promoted the exhibition with a display of images and text, advertised the education programme and set up a booking system for use at this and other Sikh events. The information was also translated into Panjabi and circulated in the form of flyers; a Panjabi speaker was also available to explain the project to non-English speakers. Data was collected on groups and individuals interested in the exhibition, including details of individuals who might be interested in helping inform the community about the V&A's plans.

This was followed up with an information session at the museum on December 12, 1998. Forty people representing Birmingham, Coventry, Essex, Kent, the London area, Middlesex, Nottingham, Slough, Warwich, Watford and the West Midlands listened to presentations by V&A staff on the exhibition and education programme, and on general aspects of the museum and the booking system. To help with the dissemination of information either formally or informally through the extensive community contacts of the group, packs were distributed consisting of posters, slides, maps of the V&A and other useful information.

# The development of the Education Programme

This was developed to address a broad range of audience needs for both formal and informal education - for families, individuals, community groups, teachers and higher education groups. Due to the importance of the tricentenary celebrations in the Sikh community and the high profile of the exhibition, a large Sikh attendance was expected. Specific programmes were developed for South Asian youth and community groups, with public drop-in events and activities being developed for all audiences.

Community consultation began at an early stage, with the exhibition curator and education officer meeting individuals from the Sikh community in May 1998. The South Asian Education Officer consulted these and other individuals from the Sikh community on developing appropriate events informally and as the need arose; advice was also sought on suitable artists for the programme. Sikh artists and freelancers were encouraged to become involved, particularly in the areas where specific knowledge of Sikh culture was required.

Our experience of outreach suggested that it was important to advertise the educational events in both Panjabi and English as many of the older members

of the community in particular would be able to access the Panjabi text more readily than the English. A flyer outlining the exhibition, events and booking information was translated into Panjabi and leaflets and posters that were circulated to over 500 Sikh gurdwaras and organisations across the country were also in Panjabi and English. The use of Panjabi was not confined solely to the publicity material, but featured strongly in the education programme, and appeared on all the signage for Sikh events in the museum.

# The Programme for South Asian Education

The aim of the programme was to communicate the richness and diversity of the arts and culture in the exhibition. It included a series of designated practical art workshops, storytelling sessions and music workshops for the South Asian youth and community groups as well as two kinds of performances for all visitors to the exhibition.

# Jewellery

A one-day workshop explored jewellery making techniques using wire and beads and was targeted at South Asian youth and community groups. The participants visited the exhibition to draw from objects, and used the drawings as sources of inspiration for making hair ornaments.

# Phulkari

A one-day embroidery workshop by Surjeet Husain targeted at South Asian womens' groups. Participants studied embroidery samples in the exhibition to learn how specific stitches were made. The techniques were then employed to make a design on a square of cloth.

# Calligraphy

Half-day sessions were planned to explore the Gurmukhi script. Participants were asked to identify the script in the exhibition and to practise it with calligraphic pens, with the aim of designing and making a Vaisakhi card. These workshops were targeted at children, families, youth and groups from the South Asian community.

# Tabla

Although there were no drums in the exhibition, the table drum is popular in Panjabi culture. The one-day workshop was planned for South Asian youth groups; two workshops took place at the weekend and two mid-week.

# Storytelling

These forty-minute sessions in Panjabi by Roop Singh focussed on stories about the Gurus and Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The sessions took place over one weekend and were targeted at children, families, and youth and community groups from the South Asian communities.

# **Bhangra and Gatka performances**

Two major performances of Bhangra, a Panjabi folk dance, by the group Jugnu, and Gatka, the display of Sikh martial arts skills, by the group Baba Fateh Singh Gatka Akhara, were planned for large audiences of both community groups and non-Sikhs. The performances were at weekends, as it was clear that many Sikh community groups would visit then. They took place over four weekends and used the largest public spaces in the museum, the Pirelli Garden and the Lecture Theatre, in order to be seen by the greatest possible audience. The Gatka performances attracted a total of 1400 people; the Bhangra, in the larger space of the Pirelli Garden, 1950.

In addition to the planned activities, the South Asian Education Officer gave a total of 12 informal talks in Urdu on the exhibition and the Nehru Gallery and facilitated visits to the exhibition for many of the larger Sikh groups who required extra assistance.

# The general programme of events

A full programme of Sikh-related events and activities took place daily during the Easter holidays in the Nehru Gallery of Indian art. The Activity Cart for families was in the gallery for the entire fortnight, attracting 1606 visitors. Special activities for families included Sikh stories, demonstrations of turban tying, handling sessions of Sikh artefacts and textiles, and making cushions and beaded wristbands. These events attracted a total of 2634 participants. The ongoing demonstrations of phulkari embroidery, miniature painting and metal inlay technique took place at weekends, A highlight was the Kirtan, where Vaisakhi festival songs were

performed by Ragi Gurdyal Singhji Rasai and his sons the day before Vaisakhi, with over a hundred visitors staying for the full hour of the performance, many of them joining in with the singing.

# Exhibition talks and visits

Formal talks on the exhibition were given in the Lecture Theatre by the curator, Susan Stronge, and on the conservation of Sikh arms and armour by Diana Heath, Head of Metalwork Conservation. One of the talks was sign-interpreted for deaf people. Evening visits were arranged for blind and partially sighted people by Imogen Stewart of the museum's Education department, aided by Susan Stronge and Neil Carleton and a team of volunteer escorts.

# Conference

An audience of over 180 attended the two-day international conference held in connection with the exhibition. Scholars, students, and members of the public heard speakers from the United States, the UK, Indian and Pakistan give illustrated talks on aspects of the visual culture of the Sikh Kingdoms of 18th and 19th century Panjab, and included several contributors to the book of the exhibition.

# Educators' evening

An evening event was developed to give teachers and lecturers an opportunity to view the exhibition and attend an introductory talk by the exhibition curator, and was attended by 205 educators responsible for education provision ranging from Key Stage 1 (5 to 7 year olds) to further and higher education.

[The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms was on show at the Victoria and Albert Museum from 25 March to 25 July 1999; a reduced touring version opened at the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco on 22 September 1999, running to January 9, 2000. From there it is hoped that the exhibition will travel to the National Museum of India, and then to the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

The hardback book of the exhibition, edited by Susan Stronge, is available from bookshops or through A&C Black Ltd., PO Box 19, Huntingdon, Cambs. PE19 3SF, price £35 including post.

Susan Stronge, curator of the exhibition, is an Assistant Curator in the Indian and South-east Asian Department of the V&A. Hajra Shaikh organised the educational programme for the exhibition and is South East Asian Arts Officer in the museum's Education Department.]

# **Interrogating Identities amidst Prosperity and Violence**

# Pritam Singh

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J.S. Grewal & Indu Banga, (eds.) Punjab In Prosperity and Violence: Administration, Politics and Social Change 1947-1997 (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1998), 250 pp., Rs. 450 (hb), ISBN 81-86912-01-0.

Gopal Singh, (ed.) Punjab: Past, Present and Future, (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1994), xii + 411 pp., Rs. 480 (hb), ISBN 81-202-0406-9.

These two volumes are the relatively recent additions to the academic and quasi-academic literature of edited books on the Punjab crisis after 1984. The Indian army's Operation Bluestar action in the Golden Temple at Amritsar in June 1984 had an unprecedented impact in generating academic interest in Punjab Studies from a range of divergent and contesting perspectives. Simply in terms of the quantitative addition to the literature on Punjab Studies, the post-1984 period has been the most remarkable period in the history of Punjab Studies. The Indian Punjab had certainly attracted critical intellectual attention in the late 1960s and early 1970s also. That attention was, however, almost exclusively focused on the 'Green Revolution' in Punjab - its supporters highlighting its developmental gains and its critics pointing out its inegalitarian consequences. The resurgence of interest in Punjab in the post-1984 phase is of a qualitatively different kind - it is in the issues of nationalism, ethnicity, language, culture and identity. Some refreshingly imaginative and some regrettably banal debates on these issues have added new dimensions to the literature on Punjab Studies. The two volumes examined in this review article have some overlapping themes e.g. Sikh identity, political violence and elections, but they can also be viewed as complementing each other in many other areas which are discussed below. Both the volumes also attempt to stretch the scope of their theoretical reflection and historical investigation beyond the

immediacy of post-1984 Punjab,

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I start by welcoming Grewal and Banga's volume. This is for two main reasons. First, this is one of the publications of the Institute of Punjab Studies, Chandigarh, based on the papers presented at the seminars organised by the Institute in 1995, 1996 and 1997. The editors of this volume, who are also the Directors of the Institute, mention in the Preface that three other volumes will be published separately - on Punjab's economy, on gender relations in the undivided Punjab, and on the process of urbanisation in the north-west since proto-historic times. This is a promising sign for the growth of Punjab Studies. Second, this collection includes papers by Pramod Kumar and Rainuka Dagar of the Institute of Development and Communication, Chandigarh. This institute has also been doing very good work on Punjab Studies. This collaboration between these two institutes has to be welcomed by anyone interested in promoting the intellectual understanding of the Punjab. There are two other institutes - the Centre for Rural and Industrial Development in Chandigarh and the National Institute of Punjab Studies, Delhi, which have been doing useful and interesting work on Punjab Studies. At one stage, the Punjab Institute of Public Administration at Chandigarh, when it was headed by Nitish De, had shown some promise but no significant contribution to Punjab Studies has been noticed, at least by this reviewer, in the last few years.

The first paper in this volume by Gopal Krishan and Surya Kant provides a geographical over-view of the changes in the administration of space in Punjab from 1901 to 1996. It is succinctly written, well documented and provides useful maps on the spatial organisation of administration in Punjab in 1996. P.H. Vaishnav, a former Chief Secretary of the Punjab Government, in his paper 'Punjab Administration at Work', provides insights into the changing ethos of governance in Punjab after 1947 which only an experienced and selfreflecting administrator can provide. One hopes that more Punjabi administrators will come forward with accounts of their critical reflection on their self-experiences in administration. Three important points regarding the politics of governance in Punjab emerge from this article. First, the mode of governance used by Partap Singh Kairon resulted, for the first time in post-1947 Punjab, in giving paramount importance to the police over the other segments of the state in dealing with political dissent. 'Kairon's priorities were thus clear. The CID, the police and vigilance department were at the top in the pegging order' (p.28). Second, the Punjab administration has been affected by the frequent imposition of President's rule in Punjab (p.30). Third, the mode of dealing with the militancy in Punjab in 1980s and 1990s has resulted in fearsome problems in police functioning (p.32). A connecting thread between all these three points, not noticed by the author, is the issue of the political economy of relations between the Central Indian State and Punjab.

Luckily enough, the following paper by Tejwant Gill on 'Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Punjab' helps to situate Punjab in the wider Indian context by bringing out some dimensions of the cultural politics of Indian nationalism versus Punjab. He shows that, committed to the ideology of constructing a unified Indian nationalism out of multi-national India, both Nehru and Indira Gandhi had opposed and created hurdles in the formation of a Punjabi speaking state. Nehru had gone to the extent of even denying the status of Punjabi as an independent language different from Hindi. The Akali-turned-Congress leader Hukam Singh had then remarked in a self-pitying sarcasm: 'While others got States for their languages, we lost even our language'. P.S. Verma, in his paper 'The Punjab Congress', does a fine job in studying the electoral performance of the Party and remarks that 'it would not be an exaggeration to say that the electoral base of the Congress Party has steadily become Hinduised and got concentrated in certain districts where the Hindus and Harijans form the major chunk of the population' (p. 52).

J. S. Grewal's paper 'Sikh Identity, the Akalis and Khalistan' is an excellent attempt at unravelling the relationship of Sikh identity to the Akali and Khalistan movements. He makes four major points: (i) 'Sikh nationhood was essentially the product of Sikh history. Organised as the 'Khalsa', the Sikhs acted as a distinct and separate nation in the days of the misls and Ranjit Singh (late eighteenth and early nineteenth century). They established a theocratic political organisation first, and then a monarchical system. They were now organising their national life on the democratic principle' (p. 69); (ii) 'The Sikh consciousness of a distinct identity sprang from empirical realities: scriptures, doctrines, institutions, sacred spaces and sacred places, their own sense of brotherhood, and the recognition by outsiders that they were different' (p. 92); (iii) 'A distinct Sikh identity did not start with the Khalsa: it had already emerged during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (p. 90); (iv) 'The political objective of the Akalis has been greater autonomy for the Punjab, and for other states. Their approach has been either constitutional or agitational but not militant. They are quite distinct from the militants who stood for secession.' (p.83). Points (i) and (iii) can be legitimately construed as a critique of Richard Fox and Harjot Oberoi. Both Fox and Oberoi focus their attention, though from diametrically opposite angles, on the 19th century for locating the emergence of Sikh/Singh/ Khalsa identity. Fox adopts an externalist approach: the colonial rule manufacturing Khalsa Sikh identity and Oberoi adopts an internalist approach: the internal contest between the Sikh community resulting in the hegemonic victory of the Amritdhari/Khalsa tradition.3 Grewal also examines (point iv above) the subtleties of Akali/ Bhinderanwale differences and similarities in the overall context of Sikh identity.

K.S. Dhillon's paper 'A Decade of Violence, 1983-1992' is a reflective police officer's account.<sup>4</sup> From the list of contributors, we come to know that he is a former Director-General of Punjab Police. This information would have

been more useful if the period when he headed the Punjab police had been specified. Dhillon mentions that he was 'the member- secretary of high power committee of experts' on whose recommendations the Punjab police was reoriented, modernised and reorganised and that this resulted in improving the operational capability of the Punjab police in dealing with the Sikh militancy The details about the time-period of this committee are not. unfortunately, provided. According to Dhillon, 'The elimination of Sikh terrorism is obviously the culmination of long process of planning, polishing and perfection of strategies over a long period though the spectacular results achieved in 1993-94 may not, on the face of it, appear to be closely linked to the strategies devised in the past' (pp 114-115). Dhillon identifies two phases in the Sikh 'terrorist' movement: 'Sikh terrorism during most part of the 1980s possessed all the characteristics and well-known features of a politically oriented separatist movement. Subsequently and gradually it degenerated into a pure and simple criminal terrorism' (p114). The second phase, according to Dhillon, 'facilitated police infiltration into the terrorist groups in a major way' (p114). By putting on record the fact of police infiltration into the 'terrorist' groups 'in a major way', Dhillon's contribution to illuminating this dark phase in Punjab's current political history can not be overstated. This recorded fact may one day become the starting point for a thorough going and unbiased research into the scale of police infiltration into 'terrorist' groups and the activities of police infiltrators. It will be a horrendous journey into the underworld but it will illuminate yet unknown facets of State governance in Truth is bound to lie deeply buried under heaps of falsifications, misinformation and mystification. Let us hope Punjab will have one day some Isaac Deutscher devote his entire life to discovery of the truth. Deutscher had compared his classic historical work on Leon Trotsky to archaeological work digging for fragments of truthful evidence beneath layers and layers of overgrowth of falsification of history by the Stalinist terror machine. Historically, the knowledge about the role of the State agencies in dealing with dissident movements, especially armed ones, becomes available through mainly two sources: the opening of the secret intelligence records after the lapse of the statutory time-period of inaccessibility to such reports and/or the disclosures by some officials mainly as a result of the crisis of conscience generally in the later stages of their lives. Our generation can only hope that some officials of the Punjab police or the Central security forces will have their crisis of conscience sooner rather than later. The full scale of police infiltration into the Punjab 'terrorist' groups and what the police did after infiltration would, perhaps, come to be known only to the future generations of historians and social scientists. Dhillon's account confirms, though only indirectly and by inference, what some of the militant groups in Punjab had publicly alleged that some of the 'actions' attributed to the militants were actually strategically planned police actions to discredit their movement. It is obvious that it is the degeneration of the ideological Sikh militant movement in its second phase into 'criminal terrorism'

which made the movement vulnerable to being discredited. Dhillon also confirms what was publicly known already that the 'Sikh police [were] disarmed and taken off duty' in Delhi during the anti-Sikh carnage after Indira Gandhi's assassination. He characterises this mass murder of the Sikhs as 'indiscriminate, unnecessarily cruel [sic!] and carried out with meticulous planning and forethought' (p. 112).

Pramod Kumar's paper 'Violence in Retrospect' starts from a methodologically correct theoretical premise that all forms of societal violence have 'structural roots'. He argues that the studies on terrorism in Punjab suffer from weaknesses in their theoretical frameworks and, therefore, 'isolate terrorism and more so "the terrorists" from their social and political context'. In this context, it will be appropriate to quote a line from Stephen Segaller; 'To call some one a terrorist dismisses his claim on human sympathy'. All armed opponents of any State power are, therefore, deliberately described by the State and its ideological allies as "terrorists". The State tries to politically disarm its armed opponents by depoliticising them. Pramod Kumar has followed the right procedure of retaining his intellectual autonomy by enclosing the words 'terrorist' and 'terrorism' in commas, as they should be in this case.

Birinder Pal Singh regards his paper 'The Logic of Sikh Militancy' as 'a modest attempt to construct the logic of the Sikh militants' violence as reflected in their booklets, pamphlets, articles, statements and declarations made from time to time'. Such an attempt must be welcomed because it promises an articulation of the militant viewpoint by a reliance on the original Punjabi language sources. However, as the article proceeds, our initial expectations turn into disillusionment. This is due to several reasons. Firstly, the article is based on a very limited reading of the literature on the subject and on an over-reliance upon one or two articles from the Babar Khalsa literature. Secondly, the key documents of the militant movement, that is, the gurmatas passed at the Sarbat Khalsa gatherings at the Akal Takhat in 1986 are not taken into account. The gurmatas were translated in English for the first time by the reviewer in a paper written in 1986 to present the viewpoint of the Sikh militants in their own words.7 Birinder Pal Singh might have been excused for not having read this paper because no scholar can be expected to have read every article on a subject but he can not be excused on that ground because that paper is the only paper in the entire literature on the Sikh militant movement, which used these gurmatas as a primary source. Moreover, his omission has a further consequence for the authenticity of research on Punjab.

The central argument of my 1986 paper was that there were socioeconomic and cultural processes responsible for the rise of religious revivalism and of the Sikh militant movement. I had carefully elaborated these background conditions for the emergence of Bhinderanwale as a Sikh leader. Several scholars, including Birinder Pal Singh (p.140), have mistakenly thought this particular insight into the political economy of Punjab to be Vandana Shiva's. IJPS 6:2 258

Whereas, she has lifted several passages, which elaborate my argument about the rise of Bhinderanwale, almost word for word from my 1986 paper, without due acknowledgement, she does, however, cleverly cite my paper as a source for the gurmatas, but remains silent about the fact that the above argument was mine in the first instance. In contrast, Khushwant Singh gave due credit to my paper. Had Birinder Pal Singh been a more careful researcher, i.e. had he read the 1986 paper, he might have detected Shiva's unacknowledged use of my arguments besides gaining access to an important authentic source relevant to his research. However he must be given due credit for citing material from Paigam, a Punjabi monthly. Paigam was one of the rare voices of radical criticism of the politics of the Indian state. Though sympathetic to the militants from a Punjabi nationalistic perspective it criticised the sectarianism in the militant movement. It is sad that this monthly is not being published any more.

The two subsequent papers by Gopal Krishan on 'Demographic Change' and 'Urbanisation Since Independence' are very fine pieces of research. Rainuka Dagar's 'Patriarchal Structure and Violence Against Women' makes an excellent contribution to the slowly developing area of gender dimension in Punjab Studies. Similarly S.K. Gupta's paper on 'Dalits in Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh' contributes to fulfilling another gap in Punjab Studies. Surinder Jodhka's paper 'Attached Labour in Haryana' is a competent synthesis of theoretical discussion and sound empirical data. His critique of Tom Brass's thesis of interpreting attached labour as 'deproletarianisation of labour' in agriculture was developed in the *Economic and Political Weekly* debate on the subject and it is very lucidly summarised here. This critique is a valuable contribution to rural labour studies in particular and to Third World agriculture in general.

J.S. Rahi and S.S. Khahra in their paper 'The Village Community in Punjabi Novel', has alerted the social science community of Punjab to a missing dimension in the source material for the study of agrarian change in Punjab viz. the creative literature in Punjabi. Their analysis is focussed on the novels of Gurdial Singh but also takes into account the novels of Ram Sarup Ankhi, Karamjit Singh Kussa, Inder Singh Khamosh, Jasbir Singh Mand and Mitter Sen Meet. They point out the depiction in Gurdial Singh's novels of an 'increasing fragmentation of land holdings and their consequential tremors in family and social relationships, institutionalised lust for landed property and upsurge of a deceitful mercantile culture' (p.244). More importantly, 'Gurdial Singh's novels do not merely document the externals of community life in the rural Punjab; they unravel the socio-psychic mysteries operating at its core' (p. 240). Commenting upon Ankhi's Partapi (1993), they call attention to the portrayal of 'the nexus between money, religion, and politics with its bearing upon gender relations' (p. 247). Kussa's novel Raat de Rahi (The Wayfarers of the Night, 1979), is seen to situate the extra-marital relations in the rural society within the context of the strains in the marriage institution brought about by the marginalisation of land holdings. His Rohi Biabann (The Wasteland, 1983) is

considered a portrayal of the crisis of the land-owning Jat peasantry that is gradually being proletarianised but is resistant to accepting the lower caste and class status (p.247). The list of the Punjabi novels that are mentioned in the bibliography of this paper can serve as a recommended reading list on the subject.

The creeping empiricism in social science disciplines is depriving us of the hugely important qualitative insights that creative literature can provide for understanding social change. Rahi and Khahra deserve thanks for writing this paper and the editors for its inclusion in this volume. Of all the edited books published in English on the Punjab Crisis so far, this is the only one to carry a paper of this kind. One hopes that more papers and books in this genre will be forthcoming in the future.

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Gopal Singh's edited Punjab: Past, Present and Future is divided into five Section I, entitled 'Of Identities, Integration and Nationality Question', contains three papers. The first paper by Rajinder Kaur entitled 'Identities, Integration and the Sikhs (Conceptual and Historical Context)', situates its argument through a good attempt at the review of the literature on the subject. It is a pity, therefore, that she concludes rather hurriedly and hesitates to make any significant conclusion from the extensive survey the of literature. Ramesh Chauhan in his paper 'National Question in India' starts with an interesting suggestion, though too schematic, about the linear progression path from a community to an ethnic group - a nationality - a nation and a nation state. He makes some useful references to the Marxist (mainly Stalinist) 10 literature on the nationality question with some reference to India but finally spoils his conclusions by raising a series of questions rather than making progress with the argument of his paper.11 In contrast with that, Gopal Singh in his paper 'Complexities of the Question of Sikh Nationality', is forthright in putting forward the central argument of his paper that 'today Sikhs are a nationality like any other nationality in India' (p. 115).12 His view is that 'three incidents of 1980s' namely the Operation Blue Star, Operation Woodrose and the November 1984 massacre of Sikhs in Delhi and some other North Indian towns, 'have finally consolidated the national consciousness among the Sikhs which by no means can be eliminated' (p.115). Having thus stated his position, he is troubled by a very pertinent question 'if Sikhs are a nationality what about the Hindus of Punjab?' (p. 115). He recognises very correctly that 'a more complex question to be answered is - if Sikhs are a nationality, what the Hindus living in Punjab are and what about, as some people call it, nationality" or Punjabiat? this indeed is the crux of the complexities of the question of the Sikh nationality' (p. 109). His answer to this question is, unfortunately, one of irritation with Punjabi Hindus: 'Well, its (sic!) a IJPS 6:2

community which by and large disowned its mother tongue and by implication the cultural heritage. I would, therefore, suggest that instead of denying Sikhs the status of a nationality, they should regard themselves as a minority community of the Punjab just as the Sikhs are in Haryana, Delhi, U.P. and other

places in India' (p.115).

Gopal Singh deserves credit in highlighting the Punjabi Hindu dimension in the nationality question in Punjab. However, apart from the bluntness of his style, which is not an appropriate way of dealing with a sensitive question like this, there are several methodological, moral and empirical problems with the way he has answered the question. Methodologically, his answer is premised on the denial of Punjabi nationalism alternative, which can accommodate both Sikh nationalism as well as Punjabi Hindus. He dismisses this alternative without examining it. Morally, it is wrong to portray Punjabi Hindus only as a religious minority in Punjab. Punjab is as much the natural and cultural homeland of Punjabi Hindus as it is of Punjabi Sikhs, Punjabi Muslims, Punjabi Christians and Punjabi Jains. Empirically, it is incorrect to make an unqualified statement that Punjabi Hindus have disowned their mother tongue and Punjabi cultural heritage. It is undeniably true that in the 1950s and 1960s, a sectarian Arya Samaj leadership was successful in arousing fear among Punjabi Hindus about Sikh domination if a Punjabi Suba were to be formed and this resulted in a considerable number of Punjabi Hindus declaring Hindi as their mother tongue as a tactical device to defeat the demand for Punjabi Suba. Too many commentators on Punjab are just stuck on that 'fact' which needs to be understood in the historically specific context of 1950s and 1960s Punjab. History has moved forward since then and as far as Punjabi Hindus' relation with Punjabi as their mother tongue is concerned, it is progressive forward movement. According to the latest data available (1991) Sikhs constitute 63% of Punjab's population, Hindus 34.5%, Muslims 1.2%, Christians 1.1% and others 0.2%. Furthermore according to the latest data available (1981) the percentage of Punjabi speaking population is 85%.13 Obviously, the overwhelming majority of the Punjabi Hindus have declared Punjabi as their mother tongue. Anyone familiar with Punjabi literature would know that Shiv Batalvi, a Punjabi Hindu, is the most celebrated Punjabi poet of modern times. Bihari Lal Kapoor and many other Punjabi Hindu scholars have made pioneering contributions to the development of Punjabi grammar. Dhani Ram Chatrik, Ishwar Chand Nanda, Balwant Gargi, Prem Prakash, Mohan Bhandari and Ram Sarup Ankhi, to name just a few, are towering Punjabi literary figures. Among the diaspora Punjabis, Veena Verma has emerged as a leading Punjabi short story writer and Mangat Rai Bhardwaj has made a notable contribution to Punjabi linguistics.14 Innumerable Punjabi Hindu film and theatre artists, journalists, photographers, folk singers, musicians, painters and sculptors have enriched Punjabi language and culture. If I have made this rather lengthy comment on Gopal Singh's paper, it is because I consider that he has made a sincere, though at times rash, attempt to deal with the nationality

question in Punjab. I would urge him to rethink and reconsider Punjabi nationalism as a feasible way of dealing with the nationality question in Punjab. Punjabi nationalism can recognise and accommodate Sikh nationalism as well as Punjabi Hindus and other Punjabi religious minorities. Punjabi nationalism has to be sought as a negotiated third way between the two extremes of overcentralising Indian nationalism and the divisive Sikh secessionism.

Section II has two papers on terrorism, State terrorism and human rights - one by Randhir Singh and the other by Ajit Singh Bains. The editor's footnote to Randhir Singh's article 'Terrorism, State Terrorism and Democratic Rights' wrongly mentions that this paper is from his book Of Marxism and Indian Politics (1990). Actually, it is from his book Five Lectures in Marxist Mode (1993). His 1990 book contains his article 'Marxists and the Sikh Extremist Movement in Punjab' which is also included in this collection. Both the books have already been reviewed in a review article in this journal.15 Bains's article 'State Terrorism and Human Rights' is a good exposition of the legal perspective on human rights in Punjab. In one quotable line, 'Human rights organisations want government officials to act in accordance with the law, just as the government officials expect citizens to act in accordance with the law'; Bains has brilliantly summed up the dialectics of the relationship between the State, citizens and human rights. A very praiseworthy feature of this collection is that that a separate section on human rights has been included and by doing this, this collection has notched an extra point over all the recent collections on the Punjab question. The true significance of human rights concerns in the life of the Indian and Punjabi people has been overshadowed by the successful demonisation of the human rights movement by the Indian State and by the sectarianism in the human rights discourse in the country.16

Section III 'Of Religion and Politics in Sikhism' has three articles by Gurbir Singh, Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon and Harcharan Bains. These articles are taken from The Tribune debate between the three of them in November It was an absolute delight to read Gurbir Singh's article. Here is a 1992. westernised modernist bourgeois democrat who is very well versed with the spiritual heritage of Gurbani and makes a critique, from a sympathetic angle, of some of the archaic and undemocratic features of Akali and the Sikh militant politics. His is an internal critique. It is a voice from within the Sikh Panth and not coloured by any alliance with the politics of the Indian State and its apologists. Punjab needs to hear more of such voices. Dhillon makes a spirited critique of Gurbir Singh's 'erroneous interpretation of Sikh scriptures, history Dhillon argues that the Gurus rejected the path of ascetic spiritualism (Guru Nanak disapproved his son Sri Chand's ascetic tendencies) and brought the domain of day to day material life into the spiritual realm. This, he claims, is the foundation for the Sikh ethos of not divorcing the material (political) world from the spiritual (religious) world. Dhillon argues for keeping the religious domain in politics to ensure the moral dimension in politics and he

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attributes the moral decline of Congress leaders to their secular doctrine. Dhillon is right in arguing for an ethics-based politics but he is wrong in suggesting religion as the sole source of inspiration for morality and ethics. One must recognise pluralism and multiplicity in the sources of inspiration for moral philosophy and ethical codes of conduct. The recent global upsurge of interest in ethics-business ethics, environmental ethics, human rights ethics and the ethical foreign policy etc. reveals the diversity of approaches towards incorporating ethical dimensions into public/political life.

Dhillon makes a justified and impressive criticism of Indian Congress leaders' political approach towards Punjab but he ends up making a fatal mistake by suggesting that Maharaja Ranjit Singh 'could serve as a model not only for the Sikhs but also for the so-called modern secular states' (p.203). Ranjit Singh was certainly a remarkable and admirable ruler for his time and his practice of religious pluralism in governance is a valuable part of our historical heritage but it should be too obvious that his monarchical feudal model is unsuitable and unacceptable for our modern democratic era. Harcharan Bains in his comment on Dhillon suggests an interesting line of enquiry for further research and debate by his view that the fact that the sixth Guru kept two swords 'Miri' (symbolising the temporal political realm) and 'Piri' (symbolising the spiritual religious realm) instead of one to 'denote both spiritual and political leadership' and created the Akal Takhat for the political domain leaving Darbar Sahib for the spiritual domain, could be interpreted to imply that the Guru wanted to keep the relative autonomy of the two domains - political and religious. This is certainly a fresh approach and could be a fruitful one. This does not suggest delinking religion from politics which some over-zealous Indian secularists demand from the Sikhs and thus arouse Sikh fears about the threat to their very identity. The Sikh intellectuals react by over-asserting the inseparability of religion and politics. Bains' suggestion argues for respecting the rightful claims of the two realms and not subordinating one to the other. The realms are not separated, they are related but keep their autonomy in their respective domains.

In Section IV 'Of Current Punjab Crisis', there are eight papers. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, Satish Sharma and Nazer Singh in their papers explore the historical dimensions of the Sikh grievances in India, the violence in Punjab and the language politics in Punjab respectively. Gopal Singh and Devinder Pal Sandhu attempt to draw out the implication of Akali Dal's Batala Conference Resolution (1968) and the Anandpur Sahib Resolutions (1973) for the federal processes in India. There are two papers on the Punjab economy one by Sucha Singh Gill and the other by Pritam Singh. Both these papers are based on authentic empirical data but have different aims. Gill's paper is an attempt to provide an economic explanation of the Punjab crisis while my paper looks at the prospects for Punjab's future economic development in the context of Punjab's place in India's federal political economy. Recent state of the Punjab economy has some of the features of 'post-conflict economies' like

Armenia, the Balkans, Rwanda, Gaza and the West Bank, Cambodia and East Timor but without the political structures these sovereign states (except Gaza and the West Bank) have. So special are the problems of such economies that a specialism in 'post-conflict economies' has emerged. 18 The framework of analysis for post-conflict economies may be fruitful in examining some features of the Punjab economy, especially the severe indebtedness of the state, because of the huge expenditure on police and para-military forces in the 1980s and 1990s. The economic consequence of mass loss of live especially of the male adults in the productive age group during the 1980s and 1990s also needs to be studied. Gurbhagat Singh's paper 'Paradigm Behind the Militancy' transposes us thousand miles away from the empirical-material realm of the economic papers to the post-modernist discourse of semiotics and signifiers. In a rather bold and original formulation, he states; 'A Punjab militant, who is predominantly Sikh, derives his inspiration from the Sikh paradigm that asserts the Union with God as a moment for liberation worked out through participation in the community and its transformational action organised to protect the interests of the 'humble' (nich), the 'absent of history', the exploited'. He concludes; 'An authentic Sikh saturated with the Sikh semiotic can only be a no-nonsense revolutionary whose being is filled with beauty: the conception of the best that is and a utopian desire to realise the possible'. For a change, it is a nice feeling to read an academic paper that sounds like poetry.

In Section V, P.S. Verma jolts us back to the nitty-gritty world of election data. He examines the 1992 Punjab Assembly elections boycotted by the Akalis and highlights its illegitimacy by focussing on the unbelievably low turn out, for example, 'in some rural dominated constituencies, the polling remained as low as 1.07 percent'19 and one winning candidate 'polled only 394 votes out of the total electorate of 1,00,111' in that constituency. He reports that those who boycotted the elections said that even panches had 'secured more votes in panchayat elections than certain ministers in the new cabinet' (p. 393). D.R. Chaudhry in his paper remarks, 'the Congress leadership ardently desired the Akalis to boycott the elections so that it could make a substantial addition to its strength in the Lok Sabha' (p.402). His paper 'Punjab-Haryana Disputes', highlights a common tradition of the peasantry in the two States by pointing out that in the pre-independence Punjab, 'The Congress was seen as a party of urban interests and the Unionist Party became the sole champion of the peasantry'. Keeping this shared tradition in mind, he argues for a non-partisan approach in dealing with disputes on Chandigarh, river waters and territory. On Chandigarh, he argues that, 'Haryana badly needs a capital of its own and Chandigarh is the least suited for this purpose'. With a capital city of its own, Haryana can hope to have, 'the instruments which enrich the cultural content in social life - quality newspapers, the film industry, a theatre movement, cultural and literary organisations, metropolitan centres, and enlightened middle class' (p. 409),

The editor has done a good job in selecting these papers from diverse sources. Had greater care been taken in avoiding printing and factual errors, some of which have been pointed out above, the usefulness of the book would have been enhanced. An index would have also added to the quality of the book. Despite all these shortcomings, Gopal Singh deserves appreciation for his effort in bringing out another edition of papers on Punjab after his first one in 1987.

III

Both the books are a valuable addition to the literature on Punjab Studies in general and the 'Punjab Crisis' in particular. It is a tragedy that after so much suffering by the people of Punjab in the last two decades, the disputes on Centre-State relations, river waters, territory and the capital city remain unresolved as they were two decades ago. Not even marginal progress has been made in moving towards an agreement on the framework to resolve these disputes. Some hopes raised by the Sarkaria Commission report regarding the possibility of restructuring of the Centre-State relations have also proved false. The violence, which resulted from the failure to resolve the disputes, has added a new layer of painful issues. It is not the failure of the one or the other leader of this or that political party that is responsible for the continual non-resolution of old and new issues in Punjab. The conflict in Punjab is more deeply rooted in the model of nation building in India and the constitutional arrangements born out of that model. Now that there is apparent peace in Punjab, it is an opportunity for concerned scholars to debate issues more boldly and more imaginatively than it is was possible in a fear-ridden violent political environment. Punjab needs visionary political leadership and intellectually unflinching scholarship to prepare a blueprint of a model for Punjab's future which ensures continued development of the human capabilities of Punjabi people in the new globalised world we live in.

# Notes

Acknowledgement: I wish to thank to Meena Dhanda, Eleanor Nesbitt and Shinder Thandi for their comments on an earlier draft of this review. The usual disclaimer applies to any errors.

- 1. For elaboration of some of these points, see the editors' Introduction in Pritam Singh and Shinder Singh Thandi (eds.), Punjabi Identity in a Global Context (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 2. Quoted by Darshan Tatla, The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood (London: UCL Press, 1999, 229).
- 3. For a position which takes into account the external influences as well as the internal dynamics of the Sikh tradition in explaining the rise of the Khalsa Sikh identity and thus transcends the limitations of the 19th century focus, see Tony

Ballantyne's paper in this issue of the journal.

- 4. In contrast, see K.P.S. Gill, *Punjab: The Knights of Falsehood* (Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1997) which is mainly an exercise in self-justification. Because of the self-justificatory stance of this account, the value of some useful information on 'terrorist' groups appears diminished.
- 5. Quoted by K.S. Dhillon, op. ct. 116.
- 6. The fact that even some of the academics and journalists who are not pro-State in their positions, use the terms terrorist uncritically, shows the power of hidden persuasion of the repeated use of a term. Such academics/journalists become mere passive consumers of a popularised discourse. Edward Said in his numerous writings have shown that the word 'terrorist' was coined and popularised by pro-Israel and anti-Left American policy makers to discredit the Palestinian fighters. Noam Chomsky has led a life long campaign to contest the American State's moral right to call armed anti-American State political activists as terrorists when the American State possesses the biggest arsenal of terror in the world.
- 7. My paper entitled 'Two Facets of Religious Revivalism: A Marxist Viewpoint of an Aspect of the Punjab Situation' was first presented at a conference at Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla in April 1986 and after a few months later at a seminar in Delhi organised by Dalip Simeon, Bhagwan Josh and others. It was subsequently published in Gopal Singh (ed.) Punjab Today (Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1987). It may be noted here that an editorial change of the title in the published version to: 'Two Facets of Religious Revivalism: A Defence' is confusing and it misleadingly suggests that the paper is a defence of religious revivalism, which it obviously is not. More seriously, it obfuscates the focus on a Marxist analysis in the paper.
- 8. Vandana Shiva was present at my seminar in Delhi and took a copy of the mimeographed version of the paper that was distributed there. It is this version that she cites as the source of *gurmatas* in her book on the green revolution in Punjab. After noticing that several scholars were quoting and crediting Shiva for the passages she had lifted from my paper, I wrote to her. In response, she accepted in writing that she had depended upon my paper. She offered to make amendments in any subsequent editions of her book, in whatever manner I suggested to her.
- 9. About my paper, he writes 'I have at long last come across a plausible explanation of the Bhindranwale phenomenon' in 'The Rise of Bhindranwale' in Sunday, 17-23 Jan, 1988, 9.
- 10. The only significant theoretical work Stalin ever did was on the nationality question.
- 11 Chauhan's book *Punjab and the Nationality Question in India* (Deep and Deep Publications, 1995) has been reviewed by Sucha Singh Gill in the *International Journal of Punjab Studies* (IJPS), Vol. 5, No.1 (January-June, 1998)

- 12. Gopal Singh's book *Politics of Sikh Homeland (1940-1990)* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1994) has been reviewed by Sukhmani Riar in *IJPS*, 5, 2 (July December 1998). Also see Sukhmani Riar, 'Khalistan: The Origin of the Demand and Its Pursuit Prior to Independence, 1940-45' in Pritam Singh and Shinder Thandi, op. cit.
- 13. For population data, see Gopal Krishan in Grewal and Banga, op.ct. 105-106.
- 14. I am thankful to Amarjit Chandan for drawing my attention to the contributions of Bhardwaj and the Punjabi grammarians.
- 15. See Pritam Singh, 'Marxism, Indian State and Punjab', IJPS, 4, 2 (July-December, 1997), 237-250.
- 16. See my article, 'Sectarianism in the Human Rights Discourse: politics of human rights in post-colonial Punjab' in M. Anderson and S. Guha (eds.) Changing concepts of Rights and Justice in South Asia, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998). This book has been reviewed in this issue of the IJPS by Ishtiaq Ahmad
- 17. The reference to my article is incorrect. The original article was published in Seminar No. 401, Annual 1992, January, 1993 and not No. 398 as wrongly cited in an editorial footnote. The reprint of the article in the book suffers from several printing errors. Any interested reader is therefore advised to look up the original.
- 18. In East Timor, the top IMF official among the group of economic advisors discussing the plans for re-construction of East Timor is Luis Valdiviesco, a specialist in post-conflict economies with previous assignments in Armenia and the Balkans. See Ted Bardacke and Shawn Donnan, 'East Timor searches for economic blueprint', *Financial Times*, November 16, 1999 p.10 (London edition).
- 19. There seems to be an error here; the correct figure should be 10.7 percent.

# **Book Reviews**

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

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Muhammad Azam Chaudhary, Justice in Practice. Legal Ethnography of a Pakistani Punjabi Village (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), ix + 248 pp. (hb) US\$ 13, ISBN 0 19 579063 4.

Socio-legal research work on the Pakistani Punjab is scarce and Chaudhary's doctoral work (from the University of Heidelberg) is a most welcome addition, which has much to say on the interrelationship of law and society. Since the author cannot rely on much existing writing, he was largely left to his own devices but was helped by the fact that he had close family connections in the area under research, a village near Faisalabad.

The result is an insightful study, which reads well, despite many repetitions and quite a few stylistic errors. The author seeks to illustrate and discuss the interlinkages of state law and non-state legal systems and the focus of the study is on 'determining how far the two systems differ and if the difference between the two systems is as large as described and assumed by the anthropologist...or if this difference is limited only to structure and procedure' (p. 4).

The divergent perspectives on such questions taken by anthropologists and lawyers are presented with clarity, providing a solid base for the subsequent analysis. Following an overview of the village, and the socio-economic profile of its inhabitants, many of whom appear in the detailed case studies at the end of the book, as well as a fine section on kinship structures, Chaudhary discusses the reality of multiple choices for villagers, as well as theoretical considerations under the heading of 'Legal pluralism' (pp. 22-29). This throws in catchy issues like litigation addiction, endemic corruption and the murder of women, though the term 'honour killings' does not come up. Thankfully, Chaudhary steers clear of sensationalism and calmly describes the methodological issues that arise in such a scenario, where conflicts over zan (women), zar (gold) and zamin (land) dominate the villagers' activities.

When it comes to legal details, Chaudhary seems on somewhat insecure ground. His study captures well the official structures of Pakistani law, but often does not probe deep enough when it comes to the applied law. At p. 59, it is imprecisely stated that the registration of nikah and talaaq has been made compulsory (by the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961), since the reality has been that non-registration nullifies neither a nikah nor a Muslim divorce. It matters whom one asks in this respect; Chaudhary's work remains hazy on this aspect. In this context, some comments on the impact of Islamisation in a Pakistani rural society could have been made, since that may have influenced the choice of law that villagers might make, even if we accept Chaudhary's statements to the effect that the villagers knew little about Islam and relied on local versions of customary Muslim ways of life.

Other sections of the book contain most relevant detail on dowry troubles, excellent discussions of *izzat* and its violation, and the powers of ostracism and other punishment, often given by a *panchayat* or other informal

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fora. While going to court, apart from being costly in all kinds of ways, is portrayed as 'the highest insult' (p. 89) to an adversary, the impression that panchayats have become less effective and have been damaged through political intervention is well-illustrated. While women may use other fora and often 'somatise complaints' (p. 117), men may relish a court showdown, only to find that the entire system is corrupt and that court decisions may be quite ineffective when it comes to local implementation - the local power structures are manifestly not just simply re-ordered by court decisions.

In the concluding chapter, it is therefore found that justice is in practice similar in both the official and the informal legal sphere, it is open to multiple manipulations. Chaudhary concludes that the values underpinning the traditional and the official system are not different, they are complementary. He could have said explicitly, because that is what his study shows so well, that the unofficial system is therefore, in practice, dominant, while in theory the lawyers - from their perspective of legal centralism - would insist that *their* system is dominant.

There is much recent legal writing on legal pluralism that Chaudhary could have absorbed into his study. Citing Jacques Vanderlinden, who has actually modified his earlier definition of pluralism in the meantime, this study treads the right path, but is manifestly not up-to-date on the lively discussion about pluralism among legal scholars. Masaji Chiba (1986, 1989) from Japan, in particular, has laid out a theoretical framework for the complex interplay of law and society, bringing together 'official law' and 'unofficial law' as well as what he calls 'legal postulates', the value systems operating in any particular social context. Applying Chiba's model to Punjabi villages would neatly confirm Chaudhary's findings, but it would also render his final suggestions (pp. 182-187) even more unrealistic. By calling for compulsory shares for daughters in inheritance, a reduction of legal pluralism and a court for every village to reduce the gaps between the value systems of law and society, the author shows that he stopped thinking after his conclusions and merely followed catchy agenda. Surely, implementing his suggestions would increase legal pluralism still further!

At the end of the day, then, this study merely seems to call for a deeper involvement of anthropologists in law making. While I would not wish to reject that suggestion for a moment, the first need is for legal anthropologists to learn more about the actual practice of the relevant law itself, and certainly also about different legal theories. Whether one applies this to the Punjab or any other part of the world, legal pluralist structures appear anywhere, provided the observer has learnt to 'see' them. Anthropologists should find this less of a challenge than 'mainstream' lawyers. No matter how 'modernist' our own agenda may be, therefore, Punjabi justice will in practice continue to be achieved (or denied, as the case may be) in an interplay of village politics and court manipulation. As is confirmed again and again, the Pakistani central state itself is far too busy with 'bigger' agenda than village justice, so anthropologists do indeed have a task,

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namely to tell us how better justice can be achieved locally without formal courts, rather than getting involved as 'big' politicians in the official restructuring of the legal system, an entirely utopian agenda item, given the manifest self-interest of so many people who feed off it, as this study so impressively - and depressingly - confirms.

# References:

Masaji Chiba, Asian Indigenous Law in Interaction with Received Law (New York and London, KPI, 1986).

Masaji Chiba, Legal Pluralism: Towards a General Theory through Japanese Legal Culture (Tokyo: Tokai University Press, 1989)

# Werner F. Menski

SOAS, University of London

Michael R. Anderson and Sumit Guha (eds) Changing Concepts of Rights and Justice in South Asia, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998). Pages xii and 289pp.(hb). ISBN 0-19-564120-5.

This book comprises eleven articles written by different scholars who explore the broader historical and cultural context of justice and rights, mainly in colonial and post-colonial India (one article is on Sri Lanka) with a view to identifying the interplay between formal law, the actors and agents involved, and the social environment. Each article is a detailed and in-depth study of some specific problem or situation. The editors assert that such an approach distinguishes them from the established practice of lawyers and legal academics to trace the history of present-day law by studying judicial doctrine and statutory reform; of historians to accept statutes as definitive expressions of the law; and, of anthropologists to focus on the popular idiom of justice and thus omit both the details of the state law and the ensuing dialogue between officials and the ordinary people on legal concepts.

In short, the ambition of the editors and other contributors is to transcend the essentialist as well as anti-essentialist tendencies in scholarly research, and instead analyse the problem of justice and rights, particularly human rights, within the complexity of legal relations in South Asian culture and history. This point is succinctly made by the editors in the following words:

'If one is to explain caste relations in the late-nineteenthcentury by reference to Manu, then one may as well account for the European welfare state through a careful reading of the Sermon on the Mount (p. 3).'

The various contributors belong to different disciplines: law, history, economics, sociology and anthropology. In order not to let such a

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multidisciplinary exercise result in disparate products a comparative framework is adopted. The various authors probe the extent to which 'justice', 'right' and 'law' can be employed as analytical categories of universal, comparative application. The presence of a number of terms and concepts such as *insaf*, *hak*, *nyaya* and *adhikar* in South Asian languages suggest that affinities, if not exact correlates, to Western concepts of justice and rights do exist and, therefore, comparisons are justified.

Sumit Guha examines the notions of wrongs and rights in eighteenth century Maratha society against a background of shifting political boundaries, lack of central power and a pluralist legacy of customs as well as written laws. The idea of rights did not derive from a shared sense of common citizenship and equality. Yet, it did exist as a claim rooted in ancient praxis. Radhika Singha covers the peculiarities of the colonial criminal justice in the Banaras Zamindari during the late eighteenth century. One learns that the British officers found aspects of Islamic law relating to murder, adultery, evidence and similar other matters repugnant to their idea of justice, but they nevertheless made significant concessions and allowed such law to be applied according to the values obtaining in that society: upper class Muslims could get away with impunity for crimes against the lower orders. Sandria Freitag focuses on the relationship between the Sansiahs and the state in the nineteenth century. Her point is that the British followed the earlier practice of the state relating to groups and communities rather than to individuals. The Sansiahs of northern India began to be perceived as a criminal tribe because the British state sought to replace the predatory ancient rule of various rulers and headmen with a system based on law and order. In the new balance of power, the Sansiahs as a group of roving looters had to be distinguished from ordinary criminals.

G. Arunima sheds light on how the colonial legal system facilitated the consolidation of a matrilineal system in nineteenth century Malabar. Archana Parashar studies some peculiarities of Christian personal law as it evolved during the British period. An interesting observation made on the post-independence period is that the Indian state recognizes non-Hindu groups and communities rather than individuals as bearers of rights. Invariably men are the recognized leaders of their groups. It means that reforms in favour of gender equality and rights are successfully resisted by them.

Radha Kumar studies how alleged sexual offences among women mill-workers in early twentieth-century Bombay were handled by the British authorities, their communities and immediate family members. As most workers and their families were migrants it meant that the usual mechanisms of social control were lax thereby enabling not only greater deviation from both law and custom but also the greater tolerance of punishments such as nose-cutting of wives by suspicious husbands. R. S. Khare examines how untouchable women perceive social justice and human rights. While acutely aware of their degraded position in the caste hierarchy and the concomitant husband-dominated social environment, in which domestic violence is routine, they still subscribe to belief

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in the inevitability of divine justice deriving from the notions of karma and dharma. Modern notions of justice and human rights therefore remain far removed from their sensibilities.

Jani de Silva's article on the perceptions of Sinhalese Sri Lankan secondary school students regarding the ethics of struggle during the turbulent 1980s brings out that although they hold the state responsible for maintaining law and order, most of them do not believe that it can deliver justice or protect rights. Some accuse it of excessive violence but paradoxically many seem to resign themselves to arbitrary use of power by the state as inevitable.

Pritam Singh's article, 'Sectarianism and Human Rights Discourse: The Politics of Human Rights in Post-Colonial Punjab' brings into sharp relief the underlying tensions implicit in the other contributions: that South Asian societal and cultural particularism is reproduced at the level of state and authority and translated into a politics of sectarianism. Such sectarianism seriously undermines the universalist ethos of human rights.

Writing in the context of class-based struggles and ethnic conflicts that have rocked post-independence East Punjab, Singh shows that the governments and political parties adopted an instrumentalist approach to human rights. It meant that only the violation of human rights of partisans were denounced, not those of others. More alarmingly, in the latter case, human rights violations could be condoned or even assisted. The author advocates an 'intrinsic worth of human rights' approach instead. The last chapter by Nilanjan Dutta is a plea to treat human rights as a radical ideology requiring the backing of a social movement. A historical sketch of the human rights movement in India is also presented.

The book is a major contribution to the understanding of how and why ideas of justice and rights are mediated by culture, social structure, balance of economic and political power in the civil society, and the local and national structures of state power. While the roots of modern human rights are indeed located in the Western Enlightenment and humanism their reception is facilitated or impeded in other environments by the notions of justice and rights prevalent there. One would have wanted the book to cover other parts of South Asia, but that could be an idea for the future.

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A.Chatterjee, Representations of India, 1740-1840: The Creation of India in the Colonial Imagination, (London and New York: Macmillan Press Ltd and St. Martin's Press Inc., 1998) vii and 237pp, £42.50 (hb.) U.K.ISBN 0-333-68942-9; U.S.ISBN 0-312-21145-7.

C.A Bayly, Empire and Information:Intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780-1870, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) xiv and 412pp, £40.00 (hb). ISBN 0-521-57085-9.

These two books lend themselves to a comparative review because they offer contrasting approaches to the exploration of the nature of British knowledge of 18th and 19th century India. Amal Chatterjee's book, the more recent of the two, follows current orientalist studies centering on British 'representations' of India. Christopher Bayly's work, published two years earlier and already influential in historical circles, constitutes what might be characterised as a post-orientalist study of the strengths and weaknesses of the British and Indian information order in India. Chatterjee, emphasizing the effect of the colonies on British society, and drawing on Edward Said and his successors, takes the position that 'an objective reality of India did not exist at all in the British perception at the time' (p.202). What did exist, he argues, was 'a series of changes and conflicts within British society', and a parallel series of perceptions influenced by reports from India that 'added up to the fact that the alien nation had to succumb' (p.202). Bayly, while acknowledging the contribution of the school of Said, Inden, and their disciples, seeks 'to locate socalled orientalist and colonial discourses more precisely in their social and political contexts' (p.143), and challenges as too extreme the view, that, in his words, 'what passed, or passes, for European knowledge of the Other is, in fact, a mere web of rhetorical devices designed to give legitimacy to conquest.'(p.7). On this issue, which constitutes only a portion of his comprehensive study and to which aspect of his work this review limits itself, Bayly agues that what he terms 'information panies' on such matters as Thuggee and sati reflect weakness and anxiety rather than strength and domination.

Chatterjee views his study of British popular writing on India from 1740 to 1840 as a part of the process whereby the critical focus on colonial writing shifts 'from individual aspects of texts to the broader field of examination of the material in the context of the development of political, social and ideological ideas that influenced them' (p.3), a focus that appears to be more congruent with Bayly's view than it really is. He chooses as the time frame what he calls the period of consolidation, during which the British changed from being a 'guest' trading presence into a military and administrative power, a period in which 'pre- and early colonial representations of an "exotic" East transformed into "primitive subject nation" representations/perceptions' (p.3). For his materials, he chooses sources available to a wide audience that discuss India, Indians or Britons in India, and avoids any choice based on literary or historical merit. Chatterjee, quoting Kate Teltscher (India Inscribed, Oxford

University Press, 1995), treats his materials 'primarily as representations...They are neither evaluated on their supposed accuracy, nor assessed on the extent of knowledge of India which they display' (p.3). Within this methodological framework, Chatterjee begins with a chapter (optional, he notes, for those already knowledgeable) on the historical background of the East India Company, moves on to a consideration of the British in India, devotes a third section to chapters on British perceptions of Indian religion and religious customs, and in Part IV of his study surveys British perceptions of Indian society, government and rulers. His central theme is to trace the manner in which the British justifications for their presence in India changed as their role and their perception of themselves changed, and how their view of the 'other' changed as well.

In Part II, Chatterjee focuses on traders, soldiers, and administrators. giving examples of ways in which the British saw themselves. The trader, he argues, was at first represented as a romantic hero, then as an unrefined, ostentatiously wealthy 'disrupter'of society at home, then a greedy oppressor of natives, and finally a mere peddler. As the trader's reputation sank, it was replaced by the soldier, then the administrator. In the first chapter of Part III. which discusses religion and customs, Chatterjee uses Bernard Cohn's distinction between those who saw Indian religion and civilization as 'primitive' or undeveloped, and those who saw it as 'degenerate' or fallen from earlier glory. Two more chapters focus on sati and Thuggee. In Part IV, Chatterjee writes chapters on Indian society, Indian government, and on the British demonisation of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan. In summarising his work, Chatterjee notes again that his aim is 'not to determine reality but to anaylse the representations in writings in the context of British perceptions of the political and social relationships of and between the two peoples/cultures' (p.197). His persistent theme in the analysis of these relationships is that no matter what differences of opinion existed about the nature of Indian society, institutions, and religion, 'the whole complex that was India...was perceived as alien and either immature or static, depending on the commentator'(p.199). The ascendancy of administrators marks the emergence of a morally superior code of service; the debates over whether India had fallen from a glorious past or was primitive throughout were ultimately irrelevant because both required that the British as the civilizing power restore India. The differences between interventionism and non-interventionism in the matter of sati were irrelevant because the British public demanded intervention in the name of superior morality. Thuggee was perceived as perhaps the most spectacular triumph of British administration and morality over primitive Hindu barbarianism, while the demonistion of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan was required in order to justify the overthrow of native hegemony. The alien nation had to succumb, and its defects 'could only be rectified by the civilizing influence which would be effected by the developing British administration' (p.202).

The question of Thuggee is an appropriate place to turn to Bayly's

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book, since both write in some detail on the subject. Chatterjee's account, using extensive quotations from the work of Sleeman, Thornton, and Philip Meadows Taylor, argues that Thuggee, first remarked upon in 1816, was re-discovered at a time when India was dominated in the 1830s by those demonising India as a 'primitive' rather than 'fallen' society, and that it followed on 'neatly' from the attack on sati as a form of human sacrifice. Chatterjee sees the invention of this sect as a means of serving all the interests of British power in India, which included trade, the superiority of Christianity over Hinduism and Islam, the strength of English arms and administration, and, above all, a means of providing 'convincing proof of the complete moral superiority of the 'advanced' European over the 'primitive' Indian (p.128). Thornton's account of the sect was intended, Chatterjee argues, to produce a 'culturally defined' moral outrage that could be turned 'to the purpose of justifying English rule in the subcontinent' (p.134). Again, Chatterjee concentrates on 'representations' of Thuggee, choosing not to discriminate between fact and fiction or investigate its sources or development.

Before he turns to specific remarks on Thuggee, Bayly, in his chapter entitled 'Between human intelligence and colonial knowledge', points out that, following Said's Orientalism, a number of studies have dealt with the creation by the British of categories of difference and backwardness to describe its people, and to justify their rule, and notes that historians have come to accept that colonial ideologies 'owed as much to debates in European intellectual history as they did to particular Indian circumstances' (p.142). However, compilations such as Inden's of the major ideas of Anglo-India were largely abstractions from a body of competing ideas. In fact, Bayly argues, 'British assessments of crime, religion and native lethargy were more often reflections of the weakness and ignorance of the colonisers than a gauge of hegemony' (p.143). Other forces were also in play, and orientalism in Said's sense 'was only one among a variety of localised engagements between power and knowledge' (p.143). It was where knowledgeable colonial institutions 'met but failed to mesh with the sentiment of the knowing people of the locality' (p.143). that stereotypes of criminal organisations, and religious fanaticism surfaced. It was here, Bayly argues, that the information panics which periodically convulsed expatriate British society in India arose. Such panics and 'ideological frenzies' as Thuggee, sati or human sacrifice are evidence for the anxiety, weakness and limitations of colonial power.

In his introduction, Bayly notes that 'the basic fear of the colonial official settler was...his lack of indigenous knowledge and ignorance of 'the wiles of the natives' (p.6), and in his prefatory remarks to Thuggee observes that panics about secret knowledge caused even ordinary Indian activities to become 'annexed to the prose of criminality' (p.173). The so-called secret language of the thugs was simply working-class Hindustani, their religious organisation a loose amalgam of militant Hindu devotionalism, goddess cult and Muslim tomb worship, and their centralised direction purely and simply a myth.

Bayly sees the British invention of the Thug as a reflection of current European ethnographic preconceptions. Its first appearance, which he dates as 1808, arose originally from the feeling of Thomas Perry, a magistrate in Etawah, that his administration was being denied information by the locals, and crystallised into the idea of organised criminal bands when a temple was robbed of Rs. 60,000. Thus, in contrast to Chatterjee, whose representations of the phenomenon gravitate more towards abstract perception, Bayly moves more concretely into the complex social, political and psychological contexts of the origin and development of the myth.

Bayly's approach to the question of the nature and extent of British knowledge of India, is, I believe, clearly the more fruitful of the two studies. His analysis of the anxiety that produced the information panics makes an important contribution to a theme that is rightly receiving more attention, and his placement of the successes and failures of information-gathering within an exhaustively researched and rigorously defined context may indeed, as Clive Dewey has written in his review of Bayly's book, 'promote a significant revision of the standard history of India' (*Times Literary Supplement*, 17 April 1998, 9).

In his book, Chatterjee has made substantial portions of a variety of interesting and important texts and commentary more readily available, and I cannot quarrel in principle about the presence of the themes of moral superiority, civilizing mission, aspects of Otherness, and the importance of changes and conflicts in British society at home. However, I am not sure that significant new ground has been broken in his discussion of these themes which, as Bayly pointed out, have already been explored. Furthermore, Bayly's concept of an information order and information panics constitutes a radical challenge to Chatterjee's view of the hegemonic thrust of British perceptions of matters such as Thugee and sati. It also challenges the notion that there was no objective reality in British knowledge of India. Finally, Chatterjee's fidelity to a theory of representation that seeks to distance itself from historical context tends to close off rather than open potential avenues of approach. Bayly's view of orientalism as simply one component of the information order constitutes a more liberating approach to the origins and complex dimensions of British perceptions of themselves and of India in the 19th century.

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Brian Cloughley, A History of the Pakistan Army: Wars and Insurrections (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999) 384 pp. US \$16 (hbk) ISBN 0-19-579015-4.

Stephen P. Cohen, The Pakistan Army: 1998 Edition with a new Forward and Epilogue (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998) 195 pp. Rs. 195 (pbk) ISBN 0-19-577948-7.

At the time of writing in mid-July 1999, the Pakistan Prime Minister (PM) Nawaz Sharif has announced that his government is taking 'concrete steps'1 to ensure the withdrawal of Islamic militants from their positions in the Kargil sector on the Indian side of the Kashmir Line of Control (LoC). If carried through, this action should see the termination of the previous three months' fierce fighting between the militants and the Indian armed forces which has claimed over 1000 lives.2 Despite vehement Pakistani protestations to the contrary, the international community seems unanimous in its backing of India's version of events; that is, the militants include a large number of Pakistan Army regulars out of uniform and were infiltrated, armed and now remain supplied by Pakistani government organisations including the army and/or Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Indeed, India's caretaker administration of Atul Behari Vajpayee continues to gain international (if not domestic) kudos for its reticence to attack the militants' supply lines on the Pakistan side of the LoC, and declared unwillingness to open a second front in order to ease the pressure on its forces in Kargil. In contrast, by agreeing to US President Bill Clinton's request to pull back the militants to the LoC, Sharif appears to be fighting for his political life as his domestic electorate berates him for this 'sell out of national pride'.3

What were Pakistani strategists thinking of when they committed resources to this qualitative escalation of confrontation? Information now emerging reveals that senior army and intelligence officers approached former PM Benazir Bhutto some time ago with their plans for a major operation in Kashmir in the hope that the resultant external and internal fighting would prove 'India's Vietnam', forcing the eventual resolution of Kashmiri sovereignty in Pakistan's favour. Although Bhutto refused to sanction their request, it is argued that Sharif gave the go-ahead earlier this year when faced with the additional argument that the possession of nuclear weapons by Pakistan and India would both guarantee the former's sovereign safety and push Western powers to ensure a swift resolution of the affair, again, in Pakistan's favour. Others have said that the decision to infiltrate Kargil was made for the above reasons by the Pakistan Army and/or ISI without the knowledge of the Sharif administration. A synthesis of both versions appears most plausible; Sharif may have approved of an 'infiltration' but was taken aback by the sheer scale of the operation and forceful Indian reaction. As has happened so often in the past, it appears that the Pakistan Army-with or without the ISI-has continued to make decisions affecting the very future of the nation without the full knowledge of the elected civilian administration.

It is interesting to examine Brian Cloughley's A History of the Pakistan Army and Stephen Cohen's The Pakistan Army for explanations as to how Pakistani military officers have evolved into a body confident-or foolhardyenough to take decisions potentially ruinous (the Kargil confrontation occasioned serious discussions of a nuclear exchange) to the welfare of their country and its peoples. As the former deputy head of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOIP) from 1980-82 and Australian defence attaché in Islamabad from 1989-94, Cloughley appears wellplaced to understand the structural and professional motivations of the Pakistani officer corps. Like many others writing in this field, he is baffled by the country's civil-military decision-making process. Describing the 1990 rise in tensions between Pakistan and India over an upsurge in violence in Kashmir. Cloughley wonders 'who spoke for Pakistan? Was it the government in Islamabad...or was it the generals in Rawalpindi?4 Cohen, an academic with long-standing expertise in the militaries of the Subcontinent, is more optimistic in the new Epilogue to the 1998 edition of his The Pakistan Army. He argues that, as the political role of the army has been in decline during the 1990s, 'the stage may be set for a dramatic transformation of relations between the military and the political community'.5 Given the participation of army chiefs in the serial dismissals of elected PMs in the past decade, the September 1995 coup plot by over 30 army officers to assassinate top civil-military decision-makers and create an 'Islamic' state, as well as the recent decision to infiltrate Kargil, Cloughley's confusion may be closer to the mark than Cohen's hopefulness.

A closer look at the reasons behind the muddle-headed strategic thinking of Pakistani armed forces' officers today shows both Cloughley and Cohen focusing on the damage caused by the military regime of Zia ul-Haq. In power for over a decade, Zia used a policy of 'Islamisation' of both civil society and military professionalism to appeal to the masses, divide his opponents and, ultimately, justify his right to rule. Cohen describes how the 'Zia years are now regarded with a degree of embarrassment.... '[He] stressed the importance of reform and purification, encouraging Islamic-style changes...now seen as excessive and detrimental to the professionalism of the army'. Cloughley, more up-to-date with Pakistani military practices, is more scathing in his interpretation of how Islamisation affected officers' professionalism: '[Zia] encouraged rote-learning of religious detail at the expense of improvement in intellectual probity...his regime and the years thereafter spawned a large number of blinkered, semi-educated youngsters whose expectations are greater than their competence to realize them'.

In the light of the above comments, Kargil appears to be history repeating itself. Cohen describes how the professional decision-making capabilities of the 1950-65 'generation' of Pakistani officers was affected by their country's decision to join American-led security alliances:

Many of them received some training in America or from Americans....Along with American equipment and training came American military doctrines, [and] American approaches to problem solving....officers of the American generation came to acquire an overblown estimate of their own and Pakistan's martial qualities, and some came to believe implicitly the myth that one Pakistani soldier was the equal to five, ten, or more Indians.<sup>8</sup>

This arrogance, when combined with an ignorance of their Indian counterparts due to an almost total lack of personal and/or professional contact, led the military into the disastrous 1965 Indo-Pak War. Islamisation appears to have had a similar effect on Pakistani officers' sense of their professional capabilities today. Reporter Jason Burke writes of how officers in Kargil are unhappy with Sharif's promised withdrawal—'We should finish the job and liberate Kashmir once and for all'9—while remaining ignorant about the enemy—'The young officers of the unit repeatedly ask what Indians are like'. More worrisome is the effect which Islamisation appears to have had on these officers' understanding of their professional loyalty. Statements such as 'We are Muslims first and Pakistanis second. Our orders come from Allah, not the politicians' do nothing to encourage the hope that the Pakistan Army may become subservient to their elected civilian leaders, if not today, then in the future.

In A History of the Pakistan Army and The Pakistan Army, respectively, Cloughley and Cohen have produced admirable works of understanding. While the former is more personalised and up-to-date, the latter is better organised and clearer in its conclusions. Those interested in the past, present and future of the Pakistan Army at war or in peacetime are advised to obtain a copy of both.

### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> 'Pakistan, India exchange fire despite Kashmir accord', CNN News, <customnews.cnn.com>, 13 July 1999.
- 2. ibid.
- 3. 'Kashmir fighting erupts despite withdrawal deal', CNN News, <customnews.cnn.com>, 12 July 1999.
- 4. Brian Cloughley, A History of the Pakistan Army: Wars and Insurrections (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 317.
- 5. Stephen P. Cohen, *The Pakistan Army: 1998 Edition with a new Forward and Epilogue* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 164.
- 6. Cohen, pp. 167-168.
- 7. Cloughley, pp. 355-356.
- 8. Cohen, pp. 63-64.
- 9. Jason Burke, 'Peace is hell for holy warriors', The Observer, 11 July 1999.

10. ibid. 11. ibid

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Manju Kapur, Difficult Daughters (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) 282pp. £9.99 (pb). ISBN 0-571-19634-9

The 50th anniversary of partition has resulted in a flurry of publishing in the social sciences and humanities, much of which refreshingly moves away from concerns about the official decisions. Instead, many works are asking questions about the experiences of the average person during that difficult time. The academic writings are supplanted by fictional accounts of partition such as the short story anthologies which were English translations from Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Panjabi, Malayalam, Dogri, Marathi and Sindhi (the originals were written just after partition). This writing embraces themes that return us to the original issues - recounting the tit-for-tat violence of the time, abandoned children, abducted women, and communal hatred.

Fictional works can provide primary material for the social scientist. Such a connection is made explicit by Mushirul Husan. Like others, he argues that partition must look beyond the two nation theory, the rhetoric of Indian nationalism and the pitfalls of lending respectability to British colonialism: 'If histories of partition are to be re-written, then creative writings provide a foundation for developing an alternative discourse to current expositions of a general theory on inter-community relations' (Economic and Political Weekly Oct 10, 1998, XXXIII no. 41). There are many novels which are set at the time of or invoke partition including, but not limited to, Ghosh's Shadow Lines, Kesavan's Looking through Glass, Chaudhuri's Afternoon Rag.

Many of these novels could potentially serve as primary source material for such an inquiry. One such recent publication is Manju Kapur's first novel, Difficult Daughters. The tale traces Virmati's life story through the first-person narrative of her daughter lda. The narrative alters between reconstruction of the past and the realities of the present. At the heart of this novel is a love story about Virmati. She is portrayed sympathetically as the heroine overcoming adversity who finally marries her true love, 'The Professor', an England-returned Oxford graduate who was very charming and lectured at the local College. But the tale twists as Viramati doesn't merely marry the man she loves but falls in love with a married man and then becomes his second wife. The novel skilfully reveals Viramati's experience of the world, especially her dreams. Her dreams of true love, of education, and her difficulties balancing her family requirements with her inner yearnings (getting an education, employment, living in a hostel in Lahore, facing pregnancy and abortion out of

wedlock, and finally of being a second wife). Deceptively straightforward at first glance, the title plays on the tensions in the novel and upon completion, one is never quite sure whether difficult daughters refers to the difficulties of

being a daughter or having one.

Whichever the novelist intends, Difficult Daughters fantastically presents a woman's point of view and the tensions and 'consequences' of women's education, especially from an Arya Samaj perspective. The novel intimately captures the Punjabi sense of womanhood without stifling the characters in an overly parochial sense of culture. For example, Kapur weaves the calculated responses often given by women throughout her text- such as, Virmati's mother to her daughter, Virmati's aunt Lajwati to her sister-in-law (Virmati's mother), the Professor's first wife to her own children, her mother-in law, and Virmati. The calculated responses of each of these women, balancing what they say, what they mean, and what they think reveal how culture is inscribed through gender roles. One of the best examples of this is when the Professor's wife is sent by the Professor to Virmati's house to tell them of the suicide letter he has received. Entering Virmati's family courtyard:

The woman [the professor's wife] meantime was wondering how she was going to break her news, amongst the sisters and everybody? The bearer of messages from her husband about their daughter? It wasn't fair she should be put in a situation like this, she should also be at home cooking. That was her right, to be able to cook for her family, to be left in peace to fuss over their eating habits, to cater to their likes and dislikes, to do just what Kasturi was doing with her daughters. As a preliminary she let tears gather in her eyes. (1998: 79)

Kapur's masterful writing captures the deliberateness of actions in which Punjabi woman's bodies are meant to act in certain inscribed ways (i.e., 'as a preliminary she let tears gather in her eye'). Her writing lays bare how socially - acceptable behaviour is inscribed and responded to by women and the tensions around such 'required' responses. Thus, after breaking the news, Kapur writes about Virmati's mother who is comforting the tearful Professor's wife.

'Bas, Bas,' said Kasturi, rubbing her on the back.

'Oh Bhenji! It is my unlucky kismet that has brought me here. Everybody's curses will be upon my head!'.

'No, no,' said Kasturi soothingly, one eye on the cooking vegetables...

'He told me to tell you that maybe Virmati has gone to Tarsikk.. That maybe she has done something to herself. Oh, Behnji, please forgive me!' As she gave her news, her sobs subsisted. She no longer had the greater right to cry.

This allowed Kasturi (Virmati's mother) to respond:

'How could she do this? What will happen to us all? To these girls? Where did we go wrong?' (81)

The inscribed gender roles between the sisters-in-law are also brought to the fore. The tragedy of the protagonist's potential suicide is the scene and they are sitting together waiting for news of Virmati.

Kasturi [Virmati's mother] cried on, saying all the things she knew Lajwanti [her sister in law] would be thinking, saying them with a heart full of grief and angry shame that she had to be talking like this about her own daughter, and the eldest in the family too. And Bade Baoji, who had championed her cause, what would he think? As for herself, she could never wipe out the stigma of having a child thoughtless enough to contemplate ending her life without consideration for what her family would suffer. Then there was the Professor, how did he know before her own family? She trembled at what she might find out. (81-2)

The news of Virmati's suicide allows the reader to experience Kapur's subtlety in all its depths, how she conveys the realities of the situation for women by connecting them to a social order which prescribes their specific responses. This in itself is not an entirely exciting development, but the deftness and skill with which Kapur captures the women's experience without overburdening the characters in wooden portrayals definitely is worth the read itself.

Perhaps in fact its strength also proves to be its weakness. Difficult Daughters is a novel about Viramati that happens to be set in partition, and those who want 'experience' would be best to find it as the reclaiming of history of those who grew up with the stories of partition in their home, i.e. the children of migrants. In other words, this is a novel about Virmati's life living in her Arya Samjist family at the time of partition. But it is about reclaiming the experiences of her mother, but through a fictional character Ida. What we as social scientists do not get a good glimpse of is Kapur's own experiences which made her write the book. To gain anything greater, we need to understand if this book vindicated Kapur's memories? Was partition an inevitable setting for this narrative? If so, why? The increasing number of those who were born in the shadow of partition reveal the power of these memories – memories which are only now being emancipated through writing.

Dhooleka Sarhadi Raj University of Cambridge Dushka Saiyid, *Muslim Women of the British Punjab: From Seclusion to Politics*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), 145p. £42.00 (hb), ISBN: 0-312-21459-6. Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, *From Purdah to Parliament*, (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 1998), 255p. Pak. Rs. 600 (hb), ISBN: 0-19-577804-9.

In more recent years one can observe a gradual diversification of studies on Pakistan, its formation, society, ethno-regional identities, the relationship between state and society, literature and economy. However, the serious research on Muslim gender politics in British India or on the status of women in the constituent areas and socio-political institutions of Pakistan still remains confined to a few solitary volumes. Contrasted with that one see a proliferation of autobiographies by the retired generals, technocrats and diplomats, which may be useful but have a limited historical and intellectual value. The postindependence emphasis on Muslim separatism as a single-factor explanation of the country, and that too confined within predictable parameters generally laid the grounds for future studies. Consequently, the traditional explanations of Pakistan popularised within the country itself have suffered from over-simplification lacking multi-dimensionality as well as multi-disciplinarity. Thus, within Pakistan, any intellectual discourse on ethnic or plural identities or any alternative explanation of the Pakistan movement was assumed to be a heresy. Similarly, critiquing the misuse of Islam by the establishment, or the evaluating the bureaucratic/military axis at the expense of the civic dictates, were frowned upon, so leaving little room for fresher interpretations. The official histories became a routine narrative of some presumed consensus almost destroying the very discipline of historical inquiry besides, of course, hurting the fabrics of nationhood. The exclusion of women from such interpretations left a gaping hole which still awaits reconstitutive efforts and bold initiatives.

These two volumes represent two refreshing additions in an otherwise monotonous, male-centred and highly predictable historiography in Pakistan. Dushka Saiyid's study is a rather extensive overview of the status of Muslim women in British India with special reference to Punjab. Based on a doctoral dissertation, it acknowledges the transformation of the status of urban Muslim women in the socio-judicial realms inducted during a century-long British control. The changes were brought about by the missionaries as well as by the Muslim modernists themselves. In his introduction to the volume, Ainslee Embree commends it as a major study on imperialism, whereas the author herself questions the colonial rationale behind opting for personal law as stipulated by customs and not by Islamic Sharia. Such a dichotomy, to her, hindered the fullfledged developments of the women's sector though Muslim Shurafa'a did encourage their women to seek higher education, shun purdah and participate in all sorts of socio-political activities. The author has mainly concentrated on the upper middle class women and the urban intelligentsia besides covering a wider range and this somehow disallows a focused and well-researched analysis. The 285 Book reviews

chapters on *purdah* and women's writings are the mainstay of the study though one misses the counter Muslim view as represented by Nazeer Akbarabadi and several other religio-political parties varying from the Jamaat-i-Islami to Ahrars and the Khaksars. The larger debate on imperialism and gender also does not appear in the monograph. Saiyid's study is, however, a useful beginning of a trend that needs to be highly encouraged in reference to regional, subaltern and ideological determinants. In other words, high history is to give way to the study of *peoples* not merely as passive followers but rather as the architects as well as agents of change.

Like Dushka Saiyid, Begum Ikramullah - though a generation her senior - belongs to a miniscule urban, Urdu-speaking Indian Muslim elite who allowed their women to participate in academic, literary and also some political activities. Such societal roles were well-defined within male-dominated, tradition-bound narrow parametres but were still strides ahead of their counterparts stuck in the rural, tribal and feudalist nomenclature. From Purdah to Parliament, a pioneering autobiography, is the revised edition of the book that was published in 1963 by a preeminent Pakistani stateswoman and diplomat. She comes from a leading Bengali Urdu-speaking family which enjoyed economic prosperity as well as spiritual status so characteristic of Muslim Shura'fa, a term invariably used by Dr Saiyid. Like her cousins - the Suhrawardies -- she acquired higher education and got involved in the freedom movement. It is a woman's view of the crucial developments in the 1940s until Pakistan became a reality. She served Pakistan in her different roles as a wife of its first foreign secretary, ambassador's spouse and an ambassador herself. Although she comes from an elitist background, and may not be a true representative of ordinary Muslim women, yet her views for a time have gone well with the modernists and nationalists. However, a few years down the line one could foresee a greater critique of such celebratory family histories from a younger and vocal generation of gender activists. Her last major assignment was in Morocco where she enjoyed a very close relationship with the royal family. Her daughter, Sarvath, following her studies at Oxford, emerged as a prominent personality in the Jordanian socio-political life following her marriage to Prince Hasan. The twenty-four chapters make interesting reading. One has to be, however, mindful of the fact that Ikramullahs and Suhrawardies, despite their role in the cause of Pakistan, were well-placed, upper crust families, who immensely benefited from the new opportunities offered with the creation of a new Muslims state. Such personages, for all their rhetoric for the welfare state, did not experience the rigours and pangs of an ordinary existence but rather they were conveniently catapulted into the global jet set. Their kind of Pakistan always appeared at variance with the 'other' Pakistan of ordinary, toiling folks left to the mercy of ambitious, unscrupulous and self-seeking individuals.

Iftikhar H Malik, Bath Spa University College Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, *The Name of My Beloved. Verses of the Sikh Gurus*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1995) xv and 251pp. £11.99(pb). ISBN 0-06-067049-5

For those who want to be introduced to the riches of Sikh devotion this book is a wonderful aid. It provides a collection of spiritual writings which come from not only the *Guru Granth Sahib* but also from other sources such as the *Dasam Granth*.

Much of the material is selected to take one through the different parts of the day. Thus the morning section includes the Jap, the first prayer in the Guru Granth, also the *Shabad Hazare*, which is a 'combination of poetic pieces from different Gurus in different rags or melodic frameworks, which are therefore found in a different section of the Guru Granth'. The Dasam Granth is used to contribute the Jaap. This is described as 'a marvellous profusion of divine attributes that flashed on the Guru's artistic consciousness'. Finally the Morning and Initiation section include the ten *Savvaye* or quatrains which are also from Guru Gobind Singh's Dasam Granth.

The section for the evening includes Rahiras while Ardas is included for morning and evening. It is pointed out that although not in the Guru Granth, Ardas 'is included in this section because of its prominence in the life of the community'. The cycle of the day is completed with the Kirtan Sohila, 'which is recited just before going to bed as the Guru Granth is closed and ceremoniously carried to rest'.

Other material not directly related to the moods of the day includes Lavan, composed by Guru Ram Das, which is used during the marriage ceremony. A communal element includes Barah Maha which follows the seasonal cycle of the year, and the verses of thanksgiving which conclude every reading of the Guru Granth. Finally the personal and communal section includes the Sukhmani.

Each section includes a brief introduction. These comments include just enough detail to set the scene, and include elements of description as well as evaluation. Thus when comment is made on the Shabad Hazare it is said that 'Through feminine thoughts and feelings, the hymn expresses the yearning for the One, and tells us how to unite with That One'. Here and in a number of other places we are fortunate to have a female writer making the selections.

The material is well presented and set out. The central section which contains the selections from the Guru Granth and other writings is easy to handle. The book enables one to enter into the rich spiritual heritage of Sikhism. The descriptions do not interfere with the material which is allowed to speak for itself. I would consider that the book would be useful both to those who are familiar with the material as well to those who are exploring such material for the first time. It certainly goes beyond the descriptive accounts sometimes found of Sikh practices. There is a real spiritual treasure here.

I conclude with a comment on the introduction. This may be a good

way to read the book. Explore the scriptures first and then return to place them in their context. The introduction provides a useful framework for appreciating the middle part of the book. Central to the material is the statement that 'The Sikh understanding of Ultimate Reality is a dynamic and joyous experience'. The introduction is best when it focuses on the Sikh experience. Statements about Plato which are not substantiated do not always add a great deal. There are some wonderful succinct phrases worth savouring such as 'Sikh morality seeks the Eternal One, within our day-to-day existence'. Again 'Cleansing through love and devotion is the starting point of Sikh ethics'. Such concepts as langar, sangat, and khalsa are placed within a wider framework. This is perhaps the strength of the book in that it takes one beyond the phenomena and attempts to present something of the essence of Sikhism.

There are some lovely personal touches such as the description given of the author not being allowed to place Punjabi newspapers in the Gurmukhi script on the ground.

With selections there are always passages which one might wish to see included. Mention is made in the introduction of 'the words of Guru Arjan, "You are my father, You are my mother, You are my brother, You are my friend" and it is perhaps a shame that this did not find a place in the main section. Some wonderful passages were included however. It is noted in the introduction that

'The Sikh mystical journey is not a journey away from the world. Rather it is grounded in and of this earth. It is here in our everyday existence that we develop our moral, intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual capacities and experience the Ultimate Reality'.

This book will help those who wish to be involved with the journey for all, much, or a little of it length.

#### Richard Bainbridge

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Harish C. Sharma, Artisans of the Punjab: A Study of Social Change in Historical Perspective, 1849-1947, (New Delhi, 1996), 163 pp, price not stated, ISBN 81-7304-127-X

The book under review is a revised and enlarged version of H.C. Sharma's thesis which was approved for Ph. D.. by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar a few years back. In brief this study is an attempt to comprehend the position of artisan castes in the Punjab during the colonial rule. So far there had been no major work which exclusively explored the social

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history of the artisan castes in colonial Punjab. Sharma's study does succeed in filling this vital gap in modern Punjab history. Divided into seven chapters, this small but meticulous monograph is largely based on contemporary archival records and oral information passed on to the author by some artisans' families still living in the areas around Amritsar. Sharma has adopted a very cautious approach in selecting material from official reports which indeed suffer from a number of inaccuracies. Besides, he has made a good use of sociological and anthropological tools in exploring the changing conditions of the artisan castes in British Punjab. Sharma's central argument is that under the impact of colonialism there took place a qualitative transformation in the position of artisan castes.

The author initiates the study by providing a graphic account of the socio-economic conditions of the artisan castes that existed in the pre-colonial Punjab. The artisans formed about one fifth of the total population in this region. In general they were described as kamins or mentals and were treated low in social hierarchy. Among them, the Sunars, Tarkhans, Lohars and Julahas were given the status of clean castes whereas Chamars and Mochis were described as socially untouchables. It is well known that the daily life of the people in Punjab rural society was regulated by the sepidari system (similar to the iaimani system). Under this system the artisans were required to provide services and furnish agricultural implements for the village society. In return, the landowning classes generally paid the artisans in kind for the services rendered by them. Sharma rightly contends that this kind of agrarian social structure made the 'division of labor in the countryside relatively ascriptive and economic system to a certain extent non-competitive'. In other words, the rural artisans almost lived outside the orbit of the cash nexus, though some of them, in particular the Julahas, did receive cash payment on certain occasions from the members of the upper castes in the villages. The existing structure indeed insured that the minimum requirements of the artisans were met within the village community. The fact, however, remains that the majority of them lived In addition, some of them - particularly belonging to the untouchable castes - had to work as begar (unpaid labor) which meant that their conditions were extremely miserable. In the urban areas, the working conditions of the artisans were of course not governed by the sepidari system, and they were producing directly for sale in the market. But their production for the monetized sector was highly restricted and their conditions were not much different from their counterparts in rural society.

Sharma has forcefully argued that significant changes were witnessed in the position of artisan castes in Punjab after the establishment of colonial rule in the mid nineteenth century. In the newly acquired province, the primary interest of the British was not only to consolidate its rule but also to use its resources for imperial interests. The colonial government therefore introduced some fundamental changes in the society, economy and politics of Punjab that indeed had far reaching consequences. The colonial state invested a large

amount of capital in building canal irrigation in the western part of Punjab, which not only brought new areas under cultivation but also gave a big boost to agrarian production. Besides, the establishment of the railway system and the construction of roads expanded trade. In this manner, the Punjab economy was integrated with the British metropolis.

There was a sharp increase in the export of agricultural products to England and at the same time British textile goods began to arrive in large quantities at all major centres of trade in the province. However, in the case of modern industry, the pace of development remained comparatively much Apart from these economic changes this region also slower in Punjab. witnessed the growth of education in the second half of the nineteenth century. Under the changed conditions, the old sepidari system was disrupted and the social relations which had existed hitherto in the rural society, were transformed. Although the new avenues of employment were practically monopolised by Hindu upper castes a small section of people belonging to artisan castes could also manage to enter into some middle class professions which resulted in their spatial and occupational mobilisation. It is however important to mention that the more ambitious among the rural artisans preferred to own land which not only provided them with economic security but also raised their status in the social hierarchy. However, their endeavour to achieve upward mobility was indeed an arduous task since they had to face a lot of opposition from upper caste landowning classes who were not prepared to accord higher status to the artisan castes in their social relations. However the lower castes in the changed environment were not willing to accept a permanently inferior position in society. As a result, the untouchables, in particular, began to assert their identity, which eventually culminated in the emergence of the Adi Dharmi movement in Punjab in the early twenieth century.

The author has, however, not given sufficient attention to the fact that for some sections of artisans, the conditions became more oppressive under the colonial rule. It is indeed true that the process of modernisation initiated by the British government in Punjab made it possible for a number of persons belonging to artisan castes to shift to new professions which undoubtedly raised their economic and social position in the society. But at the same time the disruption of the sepidari system produced acute hardship for a large number of artisans since their customary claims in the rural society ceased to exist under the new conditions. In other words, it was more obligatory for the upper castes in the village society to provide grain and other goods to the artisans. In fact, under the colonial conditions the forces of the market now largely governed artisans' relations with other segments of society. Many of them, particularly the untouchables, had to take up the work of agricultural labour for which the landlords generally paid them in cash. Under such prevailing conditions, some of the artisans preferred to migrate to other countries where they were mostly employed as indentured labour. In urban society too, the artisans (particularly

Julahas) suffered enormous difficult to compete with machine-made goods, which were being imported in large quantities from England. In such a situation, many artisans had to give up their professions and this led to the decline of the handicraft industry. This process of 'deindustrialisation' indeed had serious repercussions on artisans as well as on the Punjab economy in general during the colonial period.

On the whole, this well researched work is an important contribution to our understanding of social and economic history of modern Punjab, and is recommended to all those interested in the study of social change in modern India.

# K.L. Tuteja Kurukshetra University

Mahmood Hasan Khan, Climbing the Development Ladder with NGO Support: Experiences of Rural People in Pakistan (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), xv + 279 pp. Price not mentioned (hb). ISBN 0-19-577921-5

The book evaluates the adaptation of the rural development framework of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) by four national NGOs in Pakistan. It describes in detail the programmes of these NGOs in all four provinces of the country. The book falls under Pakistan Studies more than Punjab Studies. However, Idara-e-Kissan - one of the four non-governmental organisations (NGOs) discussed in the book - is based in Punjab. And a good part of National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) work is also carried out in Punjab. Sarhad Rural Support Corporation (SRSC) and Baluchistan Rural Support Programme (BRSP) are working in NWFP (North Western Frontier Province) and Baluchistan provinces respectively.

The author describes three models of rural development. The 'individualist' model assumes the intervention of an (often outside) elite to do some development for the rural poor and is not being considered a win - win situation for both the groups (rural poor and elite). The second model - called 'collectivist' - suggests that the rural poor have a tradition of collectivism in harsh environments. The outside intervention may be positive and gainful with certain conditions like self-liquidating outside involvement. The author favours the 'organisational model' - the third model - for a support organisation engaged in rural development. According to the author the organisational model is based upon Utopian Socialism. It has three components; programme, organisation, and the foremost - participants (or beneficiaries). An assumption of the model is that the programme and organisation components should be highly adaptive and responsive to the needs of participants, and that all three must have a high degree of 'fit' with each other. The author argues that by adapting this model, people in rural areas can gainfully engage in collective development work. This

model adopts a socialistic approach to development when operating under a capitalist economic system which does not favour equal distribution of resources. A question arises in the reader's mind about the hostility of the environments towards the model. The author also points to a conflict of interest between the state (including its functionaries) and the aims of rural development in Pakistan. For example the state structure promotes rent-seeking behaviour among its functionaries, which does not promote the process of rural development. In order to make the model more adaptive, the author notes, NRSP has introduced some modifications in the model but they are yet to bear fruit. SRSC has also not been able to adapt the model successfully.

From a historical perspective, the organisational model may not be the most appropriate for Pakistani NGOs in the current situation. Experience tells that a charismatic leader (or catalyst) is necessary for the successful implementation of rural development strategies. The author has correctly emphasised the need to have skilful and better-trained social organisers (SOs) and community activists. Therefore, there is a case to modify the model to include an element of strong local leadership in it.

A common crisis faced by most of the NGOs is that of finances. NGOs in Pakistan are mainly funded from external sources. It appears that the international trend in NGO funding is undergoing strategic changes, especially after the apparent collapse of Socialism as an economic system. Local fundraising by NGOs in Pakistan is still largely an un-exploited field in rural development. It will draw the local public into the rural development process. The author rightly points to some other important (and internationally debated) NGO issues:

- The dearth of impact-assessment studies is not only an issue for Pakistani NGOs which lack good monitoring and evaluation (M and E) record-keeping practices. It is generally a weak area of NGO work globally. The author correctly observes that M&E activities are seen as a 'forensic audit of the functionaries'. Decisions are generally not informed by any lessons learnt from M&E where they exist, as in the case of BRSP. There are hardly any success stories to boast of good development work according to independently commissioned impact-assessment studies (see Sogge, D. Biekart, K. and Saxby, J [eds.] Compassion and Calculation, (London: Pluto Press, 1996))
- Another area of consistent NGO concern is the dichotomy between insiders (or beneficiaries) and outsiders (those who implement development agenda). It is evident, as described by the author, in the dealings of SOs with local communities and their activists. NGOs also find it hard to find a balance between longer-term deployment of their staff in a particular area and the danger of misuse of power (and resources) for personal benefits by the same staff members.
- NGOs issues like sustainability in their working approach, beneficiaries' perceptions of 'hidden agendas', relationships with the state, and contracting

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(with donors) have been touched upon successfully.

The author has also brought to light internal NGO management issues such as inexperienced staff, absence of long-term vision about rural (as well as social) development, and the lack of an innovative approach to development. Most of the rural development work in Pakistan seems to be grafted on from outside and not coming from below, i.e. from the people. This (internal management) aspect of rural development work requires more in-depth studies and constructive criticism.

The author concludes that no considerable contribution has been made by NGOs and their workers in bringing about change. He has, however, observed changes among the female population, like an increase in schooling and awareness of population control. It is interesting to note that most of these changes are reported in the Punjab province. The book is a departure from the stereotypes used by many authors while describing the rural poor. The author succeeded in portraying the fact that the poor do not consider poverty to be their fate, that they do want to take control of their life, and that they are aware of illiteracy and population growth. But they don't want decisions to be taken by the outsiders on their behalf.

The book is a good contribution towards building a better understanding of the development scene in Pakistan. It will greatly help towards filling up the gap which I acutely felt during my M.Sc. in 'Management of NGOs' [LSE] in the development literature about Pakistan and its NGOs, and will be welcomed by development practitioners and theorists alike.

## Mohammad Abbas

Oxfam G.B; Oxford

(The writer's views are his own personal opinions and are not necessarily those of Oxfam G.B.)

Imtiaz H. Bokhari, *Management of Third World Crises in Adverse Partnership: Theory and Practice*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997), xii and 333 pp. Rs.1000 (hb). ISBN 0 19 577757 3.

I could not put this book down. Let me explain. I have been reading it while on a UNDP mission in Kyrgyzstan, currently experiencing what locals describe to me as a social-economic crisis, a result of transition. Nightly I watch Russian television news bulletins. They are full of little else than the crisis in Chechnya, I have poor Russian but I can see exactly what is going on, and Russian television does not spare me the details. I leave that and tune into the BBC World Service. The familiar strains of Lillibullero give way to crackling news of the East Timor crisis. Australian voices discuss the unwillingness of the Indonesian militia to leave peaceably a land that comprehensively voted against

domination by a country that invaded them when the world order was different and no one much seemed to care about the trials of its people. I make a cup of tea and wonder about Kosovo, there was brief mention of it here yesterday. Oh, and by the way, just coming to light are the atrocities perpetrated against women in Rwanda, the ones that survived that is.

Now why does this explain why I could not put the book down? Essentially Imtiaz H. Bokhari's thesis concerns the possibility, no more than that, that third world crises might be manageable, under certain conditions and certain circumstances; that there is an identifiable process; that there is the possibility of a theory, and if there is a theory there is also the possibility that we may be able to predict events. In other words we may be able to see how it is all going to turn out.

This is not mere suggestion. As an ex-military man, having seen service in the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war and the 1971 Bangladesh crisis, and served at the Pakistan Military Academy and the Staff and Command College in Quetta, he has selected three political-military crises, wars in fact, to illustrate the then Superpowers' attempts at managing crises, and certainly their success in containing them. (Otherwise I would not have written this review and you would not be reading it.)

The crises through which the process is explained are the 1971 Pakistan Crisis, the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973, and the Iran-Iraq war. Let us not quibble here about the difference between war and crisis. Imtiaz Bokhari deftly explains that. It depends on who is doing the definition. Thus the Iran-Iraq war is a deadly combat to direct participants, but it is a crisis to those outside the region, in this case the then Superpowers, (adverse partners as he terms them) whose needs were to contain it and protect their interests in the region. Differentiation is implied between the local, regional and systemic levels. As I write, following this differentiation I would define the current war between Russia and Chechnya as local, although it may be or soon become regional. The question is will it, like Kosovo, become a systemic crisis?

What then is the discernible process of crisis management? Imtiaz Bokhari is at pains to point out the difference between the development of a crisis - its genesis; its stages, both pre and post; its termination. This he states has been well discussed in the literature. For his model of crisis management he draws on Zartman (1988). The essence is that crises need to be viewed in the context of evolutionary processes, where the actors in events engage in the ripening and unripening of situations to the 'point at which it (the crisis) bursts or falls, (the ripe moment) and the components of power and interest (take) on a new form in the next phase' (p17).

This process is then illustrated by the three case studies. Examples are given of ripening and unripening and new forms in the next phase. However Imtiaz Bokhari does not remain uncritical of his work. The concluding chapter compares the applicability of the model in each of the cases he has selected, in addition to contrasting the more or less successful attempts in managing these

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crises. The ripening process is described in more detail drawing on common features of the three cases, the ripe moment likewise. There is commentary on the subsequent new forms. A key factor in all this, he concludes, is that the actors managing the crisis - until recently most commonly the two superpowers - have to keep control at all times, with an eye to their naturally desired outcomes - conflict resolution - while maintaining or preferably enhancing their interests. This may all look like history now. After all the CIS is currently just a shadow of the former Soviet Union. But new superpowers are developing. These days they are not nations, but global organisations, internet technology; drugs cartels and so on. And who will manage crises in these contexts? The United States still attempts to do so in some cases, but is there an increasing role for the UN? Imtiaz Bokhari suggests so.

This is where I came in. At one level I found the book a good read, retracing the steps of the three cases he uses, which I lived through, vicariously by television except for the Arab-Israeli war where I was all too close. After subsequent events in each of these areas Imtiaz Bokhari's analysis helped to explain seemingly contradictory western policy, such as the Iraqis are/are not on the side of the angels.

I have to say I did not find the thesis entirely convincing, but I thought it a good start, and an interesting perspective. It certainly was provocative, on two counts. Being concerned as I am with aid work my first thought was that crisis management is the act of the completely cynical. Push a bit here, pull a bit there to get a resolution and at all costs safeguard interests. Never mind the people in the way. On the other hand I believe few individuals are completely cynical and I began to wonder whether the Kosovo crisis had been managed. Were western politicians manipulating for ripe moments and would the humanitarian results have been far worse for both Kosovans and Serbs if they had not?

The other provocation was that humanitarian crises are all too frequently pronounced today. I need to think about the process of managing them, but the idea of getting the world to the 'ripe moment' to combat them is a concept worth exploring.

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I.W. Zartman, 'Alternative Attempts at Crisis Management, Concepts in Process', in G.R.Winham (ed.) New Issues in International Crisis Management (Westview: Boulder, 1988).

Pauline Amos-Wilson
Oxford Brookes University

Asma Barlas, Democracy, Nationalism and Communalism: The Colonial Legacy in South Asia, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 241pp, £41.50,hb ISBN: 0-8133-8750-7

This book deals with the evolution of Hindu and Muslim nationalisms in British India. It seeks to critique the modernization theory with its 'societycentric focus' at the cost of considering state and economy as determining variables, as well as the so-called Cambridge school of history based on analysis of elite, institutions and patron-client relations ignoring the input of subaltern classes. Instead, the book follows a Gramacian variety of class-based theories to understand the difference between the two nationalisms, with political parties functioning as conveyor belts around the system in their role as agents of class hegemony. In the author's view, the Congress: represented the Indian bourgeoisie and a non-revolutionary line of action; co-opted the peasantry. which gave a populist character to the party; dabbled in socialism which introduced a social reformist agenda; dwelled on Hinduism as a source of legitimacy thereby communalizing the nationalist idiom; and finally heavily relied on the non-revolutionary mobilisational potential of Gandhi. On the other hand, Pakistan has had no dominant class. Barlas traces the origin of and development of the Muslim elite in Pakistan through an intermeshing of landlord factions, politicians from the minority and majority provinces and Punjab-based army leadership.

In this book, Asma Barlas took up an ambitious project of comparing Hindu and Muslim nationalisms in terms of hegemony, defined as a fit between power, ideas and institutions. However, she only partially succeeded in achieving her target. Perhaps more analysis into economic and social change, the profile of the colonial state and the role of charismatic leadership were required for three variables to be fully elaborated and integrated. The argument in favour of bringing the state back in and using the class dynamics for outlining the building blocks of Indian nationalism needs to be further developed. The traditional source material of historical writing on the region has been generally bypassed. In that respect, this is a book of history written with a political science methodology. This is an innovative attempt to break through the perceived shackles of the Cambridge school of history. Perhaps, more of these attempts are needed to posit a creditable challenge to the accepted orthodoxy in the field of South Asia history.

#### Mohammad Waseem

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Omar Noman, Pride and Passion: An Exhilarating Half-Century of Cricket in Pakistan, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), Pp. 380. Pak. Rs. 695.(hb) ISBN: 0-19-577831-6.

Curiously while cricket has experienced a somewhat diminishing following in the developed world it has been concurrently transformed into a national institution in countries like Pakistan inspiring immense pride and passion. A number of other sports have come into the limelight thanks to television and the injections of heavy sums. On the contrary, in countries like England, cricket seems to have dwindled to particular classes without assuming a cross-sectional mainstream role. Unlike football or rugby, cricket is still perceived as an elitist hangover though at the English county and school levels one sees quite a few matches taking place largely ignored by media and irreverently unnoticed by spectators. On the contrary, in South Asia, the West Indies and the Southern African region it has become a populist passion with the players assuming star positions. In the young nation-states cricket matches with the 'rival' countries (like between India and Pakistan) become highly contested nationalist outbursts involving the players, spectators and the governments. The recent involvement of money, especially of betting, has brought in various worries yet cricket remains on the ascendancy in these regions. More than any other sport this former colonial pastime has been massively appropriated both by the elite and the masses simultaneously. The official involvement in organising the cricket boards and selecting and rejecting players and managers still does not allow any evolution of private parallel clubs enjoying a similar stature. Omar Noman's effort under review amply highlights the rise and rise of cricket in Pakistan all the way from the colonial times to its world cup primacy in the 1990s. Published as a part of the Pakistan's fiftieth anniversary series, the illustrated coffee-table companion offers a welcome break from the routine, dry narratives that one encounters while studying the state and society of this predominantly Muslim nation. Cricket is definitely one of those several areas where Pakistan has made its mark besides contributing towards its uniquely South Asian embodiment.

The book is in three parts: chronology and overview, the middle years characterised by rise, fall, revival and maturity, and reflections on the past and its future. Thus, the reader is offered a variety of historical and contemporary details encompassing the various fixtures, memorable matches and pre-eminent cricketers over the last 5 decades. The chapters on the first three decades offer a nostalgic insight. Throughout the volume, Noman offers a comprehensive account of the successes and the shortcomings of the game's career in the country. This provides a balanced approach. He demands of past heroes, like Majid khan and others who duly benefited from the English county cricket, to apply their experience in building a more competitive domestic structure. As is evident from his other books on the country's political economy, Noman sees the problems confronted by cricket within a larger national malaise.

The book is addressed not only to Pakistani readers but to the entire avid cricket fans across the globe for whom Pakistani cricketing career has been an exciting and engaging spectacle. It's narrative of the major landmark victories within Pakistan and abroad would rekindle the memories of some of the nail-biting contests overseas. A wide array of photographs charting and capturing numerous Pakistani and other international stars serves illustrative purposes as well as providing a journey down memory lane. In his great reverence for Pakistan's golden years in cricket, the author envisages a dream team followed by his own personal choice of players. Certainly, Noman continuously radiates his personal infatuation for Pakistani cricket, reverberating a celebratory undertone. Indeed, the book attempts to savour and celebrate key milestones reached for instance by the winning World Cup team of 1992. From the first page to the conclusion cricket in Pakistan is portrayed as a symbol of national pride. The OUP and the author have to be applauded for the overall presentation of this comprehensive, innovative and immensely interesting book.

The problem with books concerned with sport is that they become a bit dated even before they are published given the growing frequency of matches played. The cricketing world has witnessed significant developments since the publication of this book. The emergence of scandals concerning world class cricketers, trumped-up charges of ball tampering and organised international betting-rings have damaged the once robust reputation of the game. On the field, the fans have witnessed the whitewashing of India in the Sahara Cup and the memorable Test series win by Pakistan over the former. More recently, we saw a very memorable World Cup series being played and highly contested in Britain. The amazing aspect of the series was the participation of the Asian communities in all the matches breaking the usual monotony and quietude of the English cricket. Obviously, such developments could not be included but may await another printing

In the text, Noman fails to delve deeper into certain issues concerning Pakistani cricket. Although, there is much discussion on topical issues like ball tampering and/or match fixing allegations, the author fails to acknowledge the internal politics and regional rivalries of the game. Indeed, test cricket has also witnessed many new venues such as Gujranwala, Peshawar and Sialkot, not to mention its popularity among the Afghan refugees. In the same vein, a section concerning the cricket stadiums of the country and the regional input would have been quite in order. But this is not to underestimate the significance and topicality of this absorbing volume on a folk passion in the country.

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