

**CONTESTING VISION OF SIKH IDENTITY
IN PUNJAB: 1800-1930**

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
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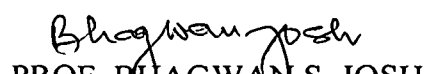
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Certified that the Thesis entitled "*Contesting Vision of Sikh Identity in Punjab: 1800-1930*" submitted by Sumail Singh Sidhu in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of *Doctor of Philosophy*, has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other university. To the best of our knowledge, this is a bonafide work. We recommend that this Thesis may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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Introduction

"In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out."

- Karl Marx

The eighteenth century was pregnant with possibilities to herald a flowering of the popular culture in Punjab. On the one hand, the Punjabi Sufis from Baba Farid Ganj-i-Shakar in thirteenth century onwards to Bullhe Shah in the eighteenth had saturated the Punjabi countryside through the popular sufi khanqahs, annual pilgrimages which also doubled up as popular performing arenas where the *qissakars*, *varkars*, *dhadhis* and others had popularized narratives having Sufi undertones and a distinctively Punjabi flavour. Displacing both the Persian as well as Braj, Punjabi language was emerging as a carrier of this sensibility which included, the Sikh writings also. The victorious eighteenth century Sikh struggle and its relatively egalitarian agenda were celebrated with Guru Gobind Singh accorded the status of its progenitor. The scholarly works composed in *braj* or *sadhukari* were not published until the late nineteenth century whereas many adaptations were orally transmitted in Punjabi countryside.

The alternative ways of being a Sikh were articulated in the *Bhagat Ratnavali*, *Bansavalinama*, and *Sau Sakhi*, texts that effectively counter the formal, exclusivist notions contained in the *Rahitnamas*. Interestingly this shared universe of the high culture of the masters and the popular culture of laity comes to full bloom in the nineteenth century. Sufi and the *qissa* poetry in the eighteenth century raise the profile of *ashiqs* as implicitly heralding a new world through their tragic ends.^(fn) Sayyad Hasham Shah takes this tendency further by explicitly stating that these *ashiqs* are *shahids*^{FN} also. Women are also bestowed noble status of a *shahid* in the cause of *ishq*. For him these Sufi romances are a challenge to the prevalence of sectarian boundaries as well as kinship relations. The social mobility, ushering into peace, economic progress and the cultural vibrancy witnessed in the reign of Ranjit Singh provides us the background to the thriving folk-popular cultural production during this period. This is a major reason that many writers produced these works celebrating the distinction of Punjab as against

the Turkish or Afghan influence. One such writer Qadiryar considers Maharaja Ranjit Singh the descendent of Puran and Rasalu, the legendary Punjabi figures and also differentiates the Punjabi ethos from his co-religionists, 'the apostate Turks'. This celebration of Punjabi identity with its legends seamlessly fusing into historical phenomenon operates with the politico-ideological sensibility to highlight the shared cultural universe. Shah Mohammad's classic *Jangnama Singhan Te Farangian* regarding the Anglo-Sikh war elevates the import of this confrontation to a civilizational pedestal where British are representatives of a money-lending, crooked strain and the Punjabis which are otherwise Hindus and Muslims but their honour and prestige is safeguarded by the Lahore Darbar. For him the Khalsa army is the vehicle on which the Punjabi civilizational future depends. To prove his point Shah Mohammad joined the armed battle on the side of the Khalsa army which continued to enjoy wide respect amongst the masses despite its occasional indiscipline. However its assorted commanders were regarded as popular heroes and their steadfast loyalty to Ranjit Singh and valour displayed in battlefield is honoured by almost all the *varkars*, *jangnama* writers and *qissakars*.

The Lahore Darbar mediated the principles of the Sikh movement with the wider Punjabi populace in the early nineteenth century mainly through the carefully cultivated notion of state-in-person where Ranjit Singh stood above the routine of administration. This process of transforming into a Punjabi maharaja was on display in the popular culture realm employing three elements culled from the shared repertoire of the popular cultural agents. The Sikh struggle of eighteenth century enjoyed a wide acceptance in Punjab thus facilitating the rise of Khalsa was entwined with the ascendance of *ashiq* to the level of *shahid*. As a result, the persona of Ranjit Singh provided the site to fuse these tendencies. He was portrayed as an ideal *ashiq* (his romance with Moran); blessed warrior (*shahid*) and Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh. These abstract principles were activated into the social arena through his persona.

That this portrayal was not an isolated occurrence but a much wider process of intermingling of the Sikh lore (*sikhi*) with the Punjabi cultural universe was underway is also demonstrated by the prevalence of "*Heer*" narrative in Punjab. The hegemony enjoyed by *Heer* is so widespread that even a baptized Khalsa, Vir Singh Bal in the first quarter of nineteenth century also propagates his version of

Sikhism through Heer Ranjha wherein Veer Singh is Heer longing for Ranjha i.e. Guru Gobind Singh. Sayyad Fazal Shah in mid-nineteenth century and Man Singh Kalidas Gujranwalia in the last quarter of nineteenth century employ this narrative to articulate Islam and Vedanta, respectively thus demonstrating the relevance of this popular narrative throughout the century. Kaveeshars and qissakars respected Heer as embodying wisdom and to compose Heer was considered to be a hallmark of a poet worth his salt. Hindu, Muslim and Sikh writers address Guru Gobind Singh as *pir* which clearly shows that his popular persona was not that of anti-Islam. A nineteenth century Punjabi woman poet Piro calls herself the Heer of the guru.

After Ranjit Singh's death in 1839 the Khalsa army with its panchayat system carried forward the agenda of Punjabi identity. Saturated with the ethos generated by worthy examples like Akali Phula Singh, the next phase is dominated by Sham Singh Attaraiwala, Bhai Maharaj Singh, Baba Bir Singh Naurangabadi, Khuda Singh and others who were instrumental in keeping alive the anti-British sentiment in Punjab in the mid nineteenth century. The defeated and demobilized soldiers of Khalsa army were a constant reminder of the sovereignty once enjoyed by the Punjabis. It is our contention that they provide us the bare architecture of anti-British sentiment in Punjab countryside and inspired the succeeding generations of Punjabi anti-colonial activists. The founder of the Kuka movement, Baba Ram Singh was also a sepoy in the Khalsa army in a regiment commanded by Prince Naunihal Singh and his initial followers had a fair sprinkling of Sikh soldiery. All these features taken together demonstrate that their Khalsa identity was anti-British in its sentiment and embodied the shared Punjabi ethos. Kuka movement was forcibly repressed by the government along with the sustained opposition by the entrenched Sikh elite. Their pro-government stance and casteist bias against the Kukas shows the persistence of this tendency throughout the Sikh movement in this period. Kuka vision of Sikh identity is evident from this incident: When the *granthis* of the Gurudwara Kesgarh Sahib refused to offer prayers on behalf of Baba Ram Singh and his followers on account of their being apostates, Baba Ram Singh replied, "You should appreciate our methods if you are a true Sikh. You violate the ethics of Guru Gobind Singh by indulging in meat, eating, drinking, lying, immoral activities and female infanticide. So the Kukas refuse to acknowledge you as Sikhs."

The above - mentioned phenomena are given a short shrift in various works whereas we feel that there is a case for significant continuities as well. Along with rehabilitating themselves with the colonial state in the wake of 1857 the respective religious elite gradually veered towards exclusivist, pro-British empire and status- oriented religious identities. On the other hand, the Nirmala, Udasi and Sewapanthi monastic orders of Sikhism were engrossed in opaque exegetical exercises in their respective establishments or *deras*. Although marginal to the everyday concerns of Punjabis, institutionally they were deeply entrenched through *deras*, *dharmshalas* *pathshalas*, etc and continued to be a source of knowledge for the Punjabis. The sewapanthis had the khatri merchants as their social basis in the western Punjab, the udasis managed the Sikh religious establishments and the nirmalas were especially privileged in the Malwa region under the Phulkiyan principalities. Minor orders like the Diwanas or Heeradasias, etc were also active in this period. For the purposes of this study we have not attempted any discussion of their doctrinal differences or on classifying them into categories but on their presence in popular arena is not altogether shorn of conflicts within and without.

The mention of the Gulabdasi sampradaya is instructive in this context. It weaves together many significant strands central to this study in order to highlight the potentialities in the popular domain and its dialogic character with the elite domain. Born Gulab Singh in Amritsar district, a jatt Sikh joined the Khalsa army at a young age. However, his quest for knowledge took him to an Udasi monk and then to the Sufis and other scholars. Widely respected for his intelligence and depth of knowledge, Gulab Singh, now christened Gulab Das, established his own *dera* in Lahore at a relatively young age. Gulab Das developed a trenchant criticism of rituals, caste hierarchy, *karma* etc, with human being as the central principle in his epicurean universe articulated in his doctrinal work, the *Gulab Gita*. His fame led to a flourishing stream of patrons and disciples. A *tawaif* Piro, jilted by a sadhu's betrayal was now living in Lahore under the strict eyes of Ilahi Bakhsh, a commander of the Khalsa army. Piro used to compose Sufi lyrics, fell in love with Sadhu Gualab Das. When their affair gained momentum, Ilahi Bakhsh's soldiers challenged Gulab Das's disciples and they could be separated only through the intervention of the maharaja who let Piro live with Gulab Das and asked him to shift his *dera* from Lahore. Resentful, Gulab Das came over to village

Chaththianwala, now in Qasur district. Both Piro and Gulab Das lived together in his *dera* with other disciples. They wrote some joint compositions; Piro sang and danced these verses. Incidentally Gulab Das is perhaps the only writer to express delight at the victory of British against Lahore Darbar and its army. With the passage of time his scholarship and rational attitude made his *deras* excel in these branches. Two young disciples with pronounced opposition to empty rituals, superstitions and idolatry came to the main headquarters at Chaththianwala. They were shocked by the presence of a woman in the *dera*. Uneasy with this arrangement, they started raising their voice in opposition to such practices. Ditta Ram and Jawahar Mall quit the Gulabdasi *dera* in disgust. Piro died in 1872 and Gulab Das followed in 1873 asking his disciples to bury him in the same place where Piro lay. Meanwhile, Dittaram and Jawahar Mall became Khalsa Sikhs and came to be known as Bhai Ditt Singh and Bhai Jawahar Singh who participated in the public debates against the Arya Samajis and significantly both were the founders of the Lahore Singh Sabha (Harjot Oberoi, Tat Khalsa episteme). This shows the popular roots of a modern, rational outlook. On the other hand, the other Gulabdasi disciples were also known for their erudition and felicity over complicated doctrinal issues. Applying the surname *aarif*, many of his disciples especially Kishan Singh Aarif, Pal Singh Aarif and perhaps Daya Sinfgh Aarif are celebrated for their literary output. Kishan Singh Aarif was a bookseller in Amritsar; his wife Chet Kaur was also a poet and following the example of Piro-Gulabdas, Kishan Singh Aarif and Chet Kaur also penned a joint *siharfi*; following the Gulabdasi tradition he refers to female lover as an inseparable element of divine persona and abuses the detractors of Gulab Das.

The ideological constitution of various sampradays and their leaders and its eventual institutional spread; their key disciples and their interface with its specific features yields a rich understanding of this period. These texts unravel the various levels at which the discourse was launched with differentiated degrees of popular elements as well as the classicity aspired to. For instance, the Udasi exegetical school was not scholarly oriented whereas the Nirmalas were well-trained in the Indian tradition. The intellectual biography of Gyani Gyan Singh is immensely significant in this context and partially mirrors that of Sadhu Gulab Das. It is not insignificant that Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha ridicules, denigrates and

misrepresents both of these figures in his classic encyclopedia of Sikhism, *Gur Shabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh*, stamped with Singh Sabha scholarship.

We can state with enough evidence that the origin of the Singh Sabha movement amongst the oft-stated condition is in avid contest with at least three contesting visions: the Khalsa political ethics of the Kukas and the others; the egalitarian intellectual strain of the Gulabdis and the institutional spread and discursive depth of the voluminous Nirmala and Udasi scholarship with its own agents. Harjot Oberoi's ingenious observation that there are no sources to record the peasant's voice is patently wrong and in consonance with Richard G. Fox who asserts about the absence of any tradition commemorating anti-Mughal struggle in Punjab countryside. My concern is not to demonstrate any simplistic continuation of the Khalsa tradition but to mention the reconstitution of *sikhi* at the defining moments from Ranjit Singh to Bhagat Singh in the 1930's. These traditions continued through selection and omission by the participants, contesting as well as assimilating the Singh Sabha thrust and launched their own moral vision and ethical agendas through the institutional political domain in the Punjab as exemplified by 1907 agitation, Ghadar movement and lastly through the Akali agitation in 1920's.

The Dhadhis and Kaveeshars provide us with precisely the peasant voice and vision. A primitive count puts their number at 750 during 1725-1975. Starting with Jog Singh's Heer in early- nineteenth century the Kaveeshari tradition matures with the legendary Bhagwan Singh transcreating the classic Punjabi qissas - Heer Ranjha, Mirza-Sahiban, Sohni-Mahiwal etc. into the Malwai dialect as well as sensibility. This process is significant in delineating the routes adopted for popular cultural production, in avid contrast to the classicism of the master Sufis, *qissakars*, *varkars* and the philosophic sophistication of various sampradays and exegetical schools which emanated from individual or institutional nucleus. The Kaveeshari principle starts from the diffused, dispersed utterances of the rural folk in variegated spaces such as the village fields, the everyday village gatherings to marriage parties, local fares and the bigger fares.

Kaveeshari constituted a universe having many nodal points: its adopted and invented metres; chosen forms or narrative genres; disciples and their geographical breadth; performing arena; the descriptive principles of their compositions;

inventing new metres- all these characteristics impart this endeavour its heuristic distinction. Evolving in the eighteenth century, it matures in the course of the nineteenth century and continues till the 1960's as a major vehicle of the rural cultural universe. Coupled with this the Kaveeshars enjoyed a rapport and prestige with the rural populace who came to them to get their advice or guidance on matters both mundane and spiritual. They were well versed in the Sikh lore, the Islamic tradition and the Vedantic Hindu thought. Most significantly, perhaps they were the sieve through which two- way traffic between urban public sphere and the village gathering was conducted. Their published works, called the *chiththas*, were published in impressive numbers consisting diverse genre like the *pattals*, *sehras*, *prasangs*, *qissas*, *sakas*, *jhagras*, *bilases*, *granths* and miscellaneous writings. We intend to exhaustively deal with these texts, to read them in contrast to the tracts, newspapers, journals, handbills etc brought out by the Singh Sabha movement in order to arrive at a wholesome understanding of the Sikh identity as a constituting element of the wider Punjabi identity.

The onset of the overt political activity in the Punjab in the 1900s gradually opened the space for popular cultural production to respond to their surroundings. The legendary Punjabi Kaveeshars of twentieth century Babu Rajab Ali, Maghi Singh Gill, Sadhu Sada Ram, Sadhu Daya Singh Aarif and others show the extent and depth of this tendency. Weaving local narratives; recording mundane happenings; writing in the popular idioms; performing in the village *akharas* carried the political attitudes far and across. Dhadhis like Sohan Singh Seetal and Gyani Kartar Singh Kalaswalia also excelled in fusing the Khalsa tradition with the popular domain. The formal, ritual- bound Khalsa identity propagated by the Singh Sabha movement sought to negate the anti-British sentiment. Rather, loyalty towards the government was actively nurtured in their activities. However, the events leading unto Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919 brought the simmering discontent to the surface. Chief Khalsa Diwan and the Singh Sabha were opaque to these currents to such an extent that it showed contempt for their notion of Sikhism as early as in 1916 when some radical Sikh activists got together to publish 'Akali'. Master Sunder Singh Lyallpuri said to Gyani Hira Singh 'Dard', "the Sikh leadership, aristocracy, and Gurudwara *mahants* have blemished Sikhism. They have raised servitude and loyalty to the British state to

the level of religion. Now is the time when we should join the battle and take the bull by the horns."

The Akali movement gathered momentum in the 1920s with the Gurudwara reform movement with Babbar Akali movement in the *doaba* region and Riyasati Praja Mandal movement in the Malwa region bringing the Punjabi Sikh peasantry onto a united platform mounting the Sikh identity on different principles than those offered by Singh Sabha. In this period we witness the linking of the Sikh lore with the general tendency towards the socialist consciousness mediated through the anti-imperial national liberation movement. The publication of 'Kirti' by Bhai Santokh Singh Dhardeo and assisted by Bhagat Singh shows the maturity of this undertaking. Finally we see the publication of *Phulwari* by Gyani Hira Singh Dard. Consciously rejecting the narrow exclusivist Sikh identity, Dard unequivocally calls for installing the Punjabi folk-romantic, heroic legendary icons- with Heer leading the way -to usher in a new era. *Central Punjabi Sabha* -with Punjabi language as the instrument stitching disparate sectarian boundaries -was the platform to launch an alternative vision of a shared Punjabiya. It started organizing hugely successful poetic symposiums in major cities. Folk metres were employed by Punjabi writers who wrote about political issues, social reforms and egalitarian social order. Remarkably, the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were actively involved in furthering this agenda.

Thus we see that the end of 1920s reconstituted the Sikh identity through a political praxis. This is also the period when the popular - rural segment makes its presence felt in the mainstream Sikh domain. Simultaneously, a Sikh identity based on the correct social practice is forged in the urban-institutional arena. The cultural geographical divisions are transcended by the political movements in the Punjab countryside. Starting from various streams informed by a socialist idealism and tempered by its experience in the national liberation movement, this period witnessed the modern Sikh identity.

The thesis would contain five chapters. First introductory chapter **Historiographical Issues in Sikh Studies** would include a detailed discussion of W. H. McLeod and Harjot S. Oberoi's works would be extensively dealt with. An alternative historiographical mapping of the Sikh movement would also be

attempted along with a discussion of new sources which contain an alternative notion of Sikh identity.

Second chapter titled as **Lahore Darbar, Punjabi Maharaja and the Sikh Identity** would discuss the Sufi works, *qissas*, *vars*, *jangnamas* and other texts and documents relating with the Punjabi society in the first half of nineteenth century. Hasham Shah, Qadiryar and Shah Mohahmmad's works will be comprehensively analyzed. The characterization of Maharaja Ranjit Singh; popular regard accorded to the Khalsa army and its commanders; the status ascribed to Guru Gobind Singh; the prevailing centrality of heer narrative and celebration of a distinctive Punjabi identity by the poets belonging to different sectarian identities and its impact on the contemporary Sikh identity would be discussed.

Chapter 3 titled **Sikh Identity and Contesting Institutions** in the post-annexation scenario would focus on the major exegetical schools- Udasis, Nirmalas, Sewapanthis-along with other minor traditions and their respective social compositions. Nirankaris and Namdhari movements and their articulation of Sikh identity would be discussed. Gyani Gyan Singh and Sadhu Gulab Das would be extensively mentioned to show the negotiations between the elite and the popular domain. The general trend in this period of crystallizing religious boundaries would be discussed with special emphasis on the limits to the Singh Sabha movement by bringing new evidence to light.

Chapter 4 titled as **Kaveeshars, Qissakars and the Reconstitution of Sikh Identity** would highlight the distinctive nature of Kaveeshari tradition and the strategic location of Kaveeshars in the Punjab countryside. Kaveeshari as an institution saturating the rural landscape; its range expansion and depth; its descriptive principles foregrounding the everyday life of the populace; their Vedantic, Sufi and Sikh learning; performing arenas and their social ideological universe would be explored in this chapter. Comprehensively dealing with reconstitution of Sikh identity in the works of Maghi Singh Gill, Babu Rajab Ali, Sadhu Daya Singh Aarif and Sadhu Sada Ram amongst other Kaveeshars of the same period is attempted for they are acknowledged masters of the genre; enjoyed a vast networks of disciples; were prolific writers and performed widely; and were hugely popular. They were the chief architects of the rural- cultural sensibility of

the Malwa region in the first half of the twentieth century Punjab. This chapter would also consider the popular cultural output regarding the Ghadar movement, Akali movement, Babbar Akali movement, Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh.

Chapter 6 titled **‘Sikhi’ and the Question of Inclusivist Punjabi Identity** would focus on the political attitudes of the Sikhs in the early twentieth century and challenging the Singh Sabha discourse in the mainstream institutional arena. The emergence of the radical Akalis with special emphasis on Gyani Hira Singh Dard and his contribution towards forging new institutions would be discussed. Akali movement's role in uniting the rural Sikh peasantry by transcending parochial boundaries on one hand and activating an alternative notion of being a Sikh on the other would be discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER I

Historiographical Issues in Sikh Studies

The various sites in the Sikh movement where identity question operates, start with the nature and status of the life and message of Nanak; its interpretation by the succeeding generations of the Sikhs; institutions, community and the social environment; nature, content and ideological significance of the Adi Granth; militarization, martyrdom and new adherents; the creation, context and purpose of the Khalsa; the Sikh struggle of the eighteenth century and the formation of Sikh principalities; Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Lahore Darbar and the 'transformation of Sikh movement'; annexation by the British in 1849, the rise of the Singh Sabha movement in the 1870s and its 'construction' of modern Sikhism or Tat Khalsa by the turn of century. The selection of any one of these sites simultaneously has to categorise the other sites to account for its sense of historical autonomy through these phases.

The Sikh studies scholarship has a convention of studying Sikh movement without sufficiently taking into account the contemporary socio-historical tendencies, both in Hinduism and Islam. This has resulted in certain avoidable discrepancies and erasures, while strengthening the notion that anti-Muslim element in the Sikh movement is an integral constituent of its discourse. Implicit in this mode of analysis is the general orientation of treating Sikh movement as operating in the vicinity of Hinduism albeit displaying its little-tradition characteristics. Thus the analytical field is constituted in which the Singh Sabha movement articulates the hegemonic discourse of Tat Khalsa and religious boundaries come to be accepted.

Interpretive diversity around Guru Nanak's message is mentioned but not fully analyzed in terms of its social significance, resulting in numerical explanations of adherents to various interpretative blocs as the deciding factor is determining the relative success of a particular mode. The sustained emphasis on the social composition, for instance, in determining the veracity of the Khalsa-Sehajdhari duality can help in linking up a variegated tradition into a socially significant universe - laden with contests, ambiguities, retreats, fresh departures while reconstituting the institutional memory of Sikhism. This manner of analysis has the possibility to show the way in which low-born but demographically significant and economically resurgent social groups appropriated and wielded a religious ideology not just for the pragmatic purpose of mobility but also for launching their versions of society, morality and notions of justice.

This brief introductory note demonstrates that the vantage- point of identity and ideological self-consciousness provides us the necessary lever to view the Sikh movement and its various phases as structurally linked. This might explain the continual reconstitution of the Sikh tradition with its characteristic selections and omissions as well as its institutional regeneration at each crucial juncture. By focusing on these aspects we can arrive at a nuanced understanding of a historically situated process of identity formation “comprising competing social institutions organized around distinct religious and ideological principles and responsive to continually changing political circumstances and economic pressures”.

Harjot S. Oberoi's work is the one that exclusively deals with this problem besides having other emphases.¹ The comprehensive way in which he has dealt with his primary sources and the problematique in which he has placed these, easily gives his work a centrality which it richly deserves. Almost every other work, published thereafter has argued his case vis-à-vis Oberoi's position e.g. J.S. Grewal², W.H. McLeod³, Ian J. Kerr⁴, Brian P. Caton⁵, etc. However none of them has used new sources and most of them have remained within the paradigm of Singh Sabha movement, Khalsa-Sahajdhari duality, folk-popular religion, etc. set by Oberoi.

His book covers the entire period of the Sikh movement from the times of Guru Nanak to the early twentieth century. So in my presentation I would go by the issues and then locate the remaining views around his argument, rather than going by each book individually. The phases are: early Sikh tradition and its ideological underpinnings; early 19th century social conditions; various categories of Sikhs e.g. Khalsa, Sanatan, Udasi, etc.; post-annexation cultural milieu of Punjab and the emergence of Singh Sabha Movement and; reasons for the 'success' of Tat-Khalsa and opposition from the popular religion.

¹Oberoi, Harjot S.: *The Construction Of Religious Boundaries Culture Identity And Diversity In The Sikh Tradition*, OUP, New Delhi, 1997.pp.xxii+494 and for a general discussion see, Ballantyne,T. *A Reframing of the Sikh Past* in IJPS,”...schematic approach charting the shape of the field with a plurality of analytical positions and their multiple epistemological framework. He discusses the conflicting methodologies deployed.... “To push Sikh Studies towards a more sustained engagement with a broader set of questions that are central to contemporary humanities scholarship..., a vision grappling with cross-cultural encounters, the power of colonialism and the important forms of cultural traffic that have cut across the borders of the Punjab region and the Indian nation.”

² Grewal, J,S.; *Historical Perspectives On Sikh Identity*; Punjabi University, Patiala, 1997

³McLeod, W,H,; *Who Is A Sikh? The Problem Of Sikh Identity*, OUP, New Delhi , 1989

⁴ Kerr, I,J; *Sikhs And State; Troublesome Relationships And A Fundamental Continuity* ,pp147-174 in Singh, P & Barrier, N,G (ed) *Sikh Identity: Continuity And Change*, Manohar. Delhi, 1999

⁵Caton, B,P; *Sikh Identity Formation And The British Rural Ideal 1880-1930* in Singh, P & Barrier, N,G (ed) *Sikh Identity: Continuity And Change*, Manohar, Delhi, 1999.

The two major dichotomies that Oberoi holds up – between Hindus and Sikhs, and between ‘Sanatan (with the folk added on) and the Khalsa appear to be problematic. These two examples are important pieces of the larger narrative Oberoi is attempting to create, focusing on hybridity and pluralism in opposition to a singular and dominating articulation of identity. Oberoi starts with the question as to how a ‘cohesive community of believers’⁶ is formed by focusing on the Singh Sabha Movement (Singh Sabha movement) and by attempting to reconstruct a pre-Tat Khalsa Sikh Identity that challenges the modern understanding of what Sikhism, as an autonomous tradition, is. Oberoi draws on his interests in folk religion and practice and argues that the Sikhs were largely undefined as a group: “In the absence of a centralized Church and an attendant religious hierarchy, heterogeneity in religious beliefs, plurality of rituals, and diversity of lifestyles were freely acknowledged...Far from a single Sikh Identity, multiple identities were there. Boundaries between the ‘great’ and ‘little’ Sikh tradition were highly blurred: several competing definitions of who constituted a Sikh were possible.”⁷ With the forming of the Singh Sabhas and the ascendancy of ‘new elites’ in the late-nineteenth century, a great rupture or epistemic shift took place. Two elements are in center of his arguments: folk-popular religion and what Oberoi calls Sanatan Sikhism.

Sanatan offers a rapprochement between the Khalsa and Sahajdhari identities articulated in the eighteenth century and it was the ‘great code’ of Sikhism before the modern period. At a general level the Sanatan episteme provided a world view that was inclusive, diverse and flexible. Tat Khalsa engineered an epistemic shift in the language and experience of being a ‘Sikh’.⁸ While most agree that Sikhism was radically redefined in late-nineteenth century, but Oberoi characterizes the pre-modern Sikhism as an alternative to its modern construct.⁹

This presents us two main problems with Oberoi: (i) his data and its interpretation, and (ii) the effectiveness of his approach for understanding both, the folk religion as well as Sikh experience.

About the placing of Sikhism within the rubric of broad Hinduism by highlighting its diffused, undefined nature, Oberoi overlooks the centrality of text

⁶ Oberoi; op cit.p7

⁷ ibid;p24-25

⁸ Murphy, Anne; *Allegories Of Difference And Identity; Reflections On Religious Boundaries And Popular Religion*, IJPS, pp 53-71

⁹ ibid; p55

established quite early in Sikhism-- thus reflecting a similar orientation to the book as that of the Middle-Eastern traditions of Judaism and Islam--which is quite different from the otherwise largely parallel Sant and Bhakti traditions of same period. In this way, the nineteenth century constructionist argument regarding 'people of the book' debate in Hinduism loses its validity in case of Sikhism.¹⁰

This also shows Oberoi's eliding of the ideological undercurrent of the earlier Sikh tradition, which is now brought to light by the works of Pashaura Singh¹¹ and G.S. Mann.¹² Oberoi here follows W.H.Mcleod with respect to early Sikh tradition by imparting it an evolutionary schema¹³ and then inflating the Singh Sabha epistemic shift as a fundamental rupture from the earlier 'diffused' tradition. Significantly this is the device used by the Institute of Sikh Studies scholars like Daljeet Singh, Khara Singh, G.S. Dhillon, Gurdev Singh, Gurtej Singh, when they say that Sikhism is a revealed religion and thus interpret every new development or innovation as already ordained in Guru Nanak's message which impinged upon the social environment¹⁴ and in this one-way traffic of agency over structure, for them the Singh Sabha movement ceases to be a rupture but a revival or reform in order to carry forward the message of Sikhism.¹⁵ The only significant difference is in the period of 'epistemic rupture': for Oberoi it is nineteenth century whereas for ISS scholars it is sixteenth century.

The middle ground here is occupied by Pashaura Singh and G.S. Mann who highlight the ideology, institutions and innovations exercised by the early Gurus which epitomize the Guru Granth Sahib along with the interplay of agency and structure. Their work does not extend unto the nineteenth century, but it gives a very different interpretation of early Sikh tradition than Mcleod and Oberoi, etc.

Secondly, Oberoi's analysis of the formation of Adi Granth in a general context of composing other medieval manuscripts is flawed: first, because medieval manuscript compilations often did reflect sectarian interests, and secondly, because the Adi Granth did this to a larger extent than others, e.g. Kabir featured in Adi Granth, as against in a Rajasthani pothi, feature a Kabir with more positive descriptions of the ultimate

¹⁰ *ibid* ;p56

¹¹ Singh,Pashaura; *Guru Granth Sahib, Text Canon And Authority*, OUP, Delhi,2000

¹² Mann, Gurinder S.; *The Goindval Pothis*, OUP, Delhi,1996

¹³ Oberoi;op cit. p. 56-76

¹⁴ Singh, Daljeet; *The Sikh Ideology*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1994, p.255-258.

¹⁵ *ibid*; p.262-265.

vaisnava than the Bijak Kabir which is outspoken. So the manuscript traditions in north India should not be viewed as completely lacking in sectarian interests.¹⁶

Evidence from contemporary medieval sources show that there were categories as well as boundaries in the pre-modern period also for instance Dabistan-I-Mazahib mentions such formations during seventeenth century Punjab.¹⁷ Progressing from medieval period to the nineteenth century, where Oberoi attempts to describe the diverse religious worlds of early -nineteenth century Punjab by bringing in a wide variety of sources and questions the conventional boundaries. However, according to J.S.Grewal, Oberoi appears 'vague' and 'vacuous' while dealing with Sanatan episteme and Sanatan Sikh in the early-nineteenth century. Firstly, because he is unable to categorise the Sanatani Sikhs from Khalsa Sikhs and Sahajdhari Sikhs, which were regarded as two components of Sikhism. Rather, the only other category that we are left with is the Udasis. Are the Sanatani Sikhs in fact Udasis? Oberoi does not make it clear.¹⁸

Secondly, Oberoi states that the eighteenth century Khalsa identity was replaced by Sanatan episteme in the early -nineteenth century, which raised the Dasam Granth to position of the 'great code' and its impact was reflected in the works of writers like Koer Singh and Bhai Santokh Singh. However, Oberoi uses their writings quite selectively. For instance Koer Singh's work adheres to essential doctrines of the Khalsa and his other ideas can be treated as marginal. To refer only to what he says about the Puranas or incarnation is to misconstrue his basic position. Oberoi is left with the evidence of Anandghan only, which is an Udasi work.¹⁹ In fact, Oberoi takes the term 'Sanatan' at face value from a public-lecture delivered by Sardar Gulab Singh in 1886 and then traces it backward and says that the Sanatan episteme with its inclusive and ludic dimensions had reconciled the Khalsa/Sahajdhari paradox.²⁰

J.S. Grewal while discussing the Sikh identity issue takes it back to the interpretative diversity about the mission of Guru Nanak (and his successors).²¹ This diversity of interpretations of 'Sikhism' is important for him. The splinter groups of the sixteenth- and seventeenth century failed not due to numbers but because their

¹⁶Murphy: op cit.p58-61

¹⁷Grewal,J.S.:op cit. P.29

¹⁸ ibid;p.28-29

¹⁹ Oberoi;op.cit.p.137-138.

²⁰Grewal; op.cit. p.29-31.

²¹Ibid; p.31-32

interpretation of the Sikh movement was relatively restricted. Similarly is the case of Khalsa of the seventeenth century, which also accepted the Sahajdhari as a part and parcel of the Sikh panth, whereas this co-sharing was never sanctioned nor practiced with Udasis or other Nanak-Panthis.²² What Oberoi does is to treat diversity as negation of identity.²³ However, J.S. Grewal also falls prey to the logic of numbers and states that Singhs out-numbered other shades.²⁴

After the annexation of Punjab in 1849 when the British undertook far reaching administrative steps; the Punjab agriculture became a part of the capitalist world economy; canal colony settlements were introduced; militarily the North-West frontier became sensitive asking for greater recruitment from Sikhs in Punjab; with the introduction of local government which accommodated mostly the traditional elite and with increasing competition for government jobs among various communities; with the setting up of English – education schools alongwith Christian evangelicalism in active support from the administrators and also with the doctrinal differences with the Arya Samaj -all these were factors which formed the constituents of a new order which was threatening to the Sikh elite during 1849-1857. They could never recover from this assault and settled for a cautious cultural dialogue with the new order. The Raj and Church advanced side by side in the Punjab, and this ‘evangelical entente’ appeared to present a grave threat. Coupled with this was the administratively backed social reform.²⁵

The Amritsar Singh Sabha (ASS) was formed in 1873 as a response of the Sikh landed aristocracy and public figures to the falling status of Sikhs, perceived variously one possible interpretation of their ‘sanatani views can be their notion of consolidating the Sikh community in order to further entrench their status as Sikh elites in Punjab. However, according to Oberoi the leaders of ASS were poorly equipped to face the rapidly changing cultural milieu especially the tool of ‘print culture’. However we contend with this view by showing their continued hold and hegemony over the ‘Sikh’ issues and their persistent harnessing by the Punjab government as a foil to the anti-imperial Akalis during the first half of twentieth century. It is only by silencing the

²² *ibid*; p.32.

²³ *ibid*; p.32.

²⁴ *ibid*; p.32.

²⁵ Caton, B.P.; *Sikh Identity Formation And The British Rural Ideal 1880-1930* in Singh, P & Barrier, N,G (ed) *Sikh Identity Continuity And Change*, Manohar, Delhi, 1999. p180

dimension of colonial authority that Oberoi could succeed in presenting the two formative *sabhas* as representing two epistemes with disastrous results.

However, the formation of Lahore Singh Sabha (LSS) in 1879 marked a shift in social and material background of the founders and hence the ideological output of the Singh Sabha movement (Singh Sabha movement). Members belonged to the class, which aspired for government jobs they were more familiar with the print culture. Egalitarian ethos and exclusivity of Sikh identity were the main points of disagreement between the two sabhas. However, these egalitarian notions did not extend to lower castes till the opening decades of the twentieth century.²⁶ In any case both groups addressed the issue of Sikh identity in similar terms of 'Sikh' custom and elimination of non-Sikh elements; what constituted Sikh tradition vis-à-vis demarcated boundaries; everyday expression of Sikh identity in terms of rites of passage; threats pertaining to the panth and its progress; defence of Sikhism; building of the Sikh nation, etc.²⁷

Oberoi treats the varying views of both the factions as 'differences in the world-views'²⁸; whereas J.S. Grewal says that differences are only of degree and not of kind,²⁹ Brian P. Caton states that the frequent recourse to the term 'community' while discussing about Sikh identity in Singh Sabha literature glosses over the discrepancies of inclusion and exclusion in terms of status, caste and ideology.³⁰

Accounting for the success of Tat Khalsa element, inspite of the opposition from the Sanatanists and peasantry, Oberoi considers the role played by British rule in Punjab, with custom giving way to market relations; British army favouring the Khalsa identity and British civilians equated Sikhs with the Khalsa which further fitted with their view of monolithic religious communities. Oberoi gives prominence to the colonial state and its institutions rather than the Khalsa tradition of the eighteenth century for the emergence of 'modern Sikhism'.³¹ Richard G. Fox also highlights the role of colonial state in fashioning Singh identity for the Sikhs.³² Fox starts with the question that how come rural petty commodity producers acutely aware of their worsening economic situation, joined hands with the urban protestors concerned with gaining control of Sikh

²⁶ *ibid* :p.180

²⁷ HSO;op.cit. p. 381-397.

²⁸ HSO;ibid: p. 254-257.

²⁹ Grewal,op. cit. p.66-69

³⁰ Caton, B.P.; *Sikh Identity Formation And The British Rural Ideal 1880-1930* in Singh, P & Barrier, N,G (ed) *Sikh Identity Continuity And Change*, Manohar, Delhi, 1999. P.180-4.

³¹ Oberoi; op. cit. P.216-258.

³² Fox, R, G.; *The Lions Of Punjab ; Culture In The Making* , Berkeley, 1985, p 178

gurdwaras and purifying the Sikh way of life? Fox is emphasizing the Akali movement in 1920s, but he traces this backwards and locates it within the framework of British policies of maximizing the profit and guarding the Indian empire with the help of loyal and so-called 'martial races'.³³ Fox clearly states that the Khalsa identity is totally a handiwork of the British rule and any unification of the Sikhs was achieved during the Akali movement in the first quarter of the twentieth century.³⁴

W.H. Mcleod does not stress too much on the role of colonial rule while he acknowledges the wide-ranging changes brought about by the rulers ranging from technology to mental attitude.³⁵ However, he advocates a 'historical' – used for saying evolutionary – approach towards the question of Sikh identity.³⁶ He delineates the differences among the sabhas as their differing understanding of the Sikh legacy in which the LSS won because of their consciousness and their initiative. The Singh Sabha movement, according to the McLeod systematized Sikhism for its propagation. In his evolutionary schema there is considerable space for the Khalsa identity of the eighteenth century.³⁷

Ian J. Kerr goes on to say that the Sikh identity is essentially a function of the state.³⁸ He is heavily dependent on Oberoi for the central argument 'to investigate the contested, time-specific and emergent cultural dimensions to the Sikh identity as represented and explained by those within and without the Panth'.³⁹ He moves on the familiar territory of co-opting the Sikh elite; military recruitment; local self-government; etc. due to which the state won over the loyalty of the ruled by working out a pattern of interest and identity.⁴⁰ In his essay, however, he denies any agency to the Sikhs, appears to be state-centric and recognizes the Singh Sabha movement as the only vehicle of Sikh identity.

Brian P. Caton's well argued piece about English nostalgia and the Punjab context in the late-nineteenth century offers new perceptions about Sikh identity. The English Yeomen ideal which mirrored the Englishness or English nation as inherently

³³ *ibid*; p.126.

³⁴ *ibid*;p.10,"British rulers, in pursuit of their colonial interests through means dictated by their own beliefs ,foreshadowed the reformed Sikh, or Singh identity , propounded by the Singh Sabhas."

³⁵ McLeod, W,H.; *Who Is A Sikh? The Problem Of Sikh Identity*, OUP, New Delhi , 1989,p.62-68.

³⁶ *ibid*;p.7-10.

³⁷ *ibid*;p.60-70.

³⁸ Kerr, I,J; *Sikhs And State; Troublesome Relationships And A Fundamental Continuity* pp147-174 in Singh, P & Barrier, N,G (ed) *Sikh Identity Continuity And Change*, Manohar. Delhi, 1999,p.149-151.

³⁹ *ibid*;p.147-149.

⁴⁰ *ibid*; p.152-158.

conservative placed squarely in the middle of eligibility to own small areas of land and the possibility of upward social mobility. All these essentialised and naturalistic attributes were foisted upon the Jat-Sikh peasantry.⁴¹ Brian P. Caton makes a further point by saying that nostalgia for the conservative English yeoman was a powerful tool in the hands of the elites, which could be used by the non-elites also to articulate their desire.⁴² Thus, according to Caton this shows complicity of the ruled in this power relationship. The accessibility of this discourse to Punjab administrators such as John Malcolm in 1812 to George MacMunn in 1920-30, suggests the application of the English rural ideal, as revealed in ethnographies, settlement reports, district gazetteers and memoirs, in comprehending and transforming Punjabi society.⁴³

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Caton places the Singh Sabha movement in the complicitous power relation with the British which was self-perpetuating in this case: their status allowed the Sikh elites to successfully define the orthodoxy, and the orthodoxy they defined reified their elite status.⁴⁴ This project was conducted somewhat outside the purvey of British colonial authority. However, because of efforts to maintain social order, the British government permitted the Singh Sabhas to engage in their project, whereas it had crushed the Namdharis and marginalised the Nirankaris.⁴⁵ This act of assent thus assured the movement its success. Incidentally, this raises the question of Oberoi's silence about Namdharis and Nirankaris and other viable identities vis-à-vis the Tat-Khalsa. The British and Sikh agents involved in the process of forming a discourse of Sikh identity in the colonial period produced a rhetoric which sometimes clashed but most often suited the agenda of power maintenance of both groups.⁴⁶ This is easily the most nuanced interpretation of the phenomenon, but silence about the agency or receiving group leaves some space for speculation which is further strengthened by the author's use of only the secondary sources with Oberoi figuring most frequently. The other sources used are the works created by colonial authorities.

J.S. Grewal in his discussion about the nineteenth century conjuncture goes back in time and starts from the self-consciousness of the Sikhs with their increasing socio-cultural articulation and the 'demonstrably distinct identity' of the Singhs during the

⁴¹ Caton, B.P.; *Sikh Identity Formation And The British Rural Ideal 1880-1930* in Singh, P & Barrier, N.G (ed) *Sikh Identity Continuity And Change*, Manohar. Delhi, 1999. p180-4.

⁴² Ibid;p.192.

⁴³ Ibid;p.195.

⁴⁴ Ibid;p.196-7

⁴⁵ Ibid;p.198.

⁴⁶ Ibid;p.197.



eighteenth century in relation to non-Singhs among the Sikhs bringing the issue of uniformity to the fore.⁴⁷ Outsiders underlined the differences of external appearance, at the cost of their common faith and shared panthic life, as two different categories.⁴⁸ Grewal gives primacy to the Arya Samaj's debate of Hindus and Sikh when the sabha leaders began to treat the Singh identity as the preferred Sikh identity because of its greater visibility.⁴⁹ Their closeness to eighteenth century Khalsa identity eventually materialised in Bhai Kanh Singh's work in 1898 'Hum Hindu Nahin'. Grewal says that a serious concern for preserving and promoting the Sikh tradition may now appear to be obvious but this dimension has been overlooked in explanations which harp on the 'mundane' interests of a new middle class

The grey area between the general conditions provided by colonialism and the exclusivist agenda of Punjabi elite has been dealt within the realm of 'discourse', 'epistemes', etc. The material imperative of such constructions is not studied in perspective in these accounts and a tendency to accord paradigmatic status to Oberoi for describing other phenomena like caste, gender, etc. has marginalised alternative attempts. Nazer Singh comes across as an exception to this trend in his attempt to link the emerging colonial discourse evolving contingently while also maintaining a sense of direction about its strategic objectives. Nazer Singh avoids reducing these objectives to either military considerations or the agrarian issues and explicates at length the colonial discourse on socio-cultural domain in Punjab right from the opening years of nineteenth century⁵⁰. One can discern that some general tendencies and discursive tropes operative in colonial policy were derived from the strategic location of Punjab on the northwestern border. John Malcolm with his 'Sketch of the Sikhs' establishes the fundamental grid to interpret Punjabi history through communal shades reflecting in language, religion, state and polity. One crucial aspect of this method consisted in systematically eroding the legitimacy of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his kingdom by denying the specific socio-political processes, which were fundamental in establishing as well as consolidating his rule. This ongoing colonial enterprise kept expanding and deepening over time alongwith adding of new elements culled from the colonial experience in Bengal, Benares, Delhi, etc⁵¹. The divisive cultural policies regarding

⁴⁷ Grewal, J.S.; *Historical Perspectives On Sikh Identity*; Punjabi University, Patiala, 1997.p.30-32.

⁴⁸ Ibid;p.20.

⁴⁹ Ibid;p.73.

⁵⁰ Singh,Nazer: *Delhi And Punjab, Essays In History And Historiography* ,Sehgal Book Distributors ,New Delhi,1995,pp.154

⁵¹ Ibid; p.131.

language and history were racialised in the wake of annexation of Punjab in 1849 and such efforts were lapped up by the emerging as well as the traditional elite of different communities. Nazer Singh emphasises the materiality of this process and joins issue with Paul Brass and others while demonstrating that these elite groups and their reform movements alone should not be considered the carriers of these tendencies but the colonial discourse and its attendant institutional apparatus in the service of its political agenda should be given adequate weight to retrieve the hitherto marginalised questions⁵².

Nazer Singh's analysis of colonial discourse about Punjab history and its cultural formations is nuanced than Oberoi's who gives a generalised account of structural conditions and the transformations wrought in Punjabi society. Oberoi remains focussed on generation of boundaries through the discourse around census operations, elite considerations and the resultant passages to modernity poised against the popular religious practice, which remains for Oberoi a counterweight to colonial modernity. Thus his projections of an 'epistemic rupture' are imperfectly argued by not accounting for those specific cultural policies pursued by the government that provided the essential armature for communitarian consciousness in the late-nineteenth century Punjab. This exercise also takes care of the colonial army-centric approaches to the issue of Sikh identity adopted by Richard G. Fox, Rajit K. Mazumdar and Tan Tai Yong. Some other authors make general points about the colonial discourse on Sikhs but none with as much analytical distinction as displayed by Nazer Singh. However, our case about the changes, advances, mutations in the popular domain remains even more important to provide a counterpoint to the colonial discourse as well as the elite-centric historiography from the vantage point of Sikh identity as a constituent of the emerging contours of Punjabi identity and the role played by Sikhs in this process spread from 1800 to 1930.

McLeod, Oberoi and the Sikh Studies

McLeod's influence on Harjot S. Oberoi is immense. He furthers McLeod's endeavour by foregrounding the category of a "cohesive community"⁵³, in the overall context of ancient Indian aversion to writing systems hence an emphasis on

⁵² *ibid* ; p.29-33

⁵³ Oberoi, Harjot S.; *The Construction Of Religious Boundaries, Culture Identity And Diversity In The Sikh Tradition* , OUP, New Delhi, 1997. p.4

memorizing the canonical texts.⁵⁴ However G.S. Mann and Pashaura Singh who show that the Gurus in fact, encouraged scribes, who were otherwise held in low esteem in India, criticize this assertion made by Oberoi⁵⁵.

For Oberoi the eighteenth century context-in Punjab, Bengal and Tamilnadu- points to a popular diffusion of the *Sufi-Bhakti* high culture of the masters e.g. Bachittar Natak, Janamsakhis, 18th century Sikh texts, etc. Also the *qissas*- having local flavour and exotic content - sit pretty well in this scenario.⁵⁶ Rather than contextualizing these episodes in their specific settings he is equating these with the diffused, fuzzy, folksy boundaries, bereft of the heuristic notion of a cohesive community of Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. This failure to situate these cases in their historical contexts in fact essentializes these phenomena under a heuristic category of the 'pre-colonial,' by claiming, "...the religious life of the people, particularly in the pre-colonial period was characterized by a continuum. There was much interpenetration and overlapping of communal identities."⁵⁷ The liberties with the sacred served as an idiom of resistance for the peasantry.⁵⁸ Whereas there is also a danger in valorizing these practices which undermine the prevalence of power by negating the potentiality of transformation into a substantive resistance at the material level.⁵⁹

Hinting at the amorphous nature of the Adi Granth through the interpretative mode Oberoi denies it a pivotal status.⁶⁰ However the sheer focus of deriving any interpretation from the Adi Granth points towards its key location and secondly, by analyzing the social background, political attitude, and sectarian concerns of the endeavor one can attempt an analysis of various ideological and social conflicts in the making of a tradition. Oberoi does not develop this line of inquiry any further. Also how does he determine the "amorphous nature of the Adi Granth; by its constitutive practice or by its later interpretation? The editorial principles employed by Guru Arjan have been studied in detail by Pashaura Singh⁶¹ which highlights "doctrinal consistency; the ideal of balanced life; the spirit of optimism; the inclusive ideal and the concern for a distinctive Sikh identity."⁶² It seems that the fluid nature of Adi Granth is presumed under the general rubric of pre-colonial. This perfunctory treatment of the early Sikh tradition - closely

⁵⁴ ibid;p.7

⁵⁵ Singh, Pashaura; *Guru Granth Sahib, Text Canon And Authority*, OUP, Delhi, 2000.Regarding the respect given to scribes see p.18-19.

⁵⁶ Oberoi ; op.cit.p.12.

⁵⁷ Ibid; p. 12 and on the essentialisation of pre-colonial' see Sumit Sarkar ,p.77; Richard M. Eaton p.143-150.; Achin Vanaik p.12,95,136(citing Sudipta Kaviraj),174,187.

⁵⁸ Ibid; p.14-16.

⁵⁹ Pinch, W.R.: *Peasants And Monks In British India*, OUP, New Delhi, 1996, p.24-27 and passim.

⁶⁰ Oberoi; op.cit. p.22. (Anne Murphy, *Allegories of Difference and Identity* and W.R. Pinch. *Peasants and Monks in British India* ,OUP, Delhi 1996)

⁶¹ Singh, Pashaura: op.cit. p.50, 62,151-176.

⁶² Ibid; p. 88-9 and 176.

following Mcleod jumbles up his otherwise significant questions for which he seems to focus on the 'modern' period alone, whereas the constitution and reconstitution of the Sikh identity is a running theme in the Sikh movement itself.

Thus by sharply counterpoising the pre-colonial and colonial concern with identity Oberoi attributes this fact - not to show much concern for establishing distinct religious boundaries - to the Indic cultural environment and its characteristic ambiguity and fluidity especially regarding religious identities.⁶³ Whereas we find a seventeenth century chronicler, Mohsin Fani, recording a particularly strong notion of being a Sikh in the mid-seventeenth century Punjab.⁶⁴

Oberoi does not specify the nature of change in the self of Sikhism with the founding of the Khalsa in 1699 and who were those "sections of the Sikh populace" that joined Khalsa ranks.⁶⁵ In fact the anti-empire stance and the resultant dynamic imposed upon the Sikhs and new political urgency, dividing the Sikh community into pro- or anti-empire segments with some rebel *zamindars*, peasants and artisans joining the Khalsa signal the forging of a political vehicle, which was open to any creed to join it through an initiation ceremony.⁶⁶ There is a strong willingness to label it as a "moral community" of an elective nature rather than being a hereditary institution.⁶⁷

Thus we are confronted with a notion of community which is an everyday phenomena, contextual, specific and generating its own status quo over time in conjunction with other historical forces in a dialectical manner. In this way we are not freezing the community into any simplistic dichotomy between 'fluid/distinct; pre-colonial/ modern; Khalsa/Sehajdhari; etc. rather keeping the analytical space shorn of any heuristic closure in order to account for internal ideological conflicts, social orientations and political motivations within a tradition. Irfan Habib does mention some such observations regarding the jatt entry into Sikhism, its historical juncture; material conditions; comprehension of the message by various constituents, their selections and omissions. However, he does not enquire it in length.⁶⁸ Kumkum Sangari attempts the same exercise although by analyzing the nodes of similarity as well as heterogeneity and its social, aesthetic and political content in the various *bhakti* saint-poets⁶⁹ and thus

⁶³ Oberoi: op cit; p.24.

⁶⁴ Habib, I. & Grewal, J.S.: *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, Tulika, New Delhi, 2001, p.59-84.

⁶⁵ Oberoi;op cit. p.24.

⁶⁶ Alam, M: *The Crisis of Mughal Empire, Awadh and the Punjab 1707-1748.*; OUP, New Delhi, 1997, p.134.

⁶⁷ J.P.S.Oberoi prefers to categorize it as 'society for salvation' in his *Religion, Civil Society And The State, A Study Of Sikhism*, OUP, New Delhi, 1999, p.97 and 137.

⁶⁸ Habib, I : *'The Jatts of Punjab and Sind'*, in Punjab Past and Present, p.98-100

⁶⁹ Sangari, K : *'The Spiritual Economy of Mirabai'*, in Gender and Nation, NMML, New Delhi, 2001, p.21-125.

taking care of the criticism about not giving credence to the synchrony of these phenomena.⁷⁰ W.R. Pinch develops this complex problematique to account for Ramanandi monks and their socio-historical journey carrying ideological, political and social currents within it and being affected by them.⁷¹ It is not without interest that they all propose structural connections of a fundamental nature to account for the webbed terrain of the Indian society and history, which is otherwise relegated to be a continuum of a pre-colonial variety discussed under the rubric of Indic culture, Sanatandharm', and so on.

Oberoi while referring to the Khalsa transformation insists primarily on the distinct code of conduct and initiation rites, which made subscription to a new set of bodily symbols mandatory.⁷² One assumes that he is looking at the preponderance of the *Rahitnama* literature in the eighteenth century, which according to me remains a circumspect source to affirm the notions of Sikh identity, even in the eighteenth century. Secondly, a semiotic analysis of the initiation rites of Sikhism reveals it to be a 'specific inversion' in relation to the rites of social renunciation established by the medieval mendicant orders that preceded Sikhism.⁷³ W.R. Pinch suggests that following such mores of discipline afforded a substantial aura of self- respect especially for those social groups derided as impure.⁷⁴ Following a pure lifestyle as a way of undermining the caste discriminations, that stigmatized low-status populations, also opens up the possibility of treating such symbols, rites, ceremonies as protest against the Sanatan episteme with varnashramadharma as its paradigmatic core.⁷⁵ By treating this phenomena of symbols, initiation ceremony as within the paradigm of varna hierarchy, both Oberoi and Mcleod make a further mistake by reducing the Khalsa rahit to a mark of formal identity with an 'other' in the form of Muslim and again Dasam Granth is the chosen text to prove the point.⁷⁶ Oberoi insists that this was not the case because in Dasam Granth we witness a 'mediating third term of co-existence' in contrast to either cultural borrowing from any source or its presumed opposition, political hostility.⁷⁷ Thus we escape from falling in the dichotomy or as J. P. S. Oberoi would have it, the dualism of social indistinction

⁷⁰ Oberoi.J.P.S.: , *Religion Civil Society and the State*.p.143.

⁷¹ Pinch; op cit.p.2-3, 6-7, and passim.

⁷² Oberoi ; op.cit, p.24.

⁷³ Oberoi, J.P.S.; *Religion, Civil Society and the State*, p.10-11.McLeod however, locates these symbols within the paradigm of 'hill culture'-- emphasising the Devi cult-- impinging upon themilitant jatt character acquired by the Sikh community See his *The Evolution Of Sikh Community*, OUP, New Delhi,p.13.This assertion seems to provide analytical space for Oberoi to to forward his argument that Guru Gobind Singh prepared the ground for a fusion of the Khalsa with the Sanatan episteme with Dasam Granth as its fountainhead and hence, the boundaries remained fuzzy.p.24-26,92-105.

⁷⁴ Pinch; op.cit p.39.

⁷⁵ HSO; op.cit. p.63.

⁷⁶ McLeod, W.H.: *Exploring Sikhism, Aspects Of Sikh Identity, Culture, and Thought*, OUP,New Delhi,2000,p.32.62,274. Oberoi; op.cit.p.68.

⁷⁷ Oberoi.; op.cit.p.76.

and 'political' as defined in a narrow militarist sense. In this context, it seems justified to quote Niharranjan Ray: "One can easily say that his (Guru Gobind's) selection of Epic and Puranic myths and legends was limited to those alone that were of a fearless and heroic nature, having a content of heroic struggle and heroism and determination among his people preparing them to fight against their enemies, the Hindu rajas and the Mughal imperial authority (emphasis added)."⁷⁸

The overwhelming tone of the passage is to treat the military-political dimension of the Khalsa in relation to opposition from both the sides. Completely reducing the temporal aspect to hill culture of Epic and Puranic sans military opposition and conflating the Mughal opposition with the Muslims as an other 'succeeds' in disorienting or reading the order of the Khalsa in a unitary manner following the principles of "silence and negation".⁷⁹

Secondly the idea of a *rahit* and the acceptance of a particular Rahitnama injunction are perhaps two different phenomena. Oberoi is silent on this accord rather; he saturates this line of enquiry by granting the Sanatan episteme the sole authority in this regard. He foregrounds the emblematic aspect of 5 Ks as reflecting the Sikh identity over other possible coordinates for instance, the changing social composition of the Khalsa over time and its ideological expression, contests and ambivalences, etc. Since a community is to be seen only in visual terms in Oberoi's framework, homogeneity is ascribed a cardinal status in his presentation. Any deviation from the norm is viewed as an evidence of denial of self-identity of the Sikhs.⁸⁰ Thus a narrative is constructed which negates substantive issues and prioritises uniformities or homogeneity. Thus he situates his framework in 'diversity versus uniformity' paradigm with diversity corresponding to the pre-colonial and uniformity as the overarching criteria for determining (Sikh) identity is rendered coterminous with modernity setting in through the colonial mode.

The notion of multiple identities should not be made to convey that the elements underpinning the Sikh self-image were not discernible. Oberoi is treating the notions of identity as primarily exclusivist as against the pluralist notion.⁸¹ Further while talking about the Sikh 'great and little tradition' in a vague manner he does not situate Sikhism as a panth or movement in any of these criteria within the Indic cultural episteme.⁸² That is why while accounting for a success of the Singh Sabha project in reconstituting

⁷⁸ Ray, N.R. *The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1978, p.16.

⁷⁹ HSO, op. cit. p.30-31. On Guru Gobind Singh's battles with hill chiefs and other conflictual processes, see Grewal, J. S. & Bal, S. S.: *Guru Gobind Singh, A Biography*, P.U. Chandigarh, 1987, p.177-180, 128-140.

⁸⁰ Grewal, J. S.; *Historical Perspectives On Sikh Identity*; Punjabi University, Patiala, 1997. p.32.

⁸¹ Oberoi; op.cit. p.24-25.

⁸² Ibid; p.24-25.

Sikhism 'in its own image by presenting an unchanging idiom in a period of flux and thus a new cultural elite aggressively usurped the right to represent other within this singular tradition... under a monolithic, codified and closed culture'.⁸³ He marginalizes Namdharis; altogether ignores such sects or *deras* as the Gulabdasis etc., in his work which in turn raises second question regarding the material constraints of being seen to be on the right side of the Raj as a leading factor amongst that very new aggressive cultural elite furthering a sectarian identity in opposition to the sections which were anti-Raj such as the Namdharis, Sardar Ajit Singh in 1907, the Ghadarites, etc. and their notion of an inclusivist ethical Sikh identity. Seen differently this also shows the inability of thinking a model for accounting identity and inclusivity, each possessing a unity. J.P.S. Oberoi calls it the dualism that according to him separates the individual from collective, status from power, fact from value etc., which is to be transcended by "the non-dualism of Indian modernity".⁸⁴

Oberoi argues for a 'series of highly complex ruptures, rapproachments and transitions resulting in the modern Sikh community'.⁸⁵ "The dramatic political triumph of the Khalsa in the 1750s gave them a vast empire ironically however; the attainment of sovereignty and the process of state formation denied the crystallization of a uniform Sikh identity".⁸⁶ Denied it for whom? Did 'they' ever aspire for uniformity? If yes, then why were they unsuccessful? Oberoi disallows any space for probing structural features, their limitations as well as emphases on the process of Sikh identity. Also by taking the eighteenth century as the first instance of rupture and rapproachment, Oberoi denies the pre-Khalsa phase its distinction and self-identity.

While accounting for the early Sikhs as a textual community, Oberoi does not provide any guidance and by looking to answer the social mobility through the peoples' veneration for a written text in an oral context he fails to take hold of any structural factor.⁸⁷ His discussion of the *Varan* by Bhai Gurdas-'best source of understanding early Sikh identity'- is frankly superficial. He is looking for a corporeal, communitarian notion of the Sikh identity and does not delve into the notions of *Sangat*, *Dharmasala*, *bani*, unity of Guruship, etc. The ideological underpinnings of these institutions should be brought to light to arrive at more substantive notion of identity. Moreover, Bhai Gurdas's critique of Hindus and Muslims is ideological and social not just on sectarian lines.⁸⁸

⁸³ Ibid; p.25

⁸⁴ Oberoi, JPS; op.cit.p.150-51.

⁸⁵ Oberoi; op.cit. p.47.

⁸⁶ Ibid; p.47-8.

⁸⁷ Ibid; p.49-50

⁸⁸ Ibid; p.50-52, Also see Hans, Surjit; *'A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature*. ABS Publishers Jalandhar, p.180-185.

By resorting to a mere listing of various denominations within Sikhism and not exploring their ideology, social composition and political stance to draw a significant inference - he is a fact very much in the empiricist trap.⁸⁹ He is oblivious of the socio-ideological thrust of the *Bani*, which actually establishes the centrality of human being and hence only succeeds in recounting for the 'transformation' of Sikhism in the entry of the Jatts.⁹⁰ Further, the inclusion of ('diverse contributors and hetero-textuality') various *bhagats*, *Sufis*, *bhatts*, etc. point towards the pan-Indian aspirations of the fifth Guru, Arjun.⁹¹ By not viewing the phase of quietism and militarism as structurally bound by a series of mediations Oberoi plays up the very dualism which these movements attempted to resolve.⁹² While discussing the Brahmins and the Khatri's resisting the Khalsa on account of their adherence to the customary cultural codes of their own lineages and castes,⁹³ he innocently collapses the colossal 'other - the Mughal state. Joining the Khalsa was a moral, political choice not only an esoteric matter. The period under consideration, the early 18th century, was about the anti-empire struggle which constructed boundaries of a very different nature rather than emanating from 'inwardness' as suggested by Oberoi.⁹⁴ However, we may state that Khalsa's association with the universality of message of Islam was simultaneously held up along with its 'resistance to the medieval worst of Mughal imperialism in politics, and the system of Muslim bigotry; fanaticism and superiority in society, claiming *shariat* law as its legitimation.'⁹⁵ There is a strong inclination in Oberoi to treat the *Rahitnamas* as constituting the Sikh version of the Hindu/Brahmanical 'high' tradition with caste/varna as its lynchpin.⁹⁶ However, he uses only the '*Chaupa Singh Rahitnama*'; as his source to mount a critique of Richard G. Fox who based his readings on English or English-language sources such as census reports, administrative reports, army recruitment manuals and so on to further the point that the Khalsa identity was predominantly a colonial state's creation in the late nineteenth century appropriated by the 'urban classes' (FN).

⁸⁹ Ibid; p.53-54.

⁹⁰ Ibid; p.58.

⁹¹ Singh, Pashaura; op.cit.p.171.

⁹² Oberoi; op.cit.p.16.

⁹³ Oberoi; op. cit, p.62.

⁹⁴ Ibid; p.62.

⁹⁵ Oberoi; op.cit .p.86.

⁹⁶ Oberoi; op.cit. p.63. The *Rahitnama* paradigm consists of the notion of a narrowly defined community as well as ritually sectarian practices being themselves a circumstantial product of subjective thrusts with differing situational perspectives. This tendency was further augmented by the writings of Kesar Singh Chhibber in the latter half of eighteenth century. Political literature of late- nineteenth century – early twentieth century also exists as commentative writings on the scripture with a general desire to explicate ethical virtues out of which all Khalsa traditions were ideally derived. Singh Sabha movement while retaining the communitarian edge, attempts to substitute the *rahitnama* sentiment with an instrumentalist rationality derived from the colonial modernity by clearing the received tradition of all contradictions. see Nripinder Singh: *The Sikh Moral Tradition*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1985, p.228.

This particular rahitnama was translated into English by Mcleod which the later scholarship has demonstrated that it was actually written by Kesar Singh Chhibber's clan member⁹⁷ having many ideological similarities with Chhibber's *Bansavalinama* in his emphasis on Hindu mythology. Incidentally, Oberoi records Kesar Singh Chhibber's *Bansavalinama* as anti-thetical to the community of Khalsa.⁹⁸ However, his reading of the indigenous sources is not comprehensive enough. Dislocating the political thrust, ambiguous injunctions, 'apostate' pronouncements, he reads the rahitnama in a unitary manner. Further the internally variegated domain of rahitnama genre, authoring climate and most significantly its reception by the concerned audience must be probed. Similarly his description of the Muslim as 'other' is based on Chaupa Singh's evidence⁹⁹ but there are plenty of sources that do not support this conclusion. Thus he is pushing the authority and status of Rahitnama too far to account for a distinct identity in terms of ritual uniformity and his Khalsa versus the rest of Punjabi society is too neat a division to be acceptable both, empirically and conceptually.¹⁰⁰

His treatment of eighteenth century institutions the *misl*s, *gurmata*, *rakhi*, *sarbat khalsa* and so on is perfunctory. All these contributed towards the later success of the Khalsa which attracted productive classes presenting a shared space of righteousness, rather than any specific, identity recruits. A careful analysis of these institutions can contribute towards a refined understanding of this phase.¹⁰¹ Among the Sehajdharis he includes *Nanak - Panthis* and *Udasis* who symbolized alternative ways of being a Sikh until the Khalsa mode attained hegemony.¹⁰² Oberoi then focuses entirely on the Udasis and their practices and conflates his conclusions derived from them as applicable to the rest of Sehajdharis.¹⁰³ This issue of Udasis, sehajdharis also demands a closer scrutiny of their social background and their spokesmen who pushes forward the case of guru-lineages and other Brahmanical ideas to have attained virtuous position in counseling the Sikh chiefs in the their exercise of temporal power. J.P.S. Oberoi will call it the reversion to the (Indian medieval) dualism of status and power which the Khalsa (society for salvation) wished to resolve.¹⁰⁴ Thus Kesar Singh Chhibber can be said to belong to the medieval structure as against the social project espoused by Khalsa. Similarly, the Udasi practices have a well- defined tradition of monasticism which although normatively followed Sikkism but interpreted it in a Vedantic-Puranic manner. Thus Chhibber along with the udasis and other such efforts shows a distinct similarity.

⁹⁷ Singh, R.J. see Introduction to '*Bansavalinama*' by Kesar Singh Chhibber, GNDU, Amritsar, p.17-19.

⁹⁸ Oberoi; op.cit. p.75

⁹⁹ ibid; p.68

¹⁰⁰ ibid; p.67

¹⁰¹ ibid; p.71-75.

¹⁰² Ibid; p.75-6.

¹⁰³ ibid; p.77-8.

¹⁰⁴ Oberoi, J.P.S.; op.cit.p.32.

To explain this paradox of duality in the Sikh identity, Oberoi seeks to locate this coexistence of Khalsa and Sehajdhari identities as part of the complex process of state formation which required the support of clans with their pre-existing social hierarchies and Udasis brought the Sikhs and Hindus closer to ward off a potential threat from the Muslims.¹⁰⁵ Thus it was structural to the formation of the Sikh state that 'Hinduisation' would occur which led to the dilution of what may be described as the religious project of the Khalsa'.¹⁰⁶ The alliance between the brahmanised Sikh church and the Sikh state sought to segregate the domains of status and power in a highly unequal society and hence, consigning the egalitarian impulse to the realm of the Gurdwara in order to carry out the inequalitarian policies of the state.¹⁰⁷ However, this failure to create 'an absolutely new mode of social organization'¹⁰⁸ with respect to egalitarian aspect by the Sikh Gurus and their disciples is better explained, in my view, by registering the non-transformation of the economy from feudal to other systems. With productive system not sufficiently developed, availability of land was easy and the crafts were meant for domestic consumption - all these factors resulted in the perpetuation of that very system which ensured the grip of Hindu-Brahmanical value system. This productive system was never seriously disturbed, all protestant and non-conformist movements - were found to be impinged by the limits imposed by its overarching value system.¹⁰⁹ Irfan Habib while acknowledging the rise in status of low-caste's through the Sikh movement however mentions that this social mobility was modeled in the shape of the Mughal ruling classes and conditions with the basic elements of the agrarian system remaining unaltered and the infusion of the zamindars along with the religious idiom 'enlarged the scale but weakened the class nature' of such movements.¹¹⁰ Thus it is in the general conditions that we can talk about for the persistence and continued significance of these lineage-groups in the Sikh polity to account for its impact on the Sikhs. Primacy should be imparted to these unaltered conditions and not just to these cultural mores of clans or biradaris.

We also have to account for the massive grants given to Udasis along with the Sodhis, Bedis, Jogis, Vaishnavas etc. Alongwith this, elevation of guru-lineages as the leaders of the corporate realm in alliance with the state; the Udasi interpretation giving a vedantic turn to the ideais of *Gurmat*; the inclusion of earlier outcasts e.g.the *Dhirmalias*, *Minas* etc. into the panth shows the structural similarities of the conservative sections.¹¹¹ However, Pinch draws another very significant conclusion that this check on

¹⁰⁵ Oberoi; op.cit.p.77-79.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid: p.80-89.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid: p.87.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid; p.87-8.

¹⁰⁹ Ray,N.R;op. cit.p.76-80.

¹¹⁰ Habib, Irfan, '*Essays in Indian History*',Tulika ,New Delhi, p.248-249,249.

¹¹¹ Pinch, W.R. op.cit. p.28.

armed monasticism in order to shape up 'priestly monk unconcerned with worldly power and given over completely to religious contemplation and prayer'¹¹² was also intimately linked with the rise of caste mores to limit the ideological effects of the low-born's entry into the Vaishnavas.¹¹³ Thus such developments closely parallel the Sikh case which Surjit Hans characterizes as the 'privatisation of Sikhism'.¹¹⁴ According to Oberoi the Sanatan religious culture had Dasam Granth as its paradigmatic text which mediated their tensions, anxieties and fluidities through the mythic mode, in order to reconcile the Khalsa - Sehajdhari paradox. Its impact on the Sikh consciousness was reflected by the rise of the *Gur-Bilas* genre and in the domain of exegesis.¹¹⁵

The pervasive influence of the Sanatan episteme is evident from doctrinal debates, which reified the same process e.g. the debate about Guru Nanak's position in the religious universe between Bhai Santokh Singh and Sadhu Anandghan.¹¹⁶ Oberoi is looking for these sources and ignoring other folk- popular sources, which can provide us with interesting contrasts, negotiations and similarities. Incidentally, it has been suggested that Santokh Singh's idea of the Sikh rahit is taken from '*Sau Sakhi*'¹¹⁷ a text which Oberoi characterizes as embodying 'primitive protest' against the Sanatan episteme.¹¹⁸ Thus, 'there was no escaping the great code as enunciated in the Dasam Granth'.¹¹⁹ He does not seem interested to probe the internal interpretative variety within the same tradition which carries meaning at various levels. By insisting on the 'bricolage' notion of this episteme he is in fact, flattening it of potentialities which it might be possessing.¹²⁰ That is why he is not able to explain the divergence between promoting a Khalsa rahit however in mythically saturated universe. It needs other variables to open the variety of questions, which we tend to look up in this study.

Oberoi views the sanatan religious culture as an extremely rich religious culture encompassing great varieties, 'an assemblage of heterogenous culture materials'.¹²¹ Simultaneously it was primarily a 'priestly' religion, creating its hierarchy with the lay people believing these religious intermediaries as 'gurus' despite being at odds with the normative thrust of the Sikh ideology.¹²² Lahore state patronized this 'religious universe of the elites' giving it the aura of 'official religion' lording over massively unequal

¹¹² Pinch, *ibid*; p.25.

¹¹³ Pinch, *ibid*; p.25-27.

¹¹⁴ Hans, Surjit, '*A Reconstruction*...p.44, 45-46.

¹¹⁵ Oberoi; *op. cit.*p.92-3,98-102.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*; p. 102.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid. Bansavalinama* .191-93.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*; p. 191.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 192-3.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*; p. 137 for bricolage notion of Sanatan episteme.

¹²¹ Oberoi, p.70

¹²² *Ibid*; p. 137

society.¹²³ He seems to think that state patronage, religious intermediation enshrined in extremely 'rich' religious culture upholding caste system and generally having a priestly orientation with lay people having affinity with it. This treatment is indeed vague and vacuous with significant silences about the Khalsa sector in this period - which epitomized it, who patronized it, etc. Silencing one stream at the cost of other might give an idea of episteme some respectability; however, it clouds the overall picture. Also, the term Sanatan is anachronistically used. Since the formal education was in the hands of Udasis and Nirmalas, it is highly probable that a priestly, official, elitist kind of religious culture developed. However, was it so shorn of internal conflicts - doctrinal or otherwise - remains to be examined afresh? W.R.Pinch's examination of the debates in the *Ramanandi Sampraday* about whether Ramanuja was a part of their tradition implied deep social concerns, attitude towards caste, etc.¹²⁴ By treating these sectarian, scholarly rhetoric as essentially reifying the same sanatan culture one runs the risk of proving a theoretical point at the cost of silencing or negating the evidence.

This endeavour also demands to account for a personalised religion in the early 19th century from an earlier (18th century) notion of a political religion. The Khalsa was to be an elective body, sovereign in both spiritual and temporal realms, having freedom in society and responsibility under the guidance of the divine word (Guru Granth) with all ten gurus as its fixed exemplars.¹²⁵ This historical event completed the threefold identification of the godhead as the guru, the word as the guru and the congregation of the disciples as the guru... so producing the archetypal Sikh trinity of Guru, Granth and Panth (the way).¹²⁶ Oberoi accounts for the 'subordinate social sector' in the realm of popular culture having its own participatory network, orality, pragmatism and cultural agents¹²⁷ and totally marginalized.

Oberoi talks about lack of religious boundaries, inversion of the social order in the popular religion centred around local gods, sacred pirs, Sufis, witchcraft, fares, etc.¹²⁸ This culture of the 'subordinate social sector' simultaneously stood harmoniously along with the Sanatan co-religionists.¹²⁹ This subverts the major thrust of his presentation by saturating the entire society with the sanatan religious universe with a pronounced focus on maintenance of hierarchy and order, leaving space only for a symbolic protest through the popular religious mode. Moreover, he draws too neat an inventory of differences between the sanatan and popular domains and then fuses them. J.S. Grewal

¹²³ *ibid*; p. 138

¹²⁴ Pinch, W.R.; *op.cit.* p.63, 69.

¹²⁵ Oberoi, J.P.S, *op cit.* p.74.

¹²⁶ *ibid*; p.74.

¹²⁷ Oberoi; p.138,141-2.

¹²⁸ Oberoi; *op.cit.* p. 155-190.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 201-203.

shows that for Oberoi, the Udasis are Sanatan Sikhs¹³⁰ and that Khalsa Sikhs have been ignored by him in the early nineteenth century context¹³¹ with murmurs of protest coming solely from 'anonymous' quarters -*Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi* and *Sau Sakhi* - in the textual domains, and by the advent of Nirankaris and Namdharis in actual practice in the mid-nineteenth century. However, according to Oberoi their criticism itself remained within the confines of Sanatan episteme.¹³²

Oberoi's treatment of the 'Sau Sakhi' inadvertently drains it of being a meaningful carrier of protest which results from ignoring other information within the same text (in other words, applying the principle of silence - a refined way of saying selective use of the source); not mentioning even the conjecture about the supposed author, Gurbax Singh; and avoiding the big question at all: why to interpolate? Also, the tendency to view the internal diversity or hierarchy only in terms of the Khalsa/Sanatan polarity negates the other plausible divisions in the Panth e.g. between Jatts and Khattris; status of Shahids and the nature of the mission and so on.

On the issue of the omnipresent sanatan episteme, he has built up a non-conflictual, shared scared universe of the elite and the rural folk - materially, the former virtually parasitic over the latter however, their religious orientations are of the same order. This paradoxical reality must have had some real potential for generating alternatives, howsoever hegemonised by the elite but offering resistance in material ways also. The analytical mode of Oberoi and its application in this case overlooks these substantive issues for instance the social composition of the Kukas as well as the Nirankaris is hardly mentioned. Against the militant call of the former, the latter professed an orthodox, quietist mode of religiosity, which is not fundamentally opposed to their contemporary elite. So where does one place it? What was the logic advanced in their critique to Sanatan and popular varieties? Similarly, the Kukas by conducting the initiation ceremony in villages demonstrate the social space for the Khalsa 'episteme' within the popular domain.¹³³ In fact, it needs to be said that Khalsa order was not just about taboos and norms of a formal nature which put off rural folk but a formidable vehicle of a very real challenge to social hierarchy, political insensitivity, etc. (euphemistically called sanatan episteme having rich and heterogenous materials) available to the lay people. This aspect in fact shows the close affinity between the popular and the Khalsa ideal. Kukas' anti-idolatry reminds one of 'Dabistan' mentioning the similar attitudes in the mid-seventeenth century,¹³⁴ establishes the element of morality

¹³⁰ Grewal, J.S.; *Historical Perspectives on Sikh Identity*, p.28-29.

¹³¹ Ibid; p.29.

¹³² Oberoi; op.cit.p.190-195.

¹³³ Ibid;p. 196.

¹³⁴ Habib and Grewal; *Sikh History from Persian Sources*.p.66.

and ethical social action amongst the lay followers of religion by the peasantry¹³⁵ in the late - nineteenth early- twentieth centuries. Pinch also shows that the popular domain was not just a symbolic universe rather it had well argued ideas about doctrinal issues and institutional concerns.¹³⁶ Our study also shows this reciprocal relationship between the Khalsa and the popular as reflected in the popular sources in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

By keeping the Kuka movement within the ambit of sanatan episteme and labeling it as a 'primitive protest'¹³⁷ Oberoi exhausts the potential of the protest movements before the eventual advent of the Singh Sabhas. The entire socio-religious arena is rendered free for them to inscribe it as they please. Politically servile, the Singh Sabha movement is given an uncritical field, by claiming that the 'Tat Khalsa' episteme established the ritually pure domain and thus successfully implanted the social agenda of Sikh elite. It seems imperative to once again mention the fact that, the Kukas articulated anti-British rhetoric while simultaneously arguing for espousing a militant Khalsa ethic among its followers whereas, the Singh Sabhas were pro- Raj and articulated a formal identity for Sikhs in which the ethic was reduced to a very conservatively defined rahit. Also whereas the Kukas were brutally suppressed by the British, the Singh Sabhaites were actually promoted by the colonial state. This also shows that for the Raj, Sikh formal identity was not as important as their political views.

Also the preference for '*var*' and '*Chandi Chartra*' in the Kuka universe points towards a militant call to arms for the Kukas. Other texts regarding their political ambitions are not discussed by Oberoi which can locate their position within Sikh movement in a nuanced and concrete manner. J.S. Grewal mentions in this context the popularity of the '*Sau Sakhi*' and '*Prem-Sumarg*' with the Kukas.¹³⁸

Finally, what should one make out of such statement, "...Sanatan Sikh tradition created a cultural reference system akin to that of the carnival".¹³⁹ While one is also told in no ambiguous tone about the entrenched caste notions: "Sikhs had no idea of difference between Khalsa and Sahajdhari but a highly developed notion of what to do what low-caste mazhabi and chamar sikhs".¹⁴⁰ Elsewhere... 'it (Sanatan culture) exemplified the strength, richness and actual state of the nineteenth century Sikh religious tradition'.¹⁴¹ J.S. Grewal while describing Oberoi's treatment of the early- nineteenth

¹³⁵ Pinch; op.cit. p.94.

¹³⁶ ibid. p.6, 7, 9.

¹³⁷ Oberoi; op.cit. p.200.

¹³⁸ Grewal, J.S.p.142-143.

¹³⁹ Oberoi; p.256

¹⁴⁰ ibid; p.241.

¹⁴¹ ibid;p.256-7.

century period terms it as an understudied period¹⁴² especially 'his whole hypothesis of Sanatan Sikhism... appears to be vague and vacuous.'¹⁴³

In my view, the political stance of various phases of the Sikh movement offers a better vantage point of looking at the Sikh identity question. This stance also succeeds in demonstrating the internal dissensions and its attendant cultural expressions that can help us in relating the Sikh identity question to other religious communities in Punjab as well its relation with the 'secular' Punjabi culture.

¹⁴² Grewal; op. cit. p.28-29.

¹⁴³ *ibid*;p.29.

CHAPTER TWO

Lahore Darbar, Punjabi Maharaja and the Sikh Identity

And if Ranjit set himself to "destroy all distinctions, he was following in the footsteps of those monarchs who, in alliance with their peoples, broke the power of feudalism under the shadow of an absolute Throne before which all men must bow. Democracy has perhaps seldom, in the East risen above this level, and seldom fallen so low as at times in Europe.

Victor G. Kiernan

All the administration institutions/procedures that were adopted by Maharaja Ranjit Singh had a Mughal descent. The rationale of this political, economic and socio religious policies lay in the critical situation in which the Sikh ruling class was placed. Maharaja Ranjit Singh adopted a 'secular' and 'liberal' policy for the reasons of the state and religious endowments to all religions were generously granted. The Sikh ruling class was a new phenomenon in the social history of Punjab. Majority of the Sikh nobility belonged to the Jats. They were 30% of the total nobility and were more than the Hindu nobility. The superior owners were discovered during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule... the position of tenants improved and they were enjoying the same rights as peasant proprietors. As a result of the state incentives, vast stretches of land were brought under cultivation. Colonization underpinned the spatial and vertical mobility. During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, even the non-agricultural castes – trading, artisan and menial – entered the agriculture hierarchy. Change of occupation often led to improvement in economic condition. In fact, "the doors to upward mobility were open straight" during the Sikh rule under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. During Maharaja Ranjit Singh's times, the number of new Sikh villages ran into hundreds. As the language of Lahore Darbar, Persian was very popular both with the Muslim and the Hindus. Among the Hindus, Khatri had a special interest in learning Persian in order to secure employment in revenue administration.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh himself led rather a Spartan life not enamoured by the elite trappings of the Darbar etiquette. His comparatively egalitarian approach went a long way in the people identifying themselves with the Lahore Darbar. It was the ascendancy of the Dogras especially Dhyani Singh which brought the hierarchised notions about the way mobility. This was also reflected in the now hereditary nature of Kingship.¹ Maharaja Ranjit Singh was modeling himself as a Punjabi Mughal however

¹ Ajmer Singh : *Maharaja Ranjit Singh Ate Punjabi Sahit* (Punjabi) Publication Bureau, Punjabi University Patiala, 1982, pp.viii+202,p.18-19(Waheeduddin Fakir, Syed, 'The Real Ranjit Singh, N.D., 176, p.29)

with a Punjabi customary touch, for instance Persian was the state language, *phirmans* and records were kept in Persian but the conversation, discussions and appeals were carried out in Punjabi. Ranjit Singh patronized traditional personages and local religious establishments to win over their loyalty and by extension their social constituency. Maharaja Ranjit Singh did not undertake any fundamental alteration in traditional institutions rather he further elevated their status. 405-6 - The composite character of the nobility and administration was not altogether a new thing but the difference of degree was becoming a different almost of kind, with a fair representation of various races, religious and regions. Upward mobility was not confined to any particular caste or group.²

While the Christian missionaries were trying to open up the Sikh masses to the influence of Christian faith and the S chiefs were promoting the S writings of classical orientation, the literature develops in the S kingdom were taking an altogether different direction.³ Ranjit Singh retained the state language of the Mughal Empire, i.e. Persian. Although the language more commonly used for conversation in the Sikh court was Punjabi, it is quite remarkable that the Sikh orthodoxy did not have any dominant role in the language policy or literary predilections of the state.

Ranjit Singh is considered earnest in his quest of information regarding affairs of the state. This period witnessed an increasing trend of luxury amongst the Singhs.⁴ Ranjit Singh had acquired the 'state in person' phenomenon and his rule lacked any developed notion of institution building. It is surprising that Ranjit Singh never commissioned any work valorizing his territorial conquests or his biography either through his own inspiration or by the direct patronage of the Lahore Darbar in Braj or Punjabi. Punjabi poets and assorted versifiers wrote out of their own conviction.⁵ Lahore Darbar got Munshi Sohan Lal to compose 'Umdatul Tawarikh' and Maulvi Ahmedyar was commissioned to write 'Shahnama' in Persian. Ranjit Singh's courtier Diwan Dina Nath's son Diwan Amar Nath wrote 'Zafarnama Ranjit Singh' in Persian. Sikhs had the tradition of narrating their history in verse in Maharaja Ranjit Singh period. Rattan Singh Bhangu in 1841 wrote his 'Prachin Panth Prakash'. Another surprising fact is that

² *ibid.*, p.405-0623 and Grewal, J. S.: *Historical Geography of Punjab*, Journal of Regional History, Vol.-I, 1980,p.11 "...the emergence of triumph of Punjabi as a literary language was the result of the recognition with which the creative writers of the Punjab gave to the people of the Punjab".

³ *ibid.*, p.540

⁴ *ibid.*,p.26

⁵ *ibid.*,p.33.The phenomenon of state-in-person carries the contradiction of the Sikh society and the Punjabi culture.Some aspects of Maharaja Ranjit Singh approach towards the languages or texts.

Ranjit Singh never patronized any hagiographic work about the Sikh gurus despite his own beliefs.

Var genre is specifically a Punjabi creation, there is no evidence whatever in any other language. Three parts: Shanka-Pakh, Sanghursh- Pakh, Samadhan-pakh. The vars of Sikh gurus and Bhai Gurdas portray a battle of ideas whereas the formal battle of these earlier authors is actually transformed into a real battle between opposing parties, albeit having a moral content.⁶Var is usually written in Pauri metre. Pauri can be of two kinds: Sirkhandi and nishani chhand. Sirkhandi is used to depict the intensity of the battle.⁷Since var genre is more concerned with the outwardly portrayal and of a narrative kind, it is pertinent for a var to be written in a simple language, keeping in view its audience. A resonating quality in the use of words is a absolute necessity. All these ingredients place this genre exclusively in the popular domain. Punjabi var had come into place during the time of Baba Farid.⁸Although Guru Gobind Singh used Durga as the hero of his Chandi-di Var' however, there is no reference of any women being Khalsa even his wives, who continued to keep earlier names like Sahib Devi, Sundari, etc. Also notable is the fact that especially in Sau Sakhi the popular domain considers women, even Guru's wives and mother, as representing the archetypal womanly full of self-centredness, vice and begetter of ill-fame.⁹

Hakam Singh Darwesh is a partisan of the Khalsa army e.g. before the conquest of Multan, the Nawab and his daughter are discussing the spiritual superiority of Guru Gobind Singh over the Pirs of Multan. It predetermines the Khalsa victory through the transcendental route. This is an extension of the janam-sakhi method brought into secular domain. Since Guru Gobind Singh is the hero of both the genres of Sakhi and var, to the extent that some vars depict actual battle scenes, and the sakhis also discuss about Guru Gobind Singh's martial process – this tendency conjoins these two genres in our discussion. Secondly, the popular character of both these genres further supplies some relevant clues about the everydayness of the eighteenth century 'Sikh' community. Apart from a certain plebeianisation of the doctrine, institutions and persons it brings the popular saying into the realm of the sacred and thus we are presented a scenario in which the sacred and the profane are directed towards a purely

⁶ Dr. Rattan Singh Jaggi, in *Punjabi Sahit Da Srot – Mulak Itihas: Vol.III*, Pub Bureau, 1999, Patiala, pp.xii+342 p.296

⁷ *ibid.*, p.301

⁸ *ibid.*, p.302

⁹ *ibid.*, p.309

temporal concern i.e. the establishment of Sikh rule under the leadership of Jat Sikh chiefs. However, on the other hand, in the Rahit nama genre, the authority of the genre is invoked in order to push forward process of othering based on physical, communitarian injunctions rather than on a dialogic plane. Thus, this contradiction between the classificatory tendencies of rahitnamas with the assimilatory tendency of the popular narratives emerges in this period questioning the status of the rahitnama genre itself. Paradoxically, the number of written points towards its social purpose also. This social basis is still not clear. This can well be a new arena for further research in this field.

Also the father-daughter dialogue is now crystallizing as a narrative strategy fashioned on Aurangzeb-Zebunnisa's dialogue written in the eighteenth century Jungnama. Nawab's daughter praises Guru Gobind Singh in Zebunnisa's Vir.¹⁰

Darwesh does not praise the bravery of the opponents. The Akalis have been praised sky-high but the Pathans are neglected. (Here, one remembers the 'Chathian Di Var' by Pir Muhammad where he praises the opponent Sikhs).¹¹ By the time of Darwesh the Sikh secular ascendancy is complete to warrant the title of 'baaz' for the Sikhs and 'chiri' for the Pathans.¹² Darwesh's skill is ennobled while praising Maharaja Ranjit Singh in a rural-folk idiom.¹³

Although Ganesh Das is a Hindu, but the militant fervour in his Fatehnama is of a Punjabi temperament, well immersed in Khalsa sensibility.¹⁴ He terms the military conquests of the Maharaja as the *Fatehnama* of '*Guru Khalsa Ji Ka*'. Being a non-Punjabi poet the tendency for personal praise is in good measure. In the opening *manglacharan*, Ganesh Das remembers both the Devi as well as Guru Gobind Singh. During the battle of Multan, Guru Gobind Singh is portrayed as engaged in a spiritual dialogue with the renowned sufi saint Shams Tabrez.¹⁵ Turk is equated with the Begh but not with the generic category of 'Muslim'.

The protagonists are treated in a Puranic manner with the Nawab, Muzaffar Khan as Harnakshyap and Ranjit Singh as an avatar of Krishna. The battle takes the

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.39

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.39-40

¹² *ibid.*, p.40

¹³ *ibid.*, p.40

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.42

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.43

form of a *Dharam Yudh*.¹⁶ All the pirs of Multan choose Shams Tabrez as their representative to have a dialogue with the Uch Da Pir Guru Gobind Singh. Ganesh Das terms this battle as of *Din-Mazhab*. This is a shared strategy between Ganesh Das and Hakam Singh Darwesh.¹⁷ Some consider these sectarian traces as a reaction against the earlier Muslim rule.¹⁸

Ganesh Das considers the Khalsa ascendancy as the vehicle of Hindu welfare i.e. why for him Guru Gobind Singh is the 'Pir of the Hindus' and by extension Ranjit Singh is 'the King of Hindus'. The same religious consciousness calls 'Muslims as 'Musle', 'Gilje', etc.

Unlike Darwesh, Ganesh Das praises the opponents.¹⁹

The divergences between these two writers tell us the emerging contours of religious sensibilities and their tension with the shared tradition, which is signified by the genre of Jangnama. One had to stick to some of the formal characteristics of this genre to be considered a worthy poet and simultaneously articulate one's beliefs and convictions. Hakam Singh Darwesh and Ganesh Das are thus representing an interesting transition. Writers have called Maharaja Ranjit Singh's victories as that of the Khalsa and their portrayal is done with deep-set admiration and vigour.

It is equally important that Muslims carried on the Punjabi literature tradition and made an overwhelming contribution to the literature of the times. An appraisal of the literature product of this period reveals a strong tendency in the Muslim writings towards secular concerns which may partly be explained by the decline of the Mughals. But this tendency reflects both a process of Punjabiisation of their literature impulse and emergence of a new type of literature written for enjoyment and entertainment.²⁰

Qissa genre is about a feudal society.²¹ Although the protagonists of a qissa are generally from the nobility or the rural chaudhary's children but their activities in the qissas were of like other simple folk. This is one reason for its across-class

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.44

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.44

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.45

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.46

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.540-41

²¹ *ibid.*, p.49 Ajmer Singh considers that long-standing waging of battles and other military affairs prevented the Lahore Darbar from commissioning any work on military conquests in either Braj or Punjabi.

popularity.²² It was widely read in groups, sung at fairs and widely performed. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's period saw the cessation of attacks from the North-West. A prosperous peaceful and sovereign state of the Punjabis was a harbinger of 'Punjab Consciousness' reflected politically through the Khalsa Raj/Lahore Darbar. The artistic imagination created a past of splendour and new qissas brimming with the spirit of adventure were in vogue.²³

In an expanding empire, adventure was in the air. The M poets of the period participated whole-heartedly in the spirit of adventure. They were helpful in shifting emphasis from the mystical, metaphysical, speculative and idealistic concerns to romantic, imaginative and hedonistic impulses. The form which came handy to meet the new demands was the scaled new heights. With the singular exception of Waris, Ww contributed the most towards a re-orientation of the form to take in the new challenges only a few decades before, the first half of the 19th century may well be heralded as the Golden Age of Punjabi qissa.²⁴ The most prolific were; Hashim, Ahmad Yar, Qadir Yar (literature excellence and aesthetic quality) Fazal Shah, Ghulam Rasul and Imam Bakhsh (More prolific)²⁵

The drift of Sikh literature away from Punjabi language which had started with some of the compositions of Bhai Gurdas and Guru Arjan, the compiler of Adi Granth, and which was consolidated in the works of Gurus Tegh Bahadur and Gobind Singh, ultimately transformed itself into the mainstream of Sikh literature and intellectual traditions.

The gigantic proportions of this rare repository of Hindi writing in Gurumukhi script remained till recently locked up in the singular uniqueness. Inaccessible both for its archaic style and pervasive Hindu ambience and ignored by Hindi scholars because of its script and its projection of the Sikhs as the noblest expression of the Hindu ideal of glory and heroism, this body of writing is expressive of the latent drive of the Sikh culture towards its source. In all the Sikh historiography in Braj Bhasha during the early 19th century, the strangest in the case of Ratan Singh Bhangu's literature of the Sikhs

²² *ibid.*, p.50

²³ *ibid.*, p.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.541.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.51

which was written for the official of the East India Company but to demonstrate the creedal autonomy of the Sikhs.²⁶

Feudal society was the bedrock of the qissa genre with feudal lords the dominant group. That is why we see that the heroes/heroines are attached with these e.g. even if Sohni was the daughter of kumhars but his father is depicted as a well to do moneylender. If Izzat Beg's (Mahiwal) slave is intoxicated by the beauty of Sohni even then he asks his master to get close with Sohni. No qissakar has bothered to express his own feelings about Sohni.²⁷ This era saw an expansion in the range of qissas with many new subjects coming up both from Indian and Arabic backgrounds.²⁸ Their concerted effort was to search for new story cycles and motifs from all sorts of sources. Before the onset of this period, the poetry had revolved around the cycle with an occasional composition relating to thrown in. Apart from adopting the old cycles, new story motifs were introduced now.²⁹ The local sources were explored for this purpose; the romances of non-Punjabi Indic origin were mined; and lastly non-Indian romances, especially of Muslim origin were also composed.

Finally the literary communication of this period was through an oral tradition. The literary activity was confined to composing, signing and reciting, in short performing and not printing, publishing or reading.³⁰ This might explain that for some critics Punjabi qissa is believed to have originated as a popular counterpart to the predominance of religious literature. For instance Peelu's *Mirza Sahiban* belonging to the earliest phase of of qissas, is a folk narrative without any pronounced religious undertones.³¹ However, we do come across the religious element associated with secular lovers in a referential manner. This assumes a narrative form in Damodar's *Heer*.³² Later on the religious element took roots in qissa when it becomes a regular literary genre in the hands of poets who were also scholars of Islamic theology and Sufi mysticism.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.540

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.50 The socio-political context for later Qissa period. Can we compare it with the establishment of Mughal rule in Punjab, when during the reign of Akbar, Damodar Gulati wrote his *Heer*. CAN, Tejwant Gill on Damodar's Heer. How are these two conjunctures similar to each other and where do they differ?

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.51

²⁹ Singh, Attar: *Political Change and Punjabi Literature in the 19TH Century*, *ibid.*, p.542

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.542

³¹ Rahi, J.S.: *Historical Dynamics of the Qissa*, pp.522-534 , p.525

³² *ibid.*, p.525

Hafiz Barkhurdar, is supposed to be the earliest known proponent of the synthesis of secular love and sufi mysticism in qissa.³³

A settled Punjabi outlook seems to be developing e.g. a Muslim qissakar Qadiryar wrote '*Puran Bhagat*' and '*Raja Rasalu*' whereas Ahmedyar wrote '*Kissa Kam-Rup*' based on Indian mythology. The legendary Punjabi heroes were resurrected.³⁴ Ranjit Singh was much loved as a popular hero and Punjabi qissakars adored him without any hint of patronage in most cases. Salwan, the king of Sialkot, was treated as a forefather of the Maharaja. We can discern a genealogy in these attempts where instead of inventing the customary descent from either Chandravamshi or Suryavamshi clans a distinctly Punjabi treatment is imparted through Salwan to Puran/Rasalu and finally Maharaja Ranjit Singh.³⁵ That an ecumenical space existed allowing for such connections to be made also tells us about the relative identification of the masses with the Lahore Darbar. This is vital evidence regarding the popular image of Lahore Darbarin which legitimacy for Maharaja Ranjit Singh is not sought from any mythical authority or text but from the Punjabi legends of Puran/Rasalu.

Many poets took to qissa genre with tremendous vigour and employed it to give expression to the Sikh thought and Guru - bhakti. This choice, incidentally seems to have blended the hitherto separate streams – one consisting the Sikh lore and the other abiding with love romances, jangnamas, and so on. Punjabi qissa genre is a blend of the Persian *Masnavi* and the Indian *Akhyan* traditions. Muslim qissakars followed the Masnavi style by naming their qissas in Persian. The invocation of titles such as "Hafiz", 'Maulvi', 'Shah' 'Pandit', 'Aarif', etc. shows their scholarship and respectable status.³⁶ Qissa being a traditional genre, it required profuse talent to make any

³³ *ibid.*, p.526. Also see p.527 "This makes the death both a moment and a metaphor signifying physical union and spiritual transcendence as simultaneous experiences. The very ambivalence makes it mystical. Spirituality conceals which the physicality reveals".

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.51

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.51-52. See Singh, Attar: *Political Change and Punjabi Literature in the 19th Century*, p.542-3 "As a measure of new secularizing impulse in Muslim Punjabi writers of this period was the search for heroes other than the traditional lover. These heroes were drawn both from mythology and contemporary literature of the Punjab. What is interesting from the broader culture perspective is the fact that the new hero was either of pre-Islamic origin, such as Puran or Raja Rasalu, the legendary sons of Raja Salwahan of Sialkot, or the ones thrown up by literature like".

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.52. Although such a cross-channeling was happening in the eighteenth century, albeit in minor texts, in the nineteenth it became a part of the mainstream literary tradition. This added a new dimension to the qissa genre.

impression in the pantheon of earlier qissakars. Heer-Hamid is the biggest in size, composed in a long metre.³⁷

Hamid is considered better than Muqbil, even excelling Waris Shah in terms of range and treatment but Waris was much more popular due to his usage of rural Islamicate vocabulary and a reluctance to employ Hindu vocabulary and terms. (Mohan Singh Diwana, 98). Rather than giving headings in Persian or Punjabi he wrote four liners for this purpose for the first time. Another first is his blending of the Indian and Islamic tradition in his narrative, plot and language used which has Persian and Hindvi in good unison. In this sense his language becomes loaded with historical significance.³⁸ He was dead against the 'Heer' for a considerably long period of 22 years but later on got converted to the cause.

Litigation over Hasham Shah's love affair with a Brahmin woman is one reason given for his proximity to Maharaja Ranjit Singh.³⁹ Hasham criticizes the ruling lords of his time in qissa Shirin- Farhad. He remains the only qissakar to openly indulge in such criticism during the Sikh-rule.⁴⁰ No evidence of patronage.⁴¹ A disciple of Ghaus-ul-Azam Abdul Qadir Jeelani of Qadiriyya sect of the sufis.⁴²

He has written in Hindi.⁴³ While Waris mastered the *Baint* metre, whereas Hasham excelled in '*Dawayya*'.⁴⁴ Hasham is deep stand of Sufi-poetry and qissa-genre. Ajmer Singh thinks that Hasham reminds us of the famous Persian poet Abu-Ali Khair. For Hasham, '*Ishq*' is the choice of martyrs; perhaps this is one reason that he etches the social contradictions very minutely. His Farhad is a skilled artisan in love with the princess, Shirin. Also, *ishq* exalts one above the mundane reality. Even difficult than *ishq haqiqi*, in the practice of *ishq majazi* death or martyrdom is inevitable, yet it inspires.⁴⁵

Hasham's concept of *ishq* is not meant for the weak-kneed rather it has a very active principle of valor, initiative and strength, which brooks no interference and

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.54

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.55 Ajmer attributes this to the religious harmony experienced in Ranjit Singh period

³⁹ *ibid.* p.57

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.57-58

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.58

⁴² *ibid.*, p.60

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.61

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.61

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.61-62

struggles incessantly for consummation with ma'ashuq or voluntary death. This conception leads him to admire Mirza more than the poor soul Ranjha.⁴⁶

Aashiq and Shahid are not just highly regarded by Hasham but effectively treated as one.⁴⁷

Can we also suggest that Hasham is proposing an internal critique of the received tradition through the categories of Aashiq and Shahid. Also his rejection of any orthodoxy and sectarianism seems to herald a very Punjabi notion of modernity. Similarly, the category of 'Khalsa' was also an elective category which was above the sectarian boundaries. The complexus of Ashiq-- Shahid-- Khalsa denotes a Punjabi modernity.

Bhambour city, is modeled on Lahore and the ruler of Istanbul is Ranjit Singh.⁴⁸

Hasham's attitude towards the rulers is dichotomous, consciously he is critical of their conduct, sub/unconsciously he is full of praise for them (perhaps the dual treatment is reminiscent of his times).⁴⁹

'Sassi' is his masterpiece, with an artisan, Farhad, as its protagonist. This was a major departure from the Shahanama Firdausi and Nizami Ganjavi's masnavi '*Shiri Va Khusro*', where instead of Farhad, prince Khusro is the hero. This departure was so significant that succeeding poets Ahmedyar and Mohammad Bakhsh Jehlami castigate Hasham for his daring embarkation.⁵⁰

We must pause for a while to deliberate on this significant discursive departure. Where does this fit in with Hasham's overall viewpoint. Although even in his other qissas he praises the artisans e.g. Sohni's father, etc.; even the usual practice of women-bashing is missing in Hasham, rather, he says that even a woman can be a shahid. Where does it take us in delineating the contours of popular ideological vision about Punjabi cultural formation?

Maulvi Ahmedyar was asked to write an epic on Ranjit Singh's life and victories by the Lahore Darbar, on the pattern of Shahnama. Qazi Mohkam Din suggested his

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.61-63

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.63

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.64

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.65

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.65

name.⁵¹ Ahmedyar is also said to be in love with a non-Muslim girl. A disciple of Abdul Qadir Gilani, his Qissa Kam-Rup is very famous.⁵²70

With the demand for new story motifs because of the proliferation of local Punjabi chiefs patronizing the composers, the poets of the period cast their nets wide enough to bring in source other than Punjabi.⁵³

Ahmad yar made a rich contribution by drawing upon the Quran to compose his Ahsan – al – Kasis that revolved around the tale of Yusuf and Zulaikha. This tour-de-force had been extended by him far beyond the Sura-i-yusuf of the Holy Quran and becomes in the process a compendium of Muslim theology, mysticism and ethics. The narrative structure is rather fragile to carry the burden of all this scholastic exercise. The major significance of this work lies in symbolizing the fundamentalist Muslim reaction to the liberal secularizing tendencies initiated by the trends towards consolidation of a liberal Punjabi identity.

Ahmedyar expanded the range of Punjabi qissa genre by creating new aashiqs and narratives. 'Kima-Malki' and 'Roda Jalali' were composed in Punjabi for the first time.⁵⁴ He was the first Muslim qissakar to write a qissa based upon Hindu mythology (Kam Rup). His 'Nal-Damyanti' is also the first in Punjabi. This harmonious spirit also point towards the amicable religious atmosphere during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time.⁵⁵

The narrative of Kam-Rup revolves around a Hindu prince Ram Rup who confronts the ghosts, witches and such like creatures, in pursuit of his lover 'Kam Lata'. This adventures spirit courting victory in the qissa is a celebration of the ethos of the Sikh rule.⁵⁶

This feeling was quite widespread in other qissakars, albeit the Muslim qissakar wrote about the Semitic/Arabic protagonists. Although Ahmedyar was a renowned scholar of Persian, he aspires for a higher status for Punjabi language, which he terms as '*Hind Zubaan*'.⁵⁷ This is evidence enough that for all practical purposes Punjabi was

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.67

⁵² *ibid.*, p.69

⁵³ *ibid.*, p.543-44

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.70

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.70

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.70-71

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.71

hegemonic language to convey the quotidian concerns of masses coupled with an awareness of its status.

'Heer' became the veritable standard to assess the worth of any poet and Ahmedyar was the only poet of Maharaja Ranjit Singh period who wrote a Heer in the manner of Waris but was nowhere near the virtuoso - a fact he himself admits.⁵⁸ Hamid Shah Abbasi purposefully ignores Waris, Hasham is all brevity and pathos, Jog Singh wrote his Heer in *Kabitt* metre and Vir Singh Bal's Heer is drenched in *Gurmat*. They all had carved their own niches, small innovations, differential discourses, whereas Ahmedyar in trying to match Waris step by step is left a worthy loser.

Ahmedyar sought royal patronage and composed various '*Namahs*' and was amply rewarded with *jagirs*, titles and fame. Ranjit Singh-period's pervasive influence is most visible on this qissakar.⁵⁹

Vir Singh is the first baptized Singh qissakar of Heer. He is the first in the line of many succeeding Sikh qissakars.⁶⁰ This is the first qissa in which Guru Gobind Singh is eulogized in the Manglacharan. Vir Singh has sourced his qissa from the *Charitropakhyan* text in *Dasam Granth* by the Guru Gobind Singh. Plausibly, this is the first qissa in which a mythic background is given to Heer.⁶¹ Vir Singh has fused Heer's desperate urge for consummation with Ranjha with his own feelings towards Guru Gobind Singh.⁶² In his unconscious Ranjha stands for Guru Gobind Singh. He himself is Heer and Guru Gobind Singh is Ranjha. It is the loving devotion of *Pir-Murid* relationship. Vir Singh calls Ranjha a 'Gurumukh'.

It is pertinent to mention in this context that Vir Singh's effort at fusing the Punjabi romantic lore with his conception of the Sikh-lore is significant for three reasons:

- The qissa was written at the asking of Maharaja Karam Singh of Patiala, which signifies a certain acceptance of this fusion by the elites.
- Even if Vir Singh is interested only in the propagation of Sikhism, the medium of Heer-Ranjha seems absolutely vital to him for a wider audience.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.71

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.72

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.72

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.73

⁶² *ibid.*, p.74 Ajmer Singh attributes the feeling of Guru devotion of the establishment of Sikh-rule.

- A certain legitimacy from the Sikh audience is guaranteed for this fusion by linking it with the Charitropaphyan of Guru Gobind Singh.

Seen in this manner we can assume that parallel to exegetical polemics; ostensibly Sikh textual culture; sectarian agenda the popular domain assimilated these discourses while simultaneously sticking to its strengths of being alive to their audience. This effort requires that Guru Gobind Singh already a pir of Punjabis should acknowledge the dominance of Heer in Punjab countryside in order to access the Punjabi audience.

Associated with the Patiala darbar, Vir Singh was an accomplished Braj poet who wrote 'Singh Sagar', the life-sketch of Guru Gobind Singh and 'Gur Kirat Prakash', the life sketches of the preceding nine Gurus for the Maharaja of Patiala.⁶³ This is an interesting paradox that the cis-Sutlej states gave ample patronage to writers for composing such texts in contrast to the Lahore Darbar which rarely opted for such an exercise. The signing of 1809 treaty divided Lahore kingdom and the territories under the direct control or political protection of the East India Company consisting of Sikh states of Patiala, Nabha, Jind and Faridkot and the Sikh principalities of Kaithal and Kalsia in South-east Punjab. This divide was instrumental in cutting off major centers of learning, theology and literature in the rest of the country from the dominions of Ranjit Singh.⁶⁴

Vir Singh wrote Heer in 285 cantos in baint metre. Although the qissa starts under the influence of the Dasam Granth but in the treatment of the narrative it is in close proximity to Muqbil. He has created a new character 'Jamman Jati'.⁶⁵

Another aspect of his Heer is the positive portrayal of woman in contrast to their general depiction in contemporary qissas. Guru Nanak's impact in this regard is evident and the qissa espouses these concerns in a spirited fashion.⁶⁶

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.74-75

⁶⁴ Singh, Attar: "Political Change and Punjabi Literature in the Nineteenth Century", pp.535-536 in *Five Punjabi Centuries*, Manohar, Delhi,(ed), Banga, Indu. While much has been said about division in the literary scene of Punjab in which Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi literature flourished as expressions of different religious affiliations, the significance of the division between the two parts of the Punjabi, one coming under the Sikh kingdom and the other under British tutelage, has been treated cursorily so far.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.75

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.75-76

Vir Singh classifies women into two categories: *kaladhar* and *kalakar*. It is safe to assume that Dasam Granth's ascribed characteristics of a Kalakar woman inform Vir Singh's description.

Vir Singh's 'Heer' is saturated with the Gurbani worldview. The total lack of sensuousness can also be explained through his connection.⁶⁷

Heer Jog Singh is the first Punjabi qissa composed in *Kabitts*. The qissa genre was enriched by this chhand derived from Braj by a Sikh qissakar. Earlier sporadic kabitts on Heer-Ranjha were attempted e.g. Gang Bhat's.⁶⁸ Heer-Jog Singh is included in the best of Heers. Bhagwan Singh is much influenced by Heer Jog Singh, especially praising the end in Jog Singh's qissa. Jog Singh also mentions the mythic origins of Heer like Vir Singh with one crucial difference. Where the latter makes Guru Gobind Singh as Ranjha and himself as Heer, Jog Singh makes Krishan the Ranjha and Heer as Radha. Ranjha of Waris has '*vanjhali*' whereas Jog Singh's has '*Murli*'. The two romances are seamlessly interwoven. That the Vaishnava cult of Krishna was gaining ground in the 18th century Punjab is evident from the compositions like the Kahn Bhagwan Di Var, Prem Di Var and Jhagra Kahn Gujri Ka. A similar influence of the cult of Rama is evident from the Luv Kush Di Var written by a devotee.⁶⁹

Jog Singh's poetic craft is mounted on his proximity to the *Reeti* tradition of Braj with some obvious influences. Although both Heer and Ranjha are Muslims they are conceived in the overarching tradition of Krishna-devotion.⁷⁰

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's period saw the efflorescence of the Siharfi form.⁷¹

Salwan – Rasalu/Puran - Maharaja Ranjit Singh was Qadiryar's creation. He resurrected the ancient Punjabi tradition and its heroes. A Muslim poet did bring alive Hindu heroes and especially Puran Bhagat was immortalized by appending with Qadiryar's genius.⁷²

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p.76. Dr. Nahar Singh: Somewhere we have to map this process. It will be interesting to locate the three levels where differential discourses are pitched up and their mutual osmosis. My hunch is that Gurbani is linked up with Punjabi folksongs through the mediation of Qissas, Kaveeshari, etc.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p.77

⁶⁹ Johal Daljinder Singh : *Evidence on Religion in Punjabi Literature: Late 18th and Early 19th Century*, Journal of Regional History; GNDU, Amritsar, Vol.-V, 1984, p.33

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.78

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.79

⁷² *ibid.*, p.80 Why did he write this qissa having a deep impression on Punjabi populace? Opinions differ, ranging from legends about his own experience with his sister-in-law in recording the moral downfall of

The settled conditions of Maharaja Ranjit Singh period went a long way to discover new subjects, traditions and eulogizing their heroes and Qadiryar is the epitome of this tendency. Not only did he composed 'Puran Bhagat', 'Raja Rasalu', 'Rani Kokilan Di Var', he was also the first one to write an ode to Hari Singh Nalva and the 'Meraj Nama'⁷³ Qadiryar's real name was Qadir Bakhsh. He has praised 'Sarkar Khalsa' intentionally or otherwise.⁷⁴ Following Hasham's Heer, Qadiyar wrote his Puran in Siharfi form.⁷⁵ 'Puran Bhagat' avoids the usual convention of *hamd* and the cajoling by friends.⁷⁶

It seems that Qadiryar virtually sings the praises of Ranjit Singh's forefathers; resurrected legendary Punjabi heroes to such an extent that they became hegemonic streams and the succeeding Hindu, Muslim and Sikh qissakars took to these subjects with 'Puran' alone counting for nearly 50 different qissas.⁷⁷

A scholar of Persian, Imam Bakhsh translated the Persian masnavi 'Gul Sanobar' into Punjabi⁷⁸. His murshid was Hazrat Mahi-Uddin Shah Jilani.

Imam Bakhsh's status is caught up between two paradoxical tendencies witnessed during Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his own predilection towards Persian literature and Islamic mythology and history.⁷⁹

Imam Bakhsh departs from the usual love-romance of Punjab and writes qissas overflowing with adventure and magical elements, supernatural, sorcery and wizardry. The predicament responsible for conceptualizing love as *faqiri* dimmed with the passage of eighteenth century and the Lahore kingdom threw up new chiefs who relished Shah Behram by Imam Bakhsh, a qissa poet of early-nineteenth century. Shah Behram is a high-pitched romance of the luxuries of love, youth beauty, music, wine and the supernatural for the new rulers.⁸⁰

Imam Bakhsh wrote 'Shah Behram', 'Malakzada Shahpari', 'Adham Balkhi', 'Badi-ul-Jamal', 'Gul Sanobar', 'Gul Badan' qissas for the first time in Punjabi. Imam

the jatts and hence the need to create a contemporary hero in the jogis. [Dr. Mohan Singh Diwana] Ajmer Singh differs with this suggestion.⁷²

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.81-82

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.82

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.83

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.83

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.84

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p.85

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.85-86

⁸⁰ Rahi, J.S.: *Historical Dynamics of the Qissa*, pp.522-534, p.532.

Bakhsh did not follow Hasham in portraying Farhad as hero in his '*Shirin*'; rather he followed Nizami Ganjavi's '*Shiri-va-Khushro*' in his qissa.⁸¹ Imam Bakhsh and Maharaja Ranjit Singh relation is two-sided.⁸²

Firstly, distant lands are conquered in pursuit of love. However, the issue is whether Maharaja Ranjit Singh rule is the inspiration or the anchoring of these pursuits in Islamic paradigm, a reaction against Ranjit Singh's rule and the ascendancy of the non-Muslim. The next question is how to go about retrieving the lost splendor of Muslims or Islam in Punjab? Imam Bakhsh's dependence upon the supernatural also shows a lack of a viable carrier of such a feeling in the Muslim populace. He typically assures the Muslims that *Fazl-i-Ilahi* [God's grace] will take care of their sovereignty:

Imam Bakhsh's protagonists are also different from that of Mohammad Bakhsh Jehlami's qissa '*Saiful Maluk*' and other adventurous qissas because they do not suffer any hardship. At his command are millions of *Farishtas*, etc.⁸³ Islamic philosophy is a major ingredient in Imam Bakhsh's oeuvre e.g. his *Badi-ul-Jamal* is loaded with Arabic *ayats*. He is propagating *Din* through the qissa genre.

While comparing Hasham with Imam Bakhsh the former's *ishq* is meant for strong-mettled persons, whereas the latter is dependent on supernatural forces. Also Hasham's Farhad, an artisan stands in contrast to Imam Bakhsh's Khusro, a prince. This internal transformation of mentalite in Punjabi Muslims acts as necessary check on two tendencies prevalent in scholarship on nineteenth century Punjab namely to treat the popular sphere as devoid of contestations even amongst co-religionists. Therefore a generic hostility to Muslim as the other gets redundant. Furthermore such phenomena point towards the verity of distinguishing between plural nodes from the exclusivist or communitarian closures in the popular cultural production.

Lakh Shah is the first Muslim qissakar to employ an Indian metre '*deodh*' as given in *Pingal*.⁸⁴ His main assets are an encyclopedic knowledge and minute observation of daily life inviting comparisons with Waris Shah.⁸⁵ Bambore city is modeled upon Lahore [also in Hasham] and Ranjit Singh is virtually the ruler of

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p.86

⁸² *ibid.*, p.86-87

⁸³ *ibid.*, p.87

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.87

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.88

Bhambore.⁸⁶Qissa is replete with references to the Sikh culture. Adam Jam's religious policy mirrors that of Maharaja Ranjit Singh :⁸⁷Sassi for the first time has been portrayed as a '*jogan*' and '*Sati*' by a Muslim qissakar. Lakh Shah calls her a disciple of Gorakh Nath.⁸⁸For the Same reason, Sassi in the desert is not a jilted lovesick person but an exalted sati out to perform a ritual in all grace.

Ganga Ram was a disciple of Manohar Dass Udasi of Patiala.⁸⁹Although Punjabi qissa stream originated with Damodar Gulati, a Hindu, but their number was small untill Ranjit Singh's rule. Chandra Bhan, Sundar Das Aram, Gurdas Guni etc. are some of Damodar's successors. Ganga Ram takes this chain further. In fact, 1850s – 1950s is a golden period for Hindu qissakars who propagated Hindu ethical norms and values, through the medium of qissa. Kalidas Gujranwalia and Daulat Ram are the best in this connection. ⁹⁰The earlier Hindu qissakars were not concerned with religious moral propaganda.⁹¹

Now we can state with enough confidence the fact that qissa writing was the supreme achievement for any writer. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs took to his genre with an untrammelled vigor and mounted their ethics, morals, norms, reforms, propaganda through this genre. Thus, the hitherto separate streams of religious-sectarian works and Punjabi folk-romances were seamlessly woven in the nineteenth century. Thus, the boundaries between sacred and profane were sought to be resolved and the Punjabi shared cultured paradigm forced the sectarian boundaries to renegotiate the terms of co-existence in nineteenth -century Punjab. It is not surprising that the onset of colonial modernity through the social reform movements was formally arraigned against each other although substantively they were united against this popular Punjabi consensus on what constituted their religious tradition or *dharma*. Singh Sabha movement's attacks on *pattals*, women's songs, etc. is an example to highlight this tendency.

Qissa – genre in the nineteenth -century is charting a new social journey by mediating between the high tradition of scholarship, knowledge and religious virtue and the little tradition of everyday life, its customs, desires, contradictions. The eighteenth

⁸⁶ ibid., p.88

⁸⁷ ibid., p.88-89

⁸⁸ ibid., p.89

⁸⁹ ibid., p.91

⁹⁰ ibid., p.90

⁹¹ ibid., p.90

century qissa was itself a part of high tradition on account of its exacting standards and claims to virtue.

He was a *tablighi* for whole of his life in Multan.⁹² He resisted the British forces during their campaign to annex Punjab.⁹³

Maulvi Ghulam Rasul Awan represents the transition from a Sufi stance to the *Shariat* orthodoxy amongst the Punjabi Muslim qissakars.⁹⁴

His 'Sassi' is still steeped in Sufi colours because of his peculiar condition, which says that when he was asked to halt his pilgrimage to the Pir Sahib of Kotha Sharif he thought of himself as Sassi and Punnu as Pir. This qissa is said to represent his desire, *ishq*, *tassawuf*, etc. However, later on, he grew rather repentant of his 'indiscretion' because he was an orthodox sura Muslim. As a penance, he wrote *Hulia Sharif*.⁹⁵

This is also representative of the process of increasing orthodoxy in Punjabi Islam from its earlier liberal, rural, Sufi ways. Hamid Shah Abbasi at the start of eighteenth century wrote his 'Heer' after opposing it for 22 years. However by 1850, Maulvi Ghulam Rasul Awaan repented for writing 'Sassi' in a fit of Sufic indiscretion by reverting to orthodoxy. Alongwith the earlier Hasham to Imam Bakhsh transition this case also points to the same direction of hardening sectarian boundaries and its attended communitarian concerns.

Known to have performed several miracles, he went to Mecca on a Haj.⁹⁶ He was arrested by the British during 1857 for conspiring with the Frontier Pathans, but had to be released on the request by Diwan Jwala Sahai of Jammu and Kashmir. Ghulam Rasul's 'Sassi' is rated quite high without a slightest trace of pedantry, bordering on the plane and rugged and rather modern in its treatment.⁹⁷

Fazal Shah wrote the best qissa in Sohni tradition when Sikh rule was on its last legs in baint metre⁹⁸. Although many preceding greats like Hasham, Ahmedyar and Qadiryar had written this qissa still Fazal Shah's stands on its own and was extremely

⁹² *ibid.*, p.91

⁹³ *ibid.*, p.91

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.92-93

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.92

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.92

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.93

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.93

popular. Fazal Shah's basic plot is taken from Hasham and Qadiryar; however, his treatment is influenced by Waris. Dr. M. S. Diwana calls him the best Punjabi.⁹⁹ Fazal Shah is also in the league of Maulvi Ghulam Rasul Awaan in tilting towards the classical Islamic tradition. Fazal wrote other four qissas besides Sohni, but those could not become popular due to his scholastic Persianised Punjabi and his similes/metaphors were not from the daily life rather from Islamic texts and Persian classics. His '*Sohni*' avoids this scholasticism and remains true to the soil of Punjab.¹⁰⁰

A comparative look at *nakh-shikh* tells the whole story:¹⁰¹

His Persianate treatment smothers the Punjabi sensibility in his later qissas, Heer included. The impending doom of the Sikh state is also stirring the society into divergent directions, which impacts even the structure of feeling of a qissakar. This accounts for differential notions of beauty of Heer and Sohni.¹⁰²

In the post- Maharaja Ranjit Singh period the Muslim qissakars veered increasingly towards Persian. Whereas, the earlier ones Hamid Shah Abbasi and Lakh Shah had a tuneful fusing of both Persian and Braj with Punjabi.¹⁰³ Fazal Shah is also said to be romantically linked with a Hindu girl.¹⁰⁴ Fazal Shah was extremely proud of Lahore.¹⁰⁵

Gurbax Singh is the first Sikh qissakar to contribute towards Sassi-stream and the third in line after Vir Singh and Jog Singh.¹⁰⁶ Besides his classic jangnama, Shah Mohammad wrote a Sassi in Siharfi form:¹⁰⁷

Maharaja Ranjit Singh period is considered the golden period of qissa genre due to:¹⁰⁸ the conditions of regional freedom, prosperity and local despotism uniquely helped the qissa to flourish. Its depth and range were enriched due to these conditions. Secondly, in the pre- Ranjit Singh period the range of the qissas was limited to six narratives: *Heer*, *Mirza*, *Sassi*, *Yousuf*, *Sorath Bija* and *Saiful Maluk*. However, the Sikh

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p.94

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.94-95

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p.94-95

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p.94-95

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p.95

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p.95

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p.95-96 Can we assume that praise for the city of Lahore was turned into a kind of convention to be followed by qissakars?

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p.96

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p.96-97

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p.97-100

period saw this range magnificently expanded to include *Sohni, Raj-Bibi, Kima-Malki, Puran, Rasalu, Shirin-Farhad, Shah-Bahram, Ibrahim Adam Balkhi, Gul Sanobar, Gulbadan, Kamrup, Hatimatai*, etc. This diversity was a highlight of this period.¹⁰⁹ Thirdly, this era was witness to a poetic genius of the stature of Hasham Shah and his awesome 'Sassi.' In addition many a classic/paradigmatic qissas were composed in their various streams in this period, e.g.¹¹⁰ *Puran Bhagat- Qadiryar; Kamrup -Ahmedyar; Shah Behram-Imam Bakhsh; Sohnī -Fazal Shah*. Fourthly, this era is also witness to diversity in poetic form and metres. Kabitts, Deodh and Siharfi were attempted successfully. Siharfi proved to be very popular with numerous writers e.g. Hasham, Qadiryar, Shah Mohammad, Ganga Ram, Sultan Ahmed, etc.¹¹¹ Fifthly, Guru Gobind Singh was eulogized in a Manglacharan of a qissa for the first time in this period. This was conjoined with an attempt to disseminate the Sikh-worldview. Vir Singh's 'Heer' in 1812 articulated his devotion to Guru Gobind Singh besides arriving at the Gurmat. Sikh Qissakars' acceptance of qissa-genre also opened new avenues for the eventual development of the genre and his trend continued till the early -twentieth century.¹¹²

The spirit of audacity, of conquering distant lands was articulated in the qissas. The protagonists excelled in different fields.¹¹³ The archetypal qissas are free from sectarian orthodoxy, whereas in the early- twentieth century qissas this tendency is widespread. Hamid and Lakh Shah's atmosphere is missing in pre- and post- Ranjit Singh period qissas. In the Sikh-period, the ordinary qissakar was addressing the populace which later on got scholasticised e.g. Fazal Shah, Maulvi Ghulam Rasul, etc. In fact, the qissas of this period epitomise this tendency of growing sectarianism, from an earlier condition of Sufic tasawwuf and the intensity of ishq.¹¹⁴ Punjabi qissakars cast a reflective eye on the annals of Punjabi-lore and re-created ancient folk-legends, mythology and historical narratives. Qadiryar is a pioneer in this respect. His 'Puran Bhagat' celebrates the predecessors of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, namely, Raja Salwan of Sailkot. 'Raja Rasalu' is another such example. One is a renouncer par excellence whereas, the other is a righteous king. Qadiryar, a Muslim qissakar, eulogizes Hindu characters, modeled on a Sikh, Maharaja Ranjit Singh thus standing testimony to an

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.97

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.98

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p.98

¹¹² *ibid.*, p.98

¹¹³ *ibid.*, p.98-99

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.99

evolving Punjabi identity, having its unique strand of values, universality and world-view.¹¹⁵

Although, Maharaja Ranjit Singh did not appoint anyone as his court poet, still patronage was not altogether lacking and was available in diffused forms e.g. Ahmadyar. Lahore Darbar provided him jagir and in'am. A certain 'Sarkar' patronizing Hasham and 'Sardar' doing the same for Qadiryar is fairly plausible. Abdul Hakim Oochvi presented his 'Yousuf-Zuleikhan' to Nawab Bahawalpur. Hamid Shah Abbasi was a courtier/noble of Raja Nurpur. Vir Singh was a direct beneficiary of Maharaja Patiala, Karam Singh.¹¹⁶

The Khalsa Army was the principal bulwark of state always matching itself against the British from day one and they lived up to their creed of sovereignty in the battlefield. Although the courtiers were instrumental in corrupting the army but still it retained loyalty towards Khalsa Raj. In contrast to the courtiers, it was the army *panchayats* that quelled the rampant anarchy in the ranks and reorganized the troops.¹¹⁷ The contrasting roles of Sikh soldiers and the commanders in the post-Ranjit Singh period were quite to the fore. Shah Mohammad is also aware of these contradictions as expressed in his Jangnamah. Also, the later rebellions led by Bhai Maharaj Singh, Baba Bir Singh Naurangabadi, Baba Ram Singh Namdhari, etc. point towards a certain political sentiment prevalent in the lower ranks of the Khalsa Army. Exactly what kind of institution was the Khalsa Army? What was its popular perception? What happened to its commanders, both the respected ones and the traitors?

The Khalsa Army surrendered on 11 March 1849 at Rawalpindi. 'Ranjit Singh is dead today!', said a surrendering veteran.¹¹⁸ Literature about the decline of Ranjit Singh's rule has three categories:¹¹⁹ about the fratricidal war of Lahore Darbar; about the first Anglo-Sikh War and; about the second Anglo-Sikh War.

Almost, the whole of this literature was composed in poetry, with three kinds of poets contributing: those indirectly related to the Lahore Darbar e.g. Gwal Bhat; those at the prompting of the British officers e.g. Kahn Singh Banga and; those who wrote out of their own conviction e.g. Shah Mohammad, Matak, etc.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.99

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.99-100

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.106

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.108

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.109

This Var is composed in the classical style. However, rather than having classical scholasticism it is nearer to the folk-universe. The poet describes Maharaja Kharak Singh as consummate renouncer. The Rajas of Jammu consider it *infra dig* to obey Maharani Chand Kaur:

Wrote at the behest of Raja Hira Singh, Vazir Khalsa Raj.¹²⁰ This text praises Maharaja Ranjit Singh however it is full of venom for his relatives, the Sandhanwalia Sardars. Vijay-Vinod's protagonists are the Dogra clan especially Raja Dhyan Singh and Raja Hira Singh. It is mostly factual and compares favourably with the records of the Lahore Darbar.

The varkar, Hira, is a devotee of the Sakhi Sarvar.¹²¹ According to the var, Baba Sahib Singh Bedi's son Baba Bikram Singh Bedi was instrumental in forging a relationship between Maharaja Sher Singh and the Sandhanwalia Sardars. Sandhanwalias were from Raja Sansi, Amritsar. In this var, the description concerning the mutual distrust, conspiracies, envy as well as affection is admirably handled and presented in adherence to the conventions of the genre.¹²²

A masterpiece of Punjabi literature Shah Mohammad's poem is a typical example of how the genres of qissa, var and jangnama were intermixed within the period of half a century.¹²³

Shah Mohd's relatives were in direct contact with the Lahore Darbar, occupying high posts in the Khalsa army.¹²⁴ His jangnama is very popular. Written at the behest of his friends Hira and Noor Khan. Narrative is in close proximity to the events.¹²⁵ His description of Rani Jindan is historically inaccurate but nonetheless conveys the popular perception.

Anti -Dogra vitriol is at its scalding caustic best. Hasham's brevity in qissas is ably transposed in the jangnama genre by Shah Mohd.¹²⁶ As a convention of this genre, Shah Mohd praises the bravery of the opponent.¹²⁷ His anti-British discourse is

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p.112-4

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p.114-6

¹²² *ibid.*, p.116

¹²³ Rahi, J.S.: *Historical Dynamics of the Qissa*, pp.522-534 p.525.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p.117

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p.118

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p.121

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p.122 Ajmer Singh views Shah Mohd as a popular personification of the religious policy of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

culturally rooted. The British are not just unwelcome outsiders; they are also a threat to the fraternal living of Hindus and Muslims [Sikhs included]. This 'third caste' (the English) will contaminate the Punjabi life.¹²⁸

Shah Mohammad's Jangnama places at the center the particularly enriched Punjabi religious universe-with Ranjit Singh, Lahore Darbar, Khalsa Army and the brave commanders as its custodians – against the traitors and their British masters. It is not just a narrow *clash of civilizations* but a clash of universal values celebrated by the Punjabis and the rabid mercantilism of the British. Viewed in this manner the resultant focus on the battlefield treats the Sikh soldiers not just fighting to save the honour of Lahore Darbar but of the entire Punjabi world-view. This gives those soldiers an elemental sheen of righteousness.

Also, the sense of commoners' belonging in the institution of state is made apparent by the treatment and discourse of the jangnama. This process should be seen in continuity from the earlier texts of Hakam Singh Darvesh and Ganesh Das. Both of these are jangnamas composed in 1830s. Coupled with these we have seen that the underlying complexus of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Lahore Darbar, people's perception, religious policy is visible in the structure of feeling in qissas, Siharfis, vars, etc. This underlying unity is made the focal point by Shah Mohammad. Although small in size, it is an outstanding document of the universal cultural paradigm of the Punjabis in the nineteenth century.

Shah Mohammad categories British as the sons of a sahuakar – a Gumasta. This is a surprisingly forthright class description which has been embellished by the additional demerits of being ' ' and ' '. Shah Mohammad's text thus subscribes to the peasant values and norms as well as universal-historical categories. [Theodor Shanin, Russian Peasants; 1905]¹²⁹

Khalsa Raj for Shah Mohammad is the epitome of Punjabi achievement. It thus comes to acquire a centrality in the web of mediations, which has that elusive capacity to haunt the coming generations. Shah Mohammad is extremely conscious of this fact and his jangnama is especially a homage to the destruction of this Punjabi

¹²⁸ ibid., p.123

¹²⁹ ibid., p.123

dream.¹³⁰ Baint is the metre employed by Shah Mohammad with ample dexterity, to compare favorably with Waris Shah.¹³¹

A patriot, Matak's Jangnama has additional information to complement Shah Mohammad. Metre used is *deodh*.¹³² Matak is more severe in his criticism of the traitors than Shah Mohammad.¹³³ Sham Singh Attariwala is the hero of Sabhraon.¹³⁴ Matak praises the British battle exploits.¹³⁵

Kahan Singh wrote his jangnama at the behest of the Deputy Commissioner of Jalandhar, Mr. Wenstart.¹³⁶ It is plausible that Kahan Singh be a British employee and his praise for the British stems from this fact. He has praised Maharaja Ranjit Singh a lot but the Sikh army has been denounced. The Sikh-lore is sought to be employed against the Sikh army. Masnavi form is put to use. It has two merits: loaded with information regarding battles and second, its language is a good standard to compare the contemporaries. Kahan Singh has written this jangnama from the British view point still he has let out the other version:¹³⁷ Thus limits to the pro-British attitude are made visible.

This text is replete with the panegyrics to Multan pirs.¹³⁸ This is interesting when compared with the earlier vars written about Multan. There the Pirs of Multan are defeated by Guru Gobind Singh in a spiritual polemic but here these very Pirs are the protectors of the Singhs. Obviously, the altered external condition as well as the transformation in internal worlds is going on from Hakam Singh Darwesh, Ganesh Das and Sobha Baloch. Sobha's var establishes the connection between communal attitude and pro-imperialist leanings. In a way, he reverses the discursive thrust of Ganesh Das and portrays the patriotic Diwan Mul Raj of Multan as a crippled figure.¹³⁹

Punjabi poets strongly identified with the newly established Punjabi state and that's why their resentment is so well expressed. The 'teesri jat' Britishers have usurped the freedom of Punjabis. The demise of Ranjit Singh and the subsequent loss of

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p.1234-4

¹³¹ *ibid.*, p.124

¹³² *ibid.*, p.124-25

¹³³ *ibid.*, p.126

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p.126-27

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p.124

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, p.127-8

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p.129

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p.130

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p.130

sovereignty accentuate the causal sequence and this is one reason besides many others to regard Ranjit Singh as an idol and a visionary of Punjab. Somehow, the category 'Singh' is collectively made to represent everything positive about Maharaja Ranjit Singh – "Singhs embody the spirit of Ranjit Singh rule, which could not have been lost to the British, but for the treacherous role of the Dogras", etc.¹⁴⁰ The enduring mystique of Lahore Darbar, Ranjit Singh, annexation can be explained through this template.

Interestingly, the patriotic sentiment is dominant in the literature about ASW-I whereas, literature about ASW-II is veering towards British praise.¹⁴¹

One distinguishing feature of the literary production eulogizing Maharaja Ranjit Singh is the creative inspiration provided by the Maharaja himself without any notions of court patronage. This is one fact that differentiates the Punjabi texts from their contemporary Reeti-poets in North India, whereas, their creative expression is in close proximity to the popular feeling.¹⁴²

Sadhu Gulab Das is the only poet to criticize Maharaja Ranjit Singh.¹⁴³

Ranjit Singh as 'avatar in Kalyug':¹⁴⁴ Ganesh Das recreates the typology established by Kesar Singh Chhibber in the eighteenth century by treating Ranjit Singh as Krishan and the 'Turks' as 'dusht':¹⁴⁵

The brahminical elements eulogising Ranjit Singh view him as fundamentally an anti-Muslim crusader, which qualifies him as an avatar. In addition, it limits his status as a military personality only. Hindu, Muslim and Sikh all the poets have called Maharaja Ranjit Singh an avatar. Maharaja Ranjit Singh as an all-conquering king:¹⁴⁶

Maharaja Ranjit Singh – rule was satyug incarnate:

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.132-33

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.130. One is reminded of the transformation occurring in the vars of Bhai Gurdas – from humility to a militant ethic – after the martyrdom of GS. Interestingly, this event starts the process of militarisation of the Sikh Panth. And, it is the genre of var that conveys the eventual passing away of the Sikh sovereignty 'from a freedom-loving stance to surrender/sycophancy'

¹⁴² *ibid.*, p.135

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, p.136. This is significant – *Gulabdasi Sampraday* and its ideology, Piro and Gulab Das, Caste question and women, equality.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.136

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.136

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.137. Sant Singh Sekhon's observation about the upward social mobility of the Sikhs is reflected in this.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh as a military leader, brave and chivalrous:¹⁴⁷

The power and authority of the Maharaja Ranjit Singh :¹⁴⁸

This authority was practiced against the criminal and the poor and meek were protected by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. In fact, this is the crowning achievement of his rule. Maharaja Ranjit Singh authority was diametrically opposite to that of the Nadir Shah.¹⁴⁹ Maharaja Ranjit Singh as good samaritan, popular amongst people, donations for religious establishments.¹⁵⁰ Maharaja Ranjit Singh as a consummate *gursikh* – his personal devotion to Sikhism - Maharaja Ranjit Singh was called 'Singh Sahib' even after the annexation of Punjab .¹⁵¹

Ranjit Singh is portrayed as an aashiq and consequently worthy of respect and honour. Sawanyar treats him in the chain of classical lovers of the Punjab. Moran being his muse, even divan Amar Nath mentions it in significant detail in his 'Zafarnama-Ranjit Singh.'¹⁵² It seems that Maharaja Ranjit Singh represented that ideal persona which inspired others to invest all the characteristics on him. A certain secularization process especially of the Sikh lore is displayed here. Sawanyar states that Maharaja Ranjit Singh-Moran ishq had permeated the entire Punjabi social milieu, where even the spinning-wheel sessions were agog with this event. The public had given its consent to this union.¹⁵³ Maharaja Ranjit Singh as an ever-alert, intelligent, inspiring figure:¹⁵⁴ Folk songs were composed in his honour, long considered the epitome of popularity among the masses:¹⁵⁵

There are two important texts available on Maharaja Ranjit Singh.¹⁵⁶ In this Siharfi composed in baint metre he has given Ranjit Singh according to his own perception. He has compared Maharaja with Pandavas of Mahabhart, Raja Bikramjit, Firoun, Naushervan, etc. Sawanyar attributes Ranjit Singh's political prowess to the spiritual greatness of the Guru Gobind Singh and Guru Nanak as well as the result of grace bestowed by Pirs on Maharaja Ranjit Singh.¹⁵⁷ Mulkh Punjab - Maharaja Ranjit

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.138

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.139

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.140

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.140-41

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.141

¹⁵² *ibid.*, p.141-43

¹⁵³ *ibid.*, p.142-43

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.143

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.143-44

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.144

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.144-45

Singh ----- later on when the Punjabis join Indians against the British and in Poet – 1947 era, ----- becomes synonymous with the Punjab itself. In the mid - 19th century, even the love of the land is mediated through personages, whereas, in 20th century it acquires a sovereignty of its own. Maharaja Ranjit Singh death was caused by poisonous liquour provided by the This fills in with the general description of the British as Suggesting that the very death of Ranjit Singh was also due to treachery further reinforces the earlier assertion that Punjab was annexed by chance.¹⁵⁸

Jafar Begh has described the scenes of desolation of ordinary Lahoris very movingly. According to Jafar Begh, the prevalent feeling among the masses was to declare that today the Kingdom of Hind has been overturned.¹⁵⁹ Prior to the first Anglo-Sikh War and Shah Mohammad Punjab was considered in distinction to the rest of Hind. However simultaneously, Punjab was an embodiment of Hind also and its hero, Ranjit Singh was a representative of India against the British. This also confirms that rather than being any token or synthetic figurehead, it was the militant-powerful opposition to the British that will determine who is a true Indian.

Nalwa has the distinction of being the most written about Sardar .HSN died in 1837.¹⁶⁰ Qadiryar was impressed by Hari Singh Nalwa's bravery and secondly, both belonged to Gujranwala. Qadiryar's composition was the most famous.¹⁶¹ Nalwa is compared with Raja Karan, Bikramjit and Hatimtai.¹⁶² Although he was killed in a battle against the Pathans, Qadiyar calls them the 'founders of tyranny' (*zulm de bani*):¹⁶³

This var is not written in the classical form of Pauri, without any Manglacharan and Kal-Narad dialogue. Although deficient in many formulaic ways, it stands apart due to its linguistic felicity, staccato narrative and dramatic intensity.¹⁶⁴

How conveniently the Sikh terminology is made to treat the Lahore Darbar as something worth dying for. The writer being a Muslim his easy usage of such terms in a secular cause is full of interesting possibilities. A surefooted secularization is underway in Ranjit Singh – period.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.145-46

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.146. One is reminded of the same when Haqiqat Rai was taken to gallows and the collective sorrows of Lahoris, captured in a Var by Agra Sethi.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.147

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.148-49

¹⁶² *ibid.*, p.149

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, p.149-50

Sahai Singh comes across as a Devi devotee who makes Nalwa follow a vrat during the battle of Jamraud.¹⁶⁵ Nalwa and Jamadar Khushhal Singh are compared and the former passes the test with flying colours. Nishani Chhand is used.¹⁶⁶ Khatri is given a prominent place in this 'jangnama' and the references are sourced from Hindu mythologies and epics.¹⁶⁷ Nalwa's mother castigates Ranjit Singh for not helping out his son. Muslims are derogatorily addressed as 'Musle'.¹⁶⁸ Khatri is mentioned prominently along with Brahmins emboldening the discourse of Ganesh Das, Anad, Kesar Singh Chhibber, and so on.

Nalwa has been made out to be a Chandi Bhagat.¹⁶⁹ He is an ideal person, bringing along his qualities of righteousness, chivalry.¹⁷⁰ Gurmukh Singh employs the 'Bachittar Natak' of Guru Gobind Singh to associate Nalwa in the pantheon of great martyrs of the battlefield.¹⁷¹

Akali Phula Singh is considered a quintessential Sikh warrior with an active sense of divided loyalty between the Sikh tradition and the institution of the Lahore Darbar. His frequent altercations with Ranjit Singh are attributable to this attitude. Famously, to honour the *ardas* and its commandment, he courted martyrdom rather than beating retreat. He was a much-respected figure amongst the Sikh army.¹⁷² The Nihangs and Phula Singh are profusely eulogized with their attire getting due space.¹⁷³ The usual description of their attire says a lot about the wide respect that they had acquired. Nihangs embodied the values of the Khalsa – TatKhalsa if you like. However, Oberoi should take note that the visual aspect of Sikh identity was in currency long before the advent of the Singh Sabha movement. Having said that, this attire is not an end in itself but a complementarity to individual valour and values. Although no separate text is available about him, Hakam Singh Darwesh and Ganesh Das have mentioned Phula

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.150

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.151

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.153.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p.154-55

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p.156 This virulently anti-Muslim strain is also alive in upper castes. Maharaja Ranjit Singh is also criticised in a wild manner. Lala Kirpa Sagar carries this strain further.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.159

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.160

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.161

¹⁷² *ibid.*, p.161-63

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, p.162

Singh in their texts¹⁷⁴Sham Singh is the hero of the battle of Sabhraon . Ganesh Das, Shah Mohammad and Matak have mentioned him in their writings in glowing terms.¹⁷⁵

Without any overt patronage, Ranjit Singh and his generals were a source of popular adoration and Hindu, Muslim and Sikh poets composed their odes. With those warriors becoming the protagonists, the earlier martyr is now transformed into a valorous fighter who courts death. This transition is also significant in our argument about the secularization of the Sikh lore. Neither the British nor their cohorts have been treated as heroes. Nalwa is the epitome of Maharaja Ranjit Singh period values. Distantiation should be seen in this case where Nalwa as a satellite is eulogized compared with the centralized symbol of Ranjit Singh.

Post-1849, many Sikh chiefs turned towards the British rule whereas the populace never accepted the British and never forgot the Maharaja. It was during the Singh Sabha movement that a discourse about the moral decay of the Sikhs responsible for losing the Sikh Raj. However, the gurdwara reform movement had a link with Ranjit Singh. The land grants to gurdwaras were a major component in mahants' corrupt ways and its mass base was energized to launch a movement against the mahants as well as their backers, the British.¹⁷⁶ The literary production honouring Maharaja Ranjit Singh is unparalleled. Available in many forms, it shows the grip of Ranjit Singh on Punjabi inspiration.¹⁷⁷

Said to be a free-wheeling translation of Walter Scott's *Lady of the Lake*, Lakshmi Devi (1915) reads like an original piece.¹⁷⁸ Many interesting facets are available: protagonist though overtly is Ranjit Singh but the real one is a Rajput, Jaimal Singh. Rajputs are the bedrock of Hindu glory. Proximity in space and time to have a closer relation with Punjabi/Pahari Hindus. One aspect is that it is not just the Sikhs or Muslims who are brave but even Hindus can be as strong. Considered to be influenced by the Arya Samaj movement, Lakshmi Devi is a conscious attempt to arouse the Punjabi Hindu to rediscover his lost glory. However, the linguistic resource is Punjabi and the story revolves around Ranjit Singh – tells us about the discursive sway held over the Punjabis.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.162

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.163

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.166. Reference to Maharaja Ranjit Singh in GRM appeals, discoursey teach, etc., Ranjit Singh-rule is alive in Punjabis in very many ways. [Prakash S. Badal's Maharaja Ranjit Singh-rule.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.167

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p.168

No other king was honored like Ranjit Singh in literary output whose range and depth is exceptional. During the reign of Ranjit Singh there were many Muslims poets eulogizing him e.g. Shah Mohammad, Jafar Beg, Sawan Yar, etc. however, in later period their number virtually ceased to exist. Punjabi language is the preferred medium. Two categories of writers come to fore, those treating Ranjit Singh through a Sikh discursive practice and those who visualized him through the glory of Punjab and its culture.¹⁷⁹

Amongst the most important figures, mention may be made of (1788-1843) who availed himself of the patronage of M Karam S. of patiala and Raja Udai, S. of Kaithal to produce the most charming poetic narrative, a grand mix of myths and his works of great magnitude of imagination aimed at accommodating SL to H mythology and S philosophy to the Vedantic metaphysics.¹⁸⁰

Another significant name is that of Sahib Singh Mirgind (1808-1876) whose literature pursuits gained him the patronage of M Sarup S. of Jind.¹⁸¹

The most important literature --- phenomenon of Punjabi literature during the 19th century was its transformation from an Indo-Muslim literature tradition into a Sikh Punjabi Tradition. The last important non-Muslim poets of the Punjab were GS (1566-1606) and BG (1551-1629). Both of them had an equal facility and command over the Sadh Bhasha and Braj Bhasha variants of med Hindi. After them, for 250 years, the S lit stream flourished mainly and primarily in Braj Bhasha. Even during the SR, cS literature experience broadly confined to theology, metaphysics, exegesis, hagiography and historiography found Braj Bhasha a more congenial literature medium. But for some exceptions, the S authors showed practically no interests in composing their verses in Punjabi or adopting secular themes and concerns for their literature pursuits.¹⁸²

Bulleh Shah and. Waris Shah , the two sayyid Muslim poets, reflect the emergence of jat Sikh chiefs as a new political force that displayed the strength of peasant community as a whole, and was detrimental to the cause of the ashraf in the

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.184-85[How much these two descriptions differ? This question can shed light on the process of Sikh → Punjabi [secularization coupled with regionalisation]Also, its comparison with Banda Bahadur may also enlighten us.[SIKH → AASHIQ → MARTYR → PUNJABI]

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.539

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*, p.539-40.

¹⁸² *ibid.*, p.540

Punjab.¹⁸³ Gradually, with the consolidation of Sikh rule under Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the Khalsa army at their back, the jat Sikh generals and chiefs become the political. Chke.¹⁸⁴

An abundance of romantic and war poetry, written to please and eulogize the new rulers and generals, is in itself a proof that the political elite constituted the most important segment of the Punjabi society.¹⁸⁵ Can we discern some reeti-type influences on the contemporary 'in terms of emerging state structures and regional formations' literary production also the fact of private/state patronage to the poet needs to be taken into consideration.

M R S was lavish in his charities irrespective of the caste, creed or profession of the recipients... the Maharaja did not recognize any barriers to upward mobility and distributed jagirs for individual effort and achievement. As a reward for meritorious service jagirs were given after the Mughal pattern. They included shawls, clothing, crests and gold ornaments. Swords, horses and elephants were also bestowed.¹⁸⁶ The Khalsa army, with its quest for money and in its shifting loyalties, remained the deciding factor until it was arrayed against the British – deserted, defeated and eventually disbanded.¹⁸⁷ With the exception of a few reference to concubines at the Lahore Darbar there is no indication if the Jat Sikh rulers allowed slavery to continue as an institution which had remained a regular feature of the life of the Mughal nobility in India.¹⁸⁸

During the 1750s, when shahukars these people were the victims of arson and robbery, none come to their rescue in towns and villages because they were the exploiters. On account of unstable conditions of peace of stability were beneficial for them, and we find Khatri traders well settled in the markets of distant regions like Rawalpindi and Hazro.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸³ Banga, Indu: "Five Punjabi Centuries: Polity, Economy, Society And Cultures, C-1500-1990", *essays for J.S. Grewal*, Manohar, 2000 New Delhi, p.623, India, p.404

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.404

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.404

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.405

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.406

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.406

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p.407

It appears that commercial capital did not own or manage the industries. Manufacturers were the owners and the sellers of their articles. However, the manufacturers of arms and ammunition were employed in government factories.¹⁹⁰

Regarding industrial workers living in the cities we come upon a long list of craftsmen and manufacturers.¹⁹¹

The people directly and indirectly supported by land formed the largest section of the society. Jats, however, were the core of agricultural population as proprietors and landowners. Numerous Jat tribes of Hindu and Muslim affiliation were scattered through out the Punjab towards the middle of the 12th Century.¹⁹²

During RS's reign, Jat Sikhs constituted the bulk of the Khalsa army, had the advantage of reverting to their traditional occupation at any time. There are indications of the existence of social hierarchy among the Jats at the village level. The Jats attached great importance to property in land. The size of landholding was the basis of social status. It figured prominently during matrimonial settlements among case those who were well off. A Jat with a large holding also had more power and prestige because he had more labourers and menials attached to his family.¹⁹³

Much value was attached to the number of male members in a family among the peasant proprietors as they were a source of strength for the family in farming area in the village. They could bring dowry which included bullocks among other things. By contrast the birth of girls was a liability among the poor farmers; they practiced infanticide.¹⁹⁴

The economic conditions of Jat farmers had serious implications for their marriage system and customs as well... there are indications that among the Jats with small holdings, the chance of marrying was rather small. They reading paid price money to the parents of a bride. This encouraged selling of daughters, resulting in wide age gaps between husbands and wives.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p.407

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*, p.407

¹⁹² *ibid.*, p.408

¹⁹³ *ibid.*, p.408

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.408

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.408

The custom of widow remarriage, called *karewa*, was prevalent among them... Whereas it gave a wife to an unmarried brother, it protected the honour of a joint family. Also by retaining the widow one retained the property of the deceased brother.¹⁹⁶

Since many Khattris held important position in the government, their status among the Hindus was also that of the social elites. As an educated class they adhered to the rules and rituals of the Hindu *varna* order. A Khatri shahukar being economically well off could spend enough on the dowry of his daughter. Infanticide was rare amongst them. Also, they did not favour the idea of widow remarriage and viewed such a custom among the Jats with contempt.¹⁹⁷

Directly associated with the Jats were the tenants and landless labourers largely drawn from the castes like Chuhras and Chamars¹⁹⁸

Indirectly related to the Jat farmers were the village artisans. They were not the employees of the Jats, but they maintained relations, with their clients as *sepis*.¹⁹⁹

Broadly speaking, the learned *ulama* among the Muslims consisted of persons who possessed knowledge of the *Fiqh* and the *Quran*. They were variously designated as Sayyids, Shaikhs or *mashaikh*, *mullah* and *qazis*. Though most of them adhered to *chulles* of the *Shariat*, privately and publicly, quite a few of the Sayyids and Shaikhs had come under the strong impact of Sufism. Caste was strictly adhered to among them also. It may be important to note that for Waris Shah, Jats were not very different from *mochis*, *qasais* and *sunars*. Jats were believed to indulge in highway robberies and infanticide. They were not good Muslims because they did not believe in *namaz* and *halal*. Again, they were no good because they accepted price money while marrying their daughter. A Sayyid should not be a miser or cowardly. Waris does not like traders and bankers who thrive on money-lending. Being a noble Muslim he recommends 'chastity' and 'meekness' for the women while he condemns 'profession of prostitutes 'Karyaris'.²⁰⁰

There was a strong reaction against the *Mullah* among the *sufi* Muslims represented by poets like *Bullah*, *Hasham* and *Waris*. They do not approve of the rigidity with which the *Mullah* indulged in contention. He is represented as an immoral

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.408-9

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.409

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.409

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p.409

person who exploits his religious position to fulfil lust. He is depicted as showing inhospitable attitude towards strangers, non-Muslims, beggars of low origin, and also as upholding the cause of the rich and the evil-doers. Because of the religious dimension of certain domestic rituals, he gained on all festive and sad occasions in the houses of the Muslims. The Mullah, however, did play a creditable role in the capacity of a teacher in mosques or maktabas, commanding respect equally from the parents of his Muslim and Hindu students.²⁰¹

Like the ulama in Muslims, the Brahmins were occupying the status of religious elite in the Hindu social order. Numerous thakurdwaras and dharmshalas were under the charge of Brahman priests. They performed prayer services for the Hindus, and like the Mullah they too were known for their rigid practices.²⁰²

However, they had fallen from the high pedestal of learning and religious sublimity and were subsisting on royal bounties and public alms.²⁰³

During RS's rule, social status of quite a few of them was improving because they were performing religious rituals not only for the Hindu nobility but also for the Sikh rulers.²⁰⁴

The importance of the Brahmin in the socio-religious life of the Hindus was quite remarkable.²⁰⁵ Besides the mullahs and pandits, there were Sikh priests called Bhais who were in charge of Sikh shrines. The Bhais conducted offerings of Karah parshad through ardas and read out the auspicious shabad from the holy Granth for the devotees. Though the prayer services of the Bhais were solicited by the Sikhs in general and the Khalsa armies in particular, the influence of Brahmanical rituals upon the Hindu and Sikh courtiers of RS was quite considerable.²⁰⁶

The society highly valued the principles of asceticism. In any case there existed different categories of ascetic orders, who performed semi-priestly functions. Sufi saints commanded great respect among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The descendents of the pirs who managed their seats were called makhdums. Among the important sufi orders of the period there were references to Chishtis, Qadiris, Jalalis, Naushahis Madaris

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.411

²⁰¹ *ibid.*, p.412

²⁰² *ibid.*, p.412

²⁰³ *ibid.*, p.412

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p.412

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p.413

and Naqshabandis. The most important of these was the Chishti order popularized by Shaikh Faridud-Din Shakarganj whose tomb and seat was at Pakpattan. According to Waris, this was the most popular center of pilgrimage in the Punjab, and people went there to fulfil their desires and vows. It seems that the sufi saints were believed to possess the qualities of exorcist, sorcerer and medical practitioners.²⁰⁷

Related to Shaivism and Vaishnavism among Hindus there were Sanyasi and Bairagi ascetics armed with small weapons to be used in a clash. The Sanyasis, Jogis and Bairagis had their respective monasteries, the 'maths'. The most frequently mentioned jogis are the Kanphatas who pierced their earlobes to wear large rings. [Rawals, Jangams, Mundias, Jattadharis].²⁰⁸

There are numerous references to caste saint and local godlings. Most of the couple from the lower strata believed in their efficacious powers and miracles and thronged the local shrines.²⁰⁹

Among the professional entertainers, there were the traditional genealogists, bards or folk-singers at the level of tribal social structures in the Punjab.²¹⁰

In villages as well as in towns there were panchayats and bhaicharas. The panchayat functioned for the whole village or a town locality. The bhaichara worked for a kinship group.²¹¹ The member of a panchayat was called a Panch, the head of a Panchayat was called the Chaudhari. They were generally respectable people who represented their caste or subcaste groups. In villages, Khatri Shahukars were taken as panches the landowning Jats. In case of general disputes, conciliatory efforts were made by the panches. They also dealt with issues like the division and demarcation of land.²¹²

Bhaichara minimized the work of the Panchayat... Its decisions were virtually binding, though its rulings depended on persuasion. In fact, social and relation codes of ethics had become identical with the special interests of society in respect of these institutions. The Bhaicharas enforced rules of caste regarding marriage... A kin group of families of a subcaste the Bhaichara was called sharika. It included brother, paternal

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p.413

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p.413

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p.413-14

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.414

²¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.414

²¹¹ *ibid.*, p.415

²¹² *ibid.*, p.415

uncles and cousins. Due to conflicts over property and prestige they indulged in rivalry and mutual distrust, thus calling for intervention by the Bhaichara.²¹³

An important feature of socio-economic setup was a certain degree of self-sufficiency and autonomy which enabled its various parts to function without state help.²¹⁴

We can also notice certain significant features regarding value conflict inherent in the social structure at different levels between Khatri bankers and traders. Bantias or Kirars on the one hand and the Jat cultivators on the other, cultural or value conflicts were intimately connected with their economic condition. Among Muslims, a similar conflict was evident between Sayyids and Shaikhs on the one hand, and the lower classes, including the Jats, on the other. At the level of religious occupations among Muslims the conflict between the Mullahs and the Sufis is a fair indication of qualitative transformation with respect to the principles of equality and morality.²¹⁵

Bullhe Shah and Waris Shah, the two Sayyad Muslim poets, reflect the emergence of Jat Sikh chiefs as a new political force that displayed the strength of peasant community as a whole, and was detrimental to the cause of the ashraf in the Punjab. Gradually, with the consolidation of Sikh rule under Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the Khalsa army at their back, the Jat Sikh generals and chiefs became the political elite. An abundance of romantic and war poetry, written to please and eulogize the new rulers and generals, is in itself a proof that the political elite constituted the most important segment of the structure of the Punjabi society.²¹⁶

It may be relevant here to draw a line of distinction between Jats and Khatri in so far as their social standing and values were concerned. Since many Khatri held important positions in the government their status among the Hindus was also that of the social elites. As an educated class they adhered to the rules and rituals of the Hindu varna order.²¹⁷ Whereas for Waris Shah, Jats were not very different from telis, mochis, qasais and Sunars. Jats were bad for they indulged in highway robberies and infanticide. They were not good Muslims because they did not believe in namaz and halal. Again, they were bad because they accepted price money while marrying their daughters...

²¹³ *ibid.*, p.415-16

²¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.416

²¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.416-17

²¹⁶ Johal Daljinder Singh: "Literary Evidence on Social Structure in the Punjab [1750-1850]", *Journal of Regional History*: GNDU, Amritsar, Vol.-I, 1980, 51-2

Being an ashraf he recommends 'chastity' and 'meekness' for the women while he condemns the profession of kanjaris.²¹⁸

Ram Singh tells us about the popularity of Muktsar as a place of Sikh pilgrimage in his barahmaha 'Padam'.²¹⁹ Their 'writers' interest was not confined to their own religious community. The way they refer to the beliefs of 'others' reflects their acceptance of the idea of cultural co-existence as well as cultural plurality.²²⁰

An important feature of the social and cultural life of the people was their tribal structure. Peasant communities formed the bulk of human settlements in the Punjab.... They maintained a sort of hereditary co----- with bards, minstrels and genealogists who delighted their patrons through eulogistic recitations of genealogies, ballads and love tales.²²¹

The number of Musiim poets during the 18th century was larger than the Sikh and Hindu poets combined. Sikhs were busy in their struggle. The trading community lacked interest in Punjabi literature. The Muslim population of the countryside was alone holding on to their routine life, their cultural pursuits and literary activities.²²²

Persian metres and genres were converted to suit the expression in Punjabi e.g. baints and dwayyia metres.²²³ The qissa has undergone changes mainly in thematic typicalities.²²⁴ The Qissa spans a period of about 350 years from the early- seventeenth century to the fourth decade of the twentieth century. In the later half of this period, all the four types of qissas came to be produced as parallel streams, though their genesis was not simultaneous. Before the seventeenth century, love tales as prototypes of the qissa of ishq existed in folkloristic form.²²⁵

With the advent of Khalsa Raj in the late-eighteenth century, qissas came to be overshadowed by romances. Kamrup Kamlata, Hatamtai, Shah Behram Chander Badan, Saiful Maluk and Gulsanobar are some of the typical romances of this period. The qissas like Puraan Bhagat which hinged on the theme of renunciation and yoga, also

²¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.58

²¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.61

²¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.36

²²⁰ *ibid.*, p.39

²²¹ *ibid.*, p.23

²²² *ibid.*, p.24-25

²²³ *ibid.*, p.27

²²⁴ Rahi, J.S.: Historical Dynamics of the Qissa, 522-534, p.523

²²⁵ *ibid.*, p.523

emerged at as time. But this theme reached its culmination only after the fall of the SR.²²⁶

The theme of heroic deeds that remained predominant in var, jangnama or gurbilas, the typical narrative forms of heroic poetry in medieval times, also came to be subsumed in qissa in MRS's --- Siharfi Hari Singh Nalwa by Qadir Yar and Baitan Sher Singh by Nihal Singh are the two typical works in point. During the British period, this tendency assumed the form of narratives of heroic adventures of folk heroes fighting against the oppressive state machinery. They are invariably cast in the Robin Hood mould of benevolent daredevils and dacoits in qissas.²²⁷ We need to find an explanation how these developments in the tone and tenor of Punjabi came about.²²⁸ The essential nature of man-woman love in the qissas of this category is physical.²²⁹

The sign system in Mirza Sahiban has no mystical pretensions. It is susceptible, however, to theological interpretation intertwined with man-woman relationship.²³⁰ At the social plan, the dominant groups or classes elevate their sense of supremacy to the level of divine will to impart it a metaphysical legitimacy. In Waris, Heer's parental clan identifies its collective will with the loftiness of remembering God.

The lover in qissas of ishq is always a stranger from outside. Its social dimension, codified in the idea of the forbidden, has an obvious psychological aspect embedded in passionate sexuality.²³¹

At the creative place, however, the man-woman love in qissa is portrayed as tagui, a Sufi-mystic's humble living and spiritual longing for union with God. In Waris's Heer the idea of faquir is imparted allegorical expansion. The Sufis disapproved of the luxurious life – style of the ruling elite. But they were no political rebels. They chose faquir as a kind of penance for themselves and atonement for the sins of their co-religionist ruling elites.

As stated already the qissa poets of love had a religious-cultural affinity with the ruling elite. This affinity foreclosed choice of themes and forms fraught with the potentiality of conflict with the established regime. The choice of man-woman love as

²²⁶ *ibid.*, p.524

²²⁷ *ibid.*, p.524

²²⁸ *ibid.*, p.525

²²⁹ *ibid.*, p.526

²³⁰ *ibid.*, p.527

²³¹ *ibid.*, p.529

their favourite theme was helped by their communitarian identity. The very nature of the theme ensured popular response. But what is more significant is that it yielded to their metaphysics rather easily. The metaphysics of the times did not permit the theme of secular love to be treated as a mere socio-cultural tangle. The transformation of the physical into meta-physical was a creative necessity of the qissa poets. The Sufis sought spirituality through annihilation of the ego. The qissa poets see hardships and death in love as the highest form of faqiri. It is a journey from the state of fana to the state of faqa, i.e., the blissful state of oneness which divine essence.²³²

Hafiz Barkhurdar, a qissa poet of *ishq* during the seventeenth century, echoes Sufi perception when he says: 'There is no love possible without courting death'. More than a hundred years later, Hashim Shah, a Sufi and qissa poet, utters the same sentiment from mystical heights. 'Those who court love suffering/And suffering is a bliss indeed? The suffering of lovers in most of the qissas of the Mughal period is invariably attributed to preordained fate or the Will of God. Their spirituality lies in their submission to God's Will.'²³³

Waris Shah, the great qissa poet of the latter half of the eighteenth century, does strike a different note when he brings out the tragic destiny of the lovers as an inevitable consequence of social hostility towards those in love. However, the idea of Sufi love remains pronounced in his *Heer* too.²³⁴

The Muslim qissa poets of the Mughal period show lovers attaining spiritual union ultimately. Muqbil an immediate predecessor of Waris, sees *Heer* and *Ranjha* gaining the hallowed status of *walis* for their steadfastness in love. Similarly, *Sassi* in Hasham also achieves the states of *buzurg*.²³⁵ The fate or destiny in Waris is not a mere metaphysical category. It is a secular category too. In secular terms it unfolds the social dimension of the dialectics of the tragedy of lovers.²³⁶

The divergence of interpretations reflects the schism of the Muslim qissa poets. In their advocacy of love, they deviate from the prevalent social attitude towards love of the genders. But their religious affinity with the established regime prompts them to

²³² *ibid.*, p.529-30

²³³ *ibid.*, p.530

²³⁴ *ibid.*, p.530

²³⁵ *ibid.*, p.530-31

²³⁶ *ibid.*, p.531

spiritualise and mystify their dissent.²³⁷ With the advent of qissakar, in Panjabi language, a certain 'secular poetics comes into being and new narratives, characters and ideas predominantly of the Semitic world – were introduced in Punjab.²³⁸

²³⁷ *ibid.*, p.532

²³⁸ *ibid.*, p.295

CHAPTER THREE

Sikh Identity and Contesting Institutions in Post -1849 Scenario

The army was still largely made up of the levies brought by vassals. But the rank and file of the Sikhs soldiery were men with an ideology of their own, men who bore some resemblance to the troopers of Cromwell's New Army; even, perhaps, where their leaders had carried them furthest towards banditry, as in the Cis-Sutlej area.

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The annexation of Punjab in 1849 neatly divides the first half of Nineteenth Century as Sikh phase characterized more by continuities than changes leading to a sharp contrast with the overwhelming recasting of socio-economic landscape of Punjab. Colonial ethnographic writing is incessant in developing the theme of 'Singhs' dissolving into 'Hindus'. Thus the discourse about Sikh vs. Singh dichotomy is founded and the rise of Singh Sabhas in 1870's or the British Indian army with its 'martial races' including Singhs eventually reconstruct the militant Singh identity in their own reflection and putting finally rest to the congenital ambiguity about its creedal autonomy. Along with these identity concerns, other transformations colonial state brought were mediated through their military-strategic considerations of Afghan or Russian designs. The harvesting of land revenue to bear the cost of colonial enterprise which later started pouring profits through its yoking to world market leading to commercialization of agriculture in order to pay the land revenue and assorted cesses, which taken together were higher than in Ranjit Singh's time. Another contrast was regarding the flexible demand of revenue according to actual harvests and it was collected in kind whereas during British administration a fixed amount was to be collected whatever the produce. Although the peasant-proprietor along with occupancy tenants were strengthened against the landlords, with an exception in some areas of west Punjab, their economic condition was increasingly getting precarious and rural indebtedness was the principal manifestation of agrarian distress. The moneylender class of banias, aroras, mohajans, khattris, etc., was primarily composed of Hindus who in their monopoly position of suppliers of rural credit at use rates amassed huge capital resources. Since, land had been transformed into private property under the workings of colonial state it was the main investment option for these moneylenders. Thus, we see the makings of a potential conflict based upon such social relations but expressed

through religious - communal articulation, once again in 1870's. These tendencies were crystallised during the controversy over Punjab Alienation of land Act, 1900 lead by 'urban classes' accusing the govt. of favouring the 'agricultural castes' against the natural functioning market forces.

Annexation also witnessed the realignment of provincial elite in Punjab along differential axes. The Frontier Muslims were comparatively well treated due to their strategic at Afghan frontier. The process of harnessing the Muslim support as the bedrock of British Empire was initiated by stoking majoritarian tendency-even during the pre-1849 phase. Those strategic alliances paid off during 1857 when Punjabi element of military remained loyal and crushed the rebels in Delhi. Thus, the Muslim elite escaped of Punjab escaped the govt. distrust against their co-religionists of Northern India. However, the demands of army recruitment coupled with prevalence of rural agricultural mores founded upon landlord-tenant relations went very far in determining their eventual socio-political formation. These exploitative social relations were buttressed through the rural Sufi lore that had significantly shunned its earlier role of trenchant social critique as well as religious tolerance. The urban educated Muslims were a rarity as compared to other communities.

One such community in Punjab, the Hindus, were well represented in an expanding colonial bureaucratic apparatus both as professionals as well as clerical salariat. Coupled with this were the flourishing moneylending enterprise and the resultant concentration of capital. Their well-built biradari system and location in urban centres greatly enhanced social mobility provided with a coherent world-view by Swami Dayanand Saraswati and his Arya Samaj. Loyalty to British was cultivated and harvested through getting into govt. jobs. Furthermore a phalanx of social institutions were created helping in sustaining the Arya enterprise to such an extent that their methods attained hegemonic status with other communities initiating these efforts. South-East Punjab had a different social structure where the jats were the main carriers of Arya Samaj ideology in their aspiration for a kshatriya status.

The case of Sikh elite in this scenario is quite curious. Post-1849 political order saw a substantial diminishing of their material resources due to the residual distrust harboured from 1839 onwards. Their jagirs were taken back, according to John Lawrence's policies, and coupled with the empowerment of peasant-proprietor; stage was set for their eventual eclipse, 1857, however, provided an opportunity to these elites

to fail out the British. Suitable rewards ensued in the form of rehabilitation of jagirs, etc; elevation through absorption into colonial state apparatus as honorary officials; and the category of 'natural leaders' regarding their respective communities were employed to buttress the colonial enterprise in Punjab. As the Sikhs, especially jats, included in 'martial' races as well as in 'agricultural' classes, aroused profound sympathy as hardy cultivators and appreciation for their military prowess. Profoundly conscious of their Khalsa tendencies which could come to fore anytime and along with loss of sovereignty fresh in their minds, the British relied upon Sikh 'natural leaders' a lot. Its attendant initiative was to wrest the effective control of Sikh shrines by courting the pujaris. Thus we can visualise the ruling faction comprising colonial state, natural leaders and pujaris working in consonance to entrench this bloc over the mainly rural-agricultural society which was otherwise provided the avenue of military service as route to prosperity e.g. land grants were preferentially given to military families.

The establishment of state apparatus in mid-nineteenth century Punjab also necessitated the influx of officials, babus and others from Bengal and North-West Provinces to prepare settlement reports, dispense justice through courts, etc. Situated primarily in urban centres they provided model of colonial social circle in Punjab. This process was further supplemented by linking Delhi as a division in Punjab in 1859. Robbed of their cherished cultural superiority a large number of Delhi intelligentsia sought refuge at other centres, including Lahore. The colonial policies regarding language, association - building, census operations, social reform, customary law, education and so on give us the essential mechanism constituting the official cultural policy. The respective elite was a participant, through imitation, as well as a product of these forces. Elites had another source of power, namely the masses in Punjab countryside whose cultural universe operated around and through popular cultural practices, which acquired concentrated meanings and tangible shape in and around popular shrines. The annual fairs, ritual practices, pilgrimages, etc. to such shrines have been extensively studied in contrast to high culture of Punjabi elite stirring to 'reform' these practices.

This view has conveniently classified these oppositely arraigned arenas as demonstrating 'epistemological' domains. Sectarian agenda propounded by social elite ultimately obtained victory through the instrumentality of 'print capitalism' in the general transformation characterised as 'communications revolution' in early twentieth century Punjab. This crystallization of exclusivist religious boundaries vanquished the

shared, diffused, ludic, enchanted universe of Punjabis. Our attempt is two-fold. Firstly, to people these shared spaces and to hear the faint, voice of those who visit these spaces and keep on chiseling their critique of existing conditions be it in political, social or sectarian sphere. These arguments, criticism, ambiguities, retreats, formulaic statements provide the mode to see alternative tendencies converge to set up a 'social field-of-force'. Analyzed this way these spaces become carriers of social values in differentiate relations of power. Thus, we can appreciate that were popular spaces were not hermetically sealed domains in which the ritual practice and seasonal festivity was an end in itself. We hope to show that this space did carry alternative visions, expressed in millenarian fashion as in case of Kukas; marshalling of print culture as in case of Gyani Gyan Singh, a renowned Nirmala scholar; or it could develop a sociology of Indic philosophical school of Vedanta Gulab Das; it could yield space for articulating the female voice as in case of Peero and Nurang Devi. These assorted figures infuse the 'silenced' popular cultural sphere with their endeavours, straddling such range that on one side we have an ethic of anti-colonial resistance taken from Anglo-Sikh wars giving way to composing histories of Sikh gurus, panth and contemporary sects on 'modern' lines and on the other hand we come across millenarianism with trenchant critique of colonial state, Sikh elite and Pujaris articulated by Kukas and the social scandal of a tawaif, Pero residing in the dera belonging to Sadhu Gulab Das. We need to remind ourselves that this is perhaps the last generation who studied in traditional manner; witnessed the onset of a foreign power set to administer and transform indigenous society on a mighty scale and to fashion a way forward they articulated their vision in popular idiom with success so as to bridge the 'modern-premodern', 'elite-popular', 'Sikh-Sanatan' divide. To relegate these attempts as a manifestation of sanatan episteme is in essence to silence these voices. Quite like E.P. Thompson my attempt is to retrieve these now obscure sects, almost wiped off women poets, derisive treatment of Kuka social protest.

Collective dreams have a political charge. That is a major reason why no direct or simple link relates political economic to political action. In between stand meanings, concepts and visions with internal consistencies and a momentum of their own. Their structure bears testimony to the relations of power and production they are embedded in and shaped by. However, such interdependencies are never one sided. Patterns of thought, once established, acquire a causal power of their own to shape, often decisively, that is true particularly of the politically important act of ideology, this here

as the dream of an ideal society in relation to which goals are set and the existing reality judged. The causes and context of consciousness in mid-nineteenth century Punjab must be explored afresh, not simply pedalled.

While distinguishing the first phase of anti-imperial resistance in the mid-nineteenth century Punjab to its eventual development in the twentieth century we focus on the general conditions and precipitating factors; the social resistance and spread of the movement; and role of leadership of the Khalsa army.¹ The heavy losses inflicted upon the British forces during the Anglo-Sikh wars had contributed a lot towards diminishing the British aura amongst the native troops. Many of them returned to their village feeling that a well-trained army can defeat the British as were the case in the Anglo-Sikh wars.²

A number of scholarly works account for patriotism in Sikh forces as a direct influence of egalitarian Khalsa traditions which lead them to consider themselves as equal partners in the plunder and this was a major reason considered for these voluntary armed bands to come together as '*Dal Khalsa*' or the federal army of Sikh *misls*. Ranjit Singh's victories are attributed to this spirit and he is supposed to have appreciated this fact by persisting with the tradition. It is significant that Ranjit Singh's rule was referred as "*Sarkar Khalsa*" except for a brief period in 1845 when the Lahore army was almost the ruler, then the official documents used title of '*Sarbat Khalsa*'.³ This change from 'Sarkar' to 'Sarbat' also points towards the active memories of the eighteenth-century Sikh struggle and its institutions. This factor again confirms the hypothesis that the Khalsa army enjoyed a degree of popular respect considering them carriers of eighteenth-century Sikh struggle. This continuing impact of the individual Khalsa soldiers and their army in the Punjab countryside, in fact, provides us the essential armature to attempt the social history of rural resistance in Punjab- from mid-eighteenth century to early-twentieth century as dialogically expressed through popular cultural production. Prof. S. R. Kohli mentions that during 1807-1813 the Punjabi element in army recruitment was negligible and the Hindustanis, Gurkhas and Afghans were

¹ Ahluwalia, M.L. and Kirpal Singh: *Punjab De Modhi Sutantarta Sangramiyeen*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1972 (3rd edn.), pp.148, p.14

² *ibid.*, p.15-16. Authors stress further research on the impact of Sikh army's patriotism on the native troops that can balance the lopsided view that army's loutish behaviour was solely responsible for the demise of Lahore Darbar. Also William Edward; *Reminiscences of A Bengal Civilian*, p.12). Kaye mentions in Vol. I, p.495 that the native regiments who lead the rebellion in 1857 i.e. 11th Grenadiers and 43rd and 70th regiments had participated in the Kandhar & A-S wars.

³ *ibid.*, p.16

numerically greater in the regular army. Post-1818, the Punjabi element became dominant in all aspects of the army. These were filled up with Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and Rajputs.⁴

The daily chronicles of Lahore Darbar demonstrate the fact that during 1844-45 when almost all the nobility were making overtures to the British only the Khalsa army was desperately striving to defeat these initiatives. When the authority was eroded largely due to persistent conspiracies and counter-moves then the army revived its traditional *panchayat* – system and sought to sustain the government.⁵ Both George Campbell's 'Memoirs' along with Major Broadfoot provide the necessary evidence to the discipline maintained amongst the troops.⁶ Regimental panchayats kept their patriotism intact and strove to keep up troop discipline. Cunningham mentions that when the need arose to initiate broader mobilization against the British, "the regimental panchayats came at agreements with the ruling factions to conduct negotiations and had stopped functioning as independent authorities (p.263).Cunningham further describes in this context:

"Every Sikh considered Khalsa Raj his own. Besides carrying his gun he was putting up with other laborious tasks with equal agility and commitment. He pulled cannons, manœuvred oxen and carts and loaded and un-loaded the boats. In contrast the British troops were just paid mercenaries and carried their jobs listlessly. The young ones were absolutely stout, agile and committed".⁷

Even after the declaration of March 1, 1846 the Khalsa forces did put up spirited resistance against heavy odds when the British dictated their ruler's policy. However, now their battle was of a different nature. Now the rebel forces were fighting under the command of rebel leaders against the British army that asserted it as the benefactor of

⁴ *ibid.*, p.23-24 "Maharaja Ranjit Singh's policy was to recruit mixed platoons in order to check potential rebellions in the army. Major Broadfoot mentions in his letter on 4.1.1845 that "Sikh" is used to describe the entire army of Lahore Darbar in common parlance."

⁵ *ibid.* p.17. For more details, see the British political agent at Ludhiana. *Major Broadfoot's* different reports expose published in 'Secret Consultations' no. 33, 56 & 58 (on 20.6.1845) no. 34 (15.8.1845) and no.113 (20.12.1845) cited in Hari Ram Gupta.

⁶ *ibid.*, p.18 Emboldened by such efforts they declared to push back the British to London. (Gyani Gyan Singh: *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa*, p.238).⁶

⁷ *ibid.*, p.20 [Cunningham, p.263, Also Lord Gough on Sikh army: *Life of Lord Gough*, Vol.I, pp.368-69]

the child-Maharaja. Even in such a complicated situation, Khalsa army did win some battles.⁸ The battles fought at Multan under the leadership of Diwan Mulraj demonstrated the new offensive to British designs⁹ prompting the Lawrence brothers (Henry, George and John) to crush all the anti-British Sardars along with the resolve to crush rebellious Khalsa army and disarming ordinary Punjabis to keep the fledgling order intact.¹⁰

After the Bhyrowal treaty in December 1846 Maharani Jindan emerged as the pole of rebellion in which she was helped by some incidents like cow-slaughter to provide beef for British sepoy and entering Golden Temple with shoes on, etc. and many of the estranged Sardars gathered around her and called her "*Khalsa di mata*". Thus maharani versus British contradiction was the source of Anglo-Sikh War.¹¹ Coupled with this development, popular discontent surfaced in the form of resistance in the erstwhile Sikh areas and Jalandhar Doab with the estranged Sardars becoming the focal point of this upsurge. Not only the soldiers of Punjab army but even the native sepoy of British army were invited to join the popular revolution. A general declaration was issued asking the Khalsa to reorganize once again to liberate the Maharaja and his mother from the clutches of '*Sahibs*'. Hoshiarpur and Una were the epicenters of rebellion in the British occupied Jalandhar Doab. Baba Bikram Singh Bedi was sending messages that the government is about to collapse. The other rebel leaders in Doab were the popularly revered Sodhi Ladha Singh of Kartarpur, Raja Narayan Pal of Katlek Ram Singh of Nurpur, Jodh Singh, Sunder Singh, Lal Singh Muraria and S. Arjan Singh of Ranghar Nangal.¹²

While Diwan Mul Raj and S. Chattar Singh Attariwala were organizing the rebellion in far away corners, Lahore become the center of public speculation on the result of rebellion. Lahore was now a meeting place for the rebels to consult and recruitment center for Multan and Attari forces.¹³ Lahore was rife with rumours

⁸ *ibid.*, p.22

⁹ *ibid.*, p.22-23

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.25

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.25-26

¹² *ibid.*, p.26-27 [Resident of Lahore Sir Frederick Currie to Governor General Lord Dalhousie on 4.10.1848 in Secret consultation no.621, dated 7.10.1848 cited on p.27-28. "Widespread discontent against our occupation of Punjab is evident all over. Besides all Hindus and some Muslims are specific impact is seen on the army or the disbanded soldiers".

¹³ *ibid.*, p.27-28 [This is proven by the statement of a rebel spy Lehna Singh before Major Makesun the Superintendent of cis-Sutlej states. The recruits were served langar at the mausoleum of Maharaja Ranjit Singh while passing through Lahore. Secret Consultation no.236, dated 25.11.1848]

predicting that the general rebellion will break out as soon as the Resident and his loyal Sardars are attacked during the Royal Darbar on the occasion of Dussehra festival which cautioned the British and they took exemplary measures to avoid any mischief. ¹⁴Currie reported on the broad-base of rebellion," All the employees of the (Khalsa) Darbar and general masses are in favour of the rebels. Some sympathize with them but most are actively helping their cause. Bigger Sardars are also discontented like them, but they are looking for the right moment."¹⁵

The rebellion failed due to multiple factors; firstly, Jindan was taken away from Punjab and thus a central pole was removed and an all-encompassing rebellion was never allowed to bear fruit. Secondly, Maharaja Duleep Singh was kept outside the reach of rebel leaders who made attempts to kidnap him whereas earlier Raja Sher Singh and later Bhai Maharaj Singh were leading the rebellion in his name only. Thirdly, inadequate supplies along with the arousal of sectarian feelings amongst the frontier tribes against the Sikhs; tax relief and other inducements were offered to employ them against the rebel Sardars especially in Hazara, Bannu, Derajat and other places. Perhaps the most significant factors was the mutual suspicions in different rebel parties, their interests clashed, their mutual envy, enmity, grudges and family disputes were greatly enhanced e.g. Sher Singh and Diwan Mul Raj developed differences soon after their unity in Multan. Many Sardars were playing the double game between the rebel Sardars and the government e.g. the successors of S. Sham Singh Attariwala were responsible for the arrest and exile of their uncle S. Chattar Singh Attariwala's entire family due to a long standing family dispute. To top it all, the priests of Golden Temple who had earlier declared the *firangis* as sworn enemy of the Khalsa now in 1849 led the population in welcoming them.¹⁶

Multan province was the richest and well governed under Diwan Mul Raj who was the first to rebel against the British to restore Maharaja Duleep Singh's sovereignty.¹⁷ Annexation of Multan invited deep popular resentment and many ballads (vars) were composed on this subject.¹⁸ Bhai Maharaj Singh was the first one to join Diwan Mul Raj in this endeavour with his one thousand troops in June, 1848. Sodhi

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.28-29

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.29. Secret consultations nos. 138 & 157, dated 25.11.1848

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.30-32[p.40] – Cuningham on Sham Singh Attariwala's death, p.311 (Spirit of Guru Gobind and his mysterious Panchayati Raj)]¹⁶

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.47-48

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.54-55

Ladha Singh started recruitment in Doaba and Hoshiarpur district. Emissaries were sent to cis-Sutlej riyasats, Sardars and zamindars to join the battle for safeguarding their common culture and *dharma*. Maharaja of Patiala was invited to lead the insurrection of all the Punjabis offering him a way to keep his worldly possessions intact while also saving his Dharma, the supreme value. Similar letters were also issued to the Raja of Nabha, Sardars of Bhadaur and Malod, Gopal Singh Singhpuria, Sobha Singh Kalsia and to Dina Singh of Bhadson.¹⁹

Diwan was also active in forging a Sikh-Afghan alliance against the British. His emissaries were spread out in Bannu, Kohat, Hazara and Peshawar. He was issuing appeals to Dost Mohammad Khan and his brother Sultan Mohammad Khan. A real breakthrough was achieved when S. Chattar Singh rebelled against the British in Hazara region helped by these Afghan lords. Diwan categorizes the British as common enemies of Hindus and Muslims in this context.²⁰ Diwan Mul Raj was instrumental in weaving an all-Punjab alliance led by Rajas, Sardars, etc. in the name of Dharma, against the British. The defeat of this endeavour also paid put to horizons of a shared Punjabi identity. Mass-supported rebellion and its attendant conceptual advances had the potential to usher into a new phase. Its defeat led to various reform movements led by the ex-Khalsa soldiers with an eye on political aspects of their respective dharma.

Rani Jindan was the brain of resistance whereas Bhai Maharaj Singh can be called it's moving spirit. A loyal disciple of Baba Bir Singh Naurangabadi, he was revered by a great number of Sikhs especially in majha region. Many sardars of Lahore Darbar were loyal to him. So he possessed the necessary authority to lead such a movement. His first action was to bless the 'Prema conspiracy' (Sikh Sardar on 21.4.1847 at Shalamar Bagh Lahore). Indeed this plan was the first anti-British act which included some Lahore regiments, influential sardars and close confidantes of Rani Jindan, Bhai Budh Singh and Bhai Buta Singh.²¹

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.56-57

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.57-58[Diwan Mul Raj – a Hindu Punjabi patriot (d. Buxor, aged 36) A. united front attempted in mid-nineteenth century Punjab defeated by force. Next phase is 1907-08 'Pagri Sambhal Jatta' agitation, followed by a proposal to send Hindu and Muslim jathas in solidarity with the Akalis during the Gurdwara Reform movement in 1920s. An emerging alliance of Dr. Kitchloo, Satyapal, S.S. Kaveeshar, Hira Singh Dard was a solid platform, which could not take off.]

²¹ *ibid.*, p.64-65

Bhai Maharaj Singh evaded arrest for three long years due to public support, a fact endorsed by Lord Dalhousie in 30-09.1848," the peasants, general populace and sardars are openly sympathising with him. Even the personnel following him are not showing any urgency to arrest him, if not being friends with him."²²Bhai Maharaj Singh took extensive tours, mobilizing against British during the time between the Prema conspiracy and Diwan Mul Raj's rebellion in Multan. He went from village to village campaigning to teach a lesson to the enemies of Khalsa. On hearing about Multan rebellion he welcomed it and immediately left for Multan recruiting soldiers on the way. He was well-received every where and reached Multan. However differences emerged soon after between Bhai Maharaj Singh and the Diwan and he left for Hazara to join S. Chattar Singh through a circuitous route of Pakpattan, Muktsar Anandpur, Jwalamukhi and Punjab Hills. His popularity in Majha and Doaba ensured safe passage and potential for recruitment were main reasons for this choice.²³

Bhai Maharaj Singh's stature was a constant worry to the British. He was considered a divine person by the Sikh forces which added to his mystique. Bhai Maharaj Singh took great pains to ensure supplies to Sikh troops and participated in the battles at Ramnagar, Chhellianwala and Gujarat.²⁴However after the defeat at Gujrat, no sardar accepted Bhai Maharaj Singh's plan for another battle and Bhai Maharaj Singh decided to continue on his own. He left for Jammu and Kashmir and his headquarter was at Devi Batala in remote hills. He continued his efforts to kidnap Maharaja Duleep Singh. Another plan was to attack the British cantonments of Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur. Local pujaris and saints were involved to benefit from their influence and for having access to their monetary riches. Emissaries were sent all over Punjab (a la Diwan Mul Raj) and contacts were established with Baba Bikram Singh's followers at Una. He undertook a tour to personally inspect the preparations.²⁵

Bhai Maharaj Singh was arrested and kept in Jalandhar jail but later on sent away from Punjab to avoid public disturbance. The other political prisoners included S. Chattar Singh, Sher singh and Avtar Singh of Attari, Lal Singh Muraria, Mehtab Singh Majithia, Diwan Hakam Rai, Kanwar Krishan Singh and S. Arjan Singh. Bhai Maharaj Singh passed away on July 15th, 1856 during his incarceration in Singapore.²⁶

²² *ibid.*, p.65-66

²³ *ibid.*, p. 66-67

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.68

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.6972

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.73-75

Bhai Maharaj Singh was immensely popular across the religious divide, a fact endorsed by British officials.²⁷ Bhai Maharaj Singh did not cultivate any ill feelings against the British and had strictly ordered his troops not to kill British officers during raids on cantonments. His other qualities included mastery of details, comprehensive preparations and enduring enthusiasm. His organizing skills coupled with the traditions of 'sewa' of his dera complimented each other.²⁸

The salience of S. Chattar Singh Attariwala's efforts resides in endeavoring to diminish the Muslim communal feelings fanned by the British in Hazara region. He organized a joint rebellion against the British thus helping to stave off bitterness caused by the earlier defeat of Syed Ahmed Shah Barelvi. This continued to be the general attitude of the British administration to consolidate their rule. Seen in such a context, the rebellions in Multan, Bannu, Kohat, Peshawar, rebellions of Sikh forces and popular discontent in Jalandhar Doab and central Punjab were all interconnected.²⁹ An important aspect of these rebellions was to ask the Sikh regiments to rebel and those who responded to Chattar Singh Attariwala's appeal were imbued with millenarian beliefs that Punjab will regain its sovereignty after two and half years. Thus Chattar Singh's call led to further deepening of this sentiment and others also joined a united front of Multan, Punjab and frontiersmen against the British.³⁰

Baba Bikram Singh Bedi's resistance had a unique character of its own even while being a part of the general resistance at Multan and other regions. His endeavour was significant because his region, the Doaba, was under the direct British occupation. He had also refused the pension offered to him by the Lawrence brothers. The son of Baba Sahib Singh Bedi he ascended the establishment in 1834 after his father's death. His *jagir* was confiscated on his refusal to hand over his artillery to the British. Baba Bedi also got the Sodhis to join in the resistance alongwith asking Chattar Singh Attariwala to gather the Barakzai Pathans. He participated in the second Anglo-Sikh war and was the only person of note to support Bhai Maharaj Singh's proposal to fight

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.75-78

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.77-78

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.79-83

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.85-92 Even after the surrender of Sikh forces at Mankyala village on March 12, 1849 and house arrest of Attariwalas in their village, they continued to be a source of resistance for Punjabi Patriots [Secret consultation nos.54-55, 24.11.1849] Brahmins and Bhais were the linkmen all over Punjab. These factors lead to exile of Attariwalas and other ruler Sardars. Chattar Singh died on December 27th, 1855.

for one last time, at the Rawalpindi meeting. However, he surrendered along with the Attariwalas. He was sent to house arrest at Amritsar where he died in 1863.³¹ Sher Singh and Baba Bedi employ the discourse of 'bubble-like ephemeral existence' to launch and arouse the rebels against the British.

Rani Jind Kaur's aspiration was to get back Lahore throne for her son and next generations.³² Showing remarkable forthrightness she did away with purdah and made attempts to lead a disciplined life.³³ She ascribed her escape to magical powers.³⁴ Her letters to political prisoners of Punjab were captured, further investigations revealed her other initiatives of secret nature in Allahabad, Kanpur and Lucknow, inciting the Hindu and Sikh sepoys in the British army. Confiscated documents included predictions about the Maharani and her son by an Allahabad astrologer.³⁵ She died in 1863.³⁶

Appeals to Dharma were made in different ways, the other aspect being appealing to the Sikh regiments. Millenarian predictions, appeals to Sardars, Rajas, religious leaders, mobilizing popular support through extensive campaigns – are some of the features associated with this primitive rebellions (which again had internal weaknesses) organizing efforts were reduced to the military and conspiratorial aspects. Deep-seated social disturbance, long-drawn political-military conflicts, frequent material losses or damages create an environment in which the end of the world seems imminent.³⁷

After their defeat and annexation of 1849, the restiveness took many forms e.g. social reform (the Nirankaris); scholarly pursuit and materialist thought (Gulabdasi sampraday); militant ethic, boycott of British, organizing a parallel apparatus with political vision, a puritanical code coupled with millenarian predictions, recovering a Sikh way to liberation (Sant Khalsa and the Namdharis). Thus the elements employed by the Namdharis show advances made in the traditional diverse structure and its limitations in an altered scenario of 1860s to 1870s. However, their martyrdom kept alive the anti-imperial sentiment in the Punjab countryside. Elements of this discursive structure were alive till the Ghadarites attempted at inducing rebellion in the British

³¹ *ibid.*, p.93-102

³² *ibid.*, p.105

³³ *ibid.*, p.108

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.123

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.40

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.132

³⁷ Christopher Hill; *The World Turned Upside Down, Radical Ideas During The English Revolution*, Penguin, 1975, England, pp.431, p.287-290.

army during First World War. The Akali movement makes a radical break with this paradigm when it focuses on organizing the masses for a non-violent movement without appealing to the army and operating within the public spaces.

Historiography of the Namdhari movement is available in nationalist,³⁸ imperialist³⁹, as a study in millenarianism⁴⁰ and as a Sikh sect.⁴¹ However these accounts offer a general narrative account of the Kukas, who were obliterated, thus, paving the way for Singh Sabha Movement. Their (in)significance is realized through conduct of Singh Sabha movement learning not to annoy the Raj otherwise the Kukas' fate will be theirs.

Some recurring themes in Namdhari discourse traverse Sant Khalsa versus Malechh Khalsa ;debate with Kesgarh granthi regarding who is a better Sikh?; caste question; Khalsa army; Ram Singh delineating his legacy comprising of Baba Bir Singh, Bhai Maharaj Singh, and so on. Along with such political stance, it's social-ideological arm had a much active dimension regarding women e. g. marriageable age, anand marriage, participation in Kuka affairs.

The fundamental aspect remains their opposition to the Raj and its methods of 'swadeshi' struggle and not their exclusivity, or dress, etc. Their ethic of rahit of poor rural folk based on substantive issues is also significant. Rather than looking for a separation of religion and politics, Kukas come across a group in which changes in the self of religion have an inherent secularizing function by expanding the frontiers of political engagement. In a way, this is a shared pattern in the peasant and tribal uprisings, jacqueries in West Europe, etc. The discontent was not generalized; other

³⁸Fauja Singh: *Kuka sMovement* considers them as precursor of the Ghadar movement being the first outbreak of anti-Raj impulse. For him the kukas provide a crucial counterweight to the Sikh role during 1857. Disregarding other constitutive elements he underscores the political motivation in their conduct.

³⁹Written primarily by Raj administrators, it focuses upon Religious reforms of the righteous coupled with seditious potential, demanding repression; settled down after 'sufficient' measures were taken.

⁴⁰ McLeod, W.H.; He considers that it Conforms to the classical 4-phase pattern of such sects, namely internal contradictions of the Sikh society; channeling of the rural discontent; essentially a religious reform movement which dabbled in inconsistent, confused 'political activities.

⁴¹ As in the works of Grewal, J.S., Ganda Singh; *Kukian Di Vithia*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, year not mentioned.

demonstrating such features as an individual guru; British fall first due to Russian intervention then through Maharaja Daleep Singh; their initial parallel with the Nirankaris; Rawalpindi to Bhaini (Biradar – Suba).

forces at work by the Raj were creating new constituencies of social support and Kukas were marginalized which they also seem to have accepted.

Letters of Baba Ram Singh gave form to the everyday speech of used by people.⁴² Strong emphasis on equality between humans and upon higher social groups as anti-God (anti-Sikh) is reflected in his *hukumnamas*.⁴³ Intellectual consistency (BRS' later letters) and principled conduct remains an issue; their rejection of capitalism (Britishers) was often backward – looking, negative and unrealistic.⁴⁴ In the hands of men and women simpler and less theologically sophisticated, especially in this time of revolutionary crisis... teachings were easily pushed over... (to extremes)⁴⁵ “Given them this breakdown of confidence on the own hand and the prevalent millenarian enthusiasm on the other, it is hardly surprising that men and women, faced with an unprecedented freedom of choice, passed rapidly from sect to sect, trying all things, finding all of them wanting (Punjab during 1850-1900)⁴⁶

Kukas had a definite idea of future religious life of piety but their social ideological vision did not go beyond a political storm helped by the Russian or through restoration of M. Daleep Singh. It also suggests that return to MRS reign was the Kuka vision. The general refrain of treating Maharaja Ranjit Singh era as fallen is put into perspective by Kukas fervent insistence on *rahit* on one hand and a longing for Maharaja Ranjit Singh reign on the other as complementary and not antagonistic phenomena.

For the purpose of this study, we intend to take up two different but complementary sources in order to gain an insight into the matrix as well as the dynamics of constituting the Namdhari self-identity. The status and unquestioned authority of Baba Ram Singh within the Namdhari social universe is a well-known phenomenon. His *ardas* and *hukumnamas* thus provide us with a valuable source of delineating this process. His audience was composed of lay followers not particularly known for their cultivation of scholarship rather their simplicity coupled with their laboring traditions. Their feelings of separation from their ‘Satguru’ are expressed in ‘*Baranmahas*’ composed by Chanda Singh, Sant Nihal Singh and an *Ustatnama* by Kahla Singh. We can derive an understanding of the Namdhari self-identity by weaving

⁴² CH, p.153

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.22

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.123

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.190

these narratives – from above and below, respectively. The discursive continuities; shifts and ruptures; selections and omissions; silences and emphases amply demonstrate the imaginations and their continuing variations. Significantly these texts are all composed after the initial confrontation with the British government resulted in violent repression on the movement whose one consequence was the internment of Baba Ram Singh along with eleven of his *Subas*. With the remaining followers in Punjab under strict surveillance; leadership in jails and; the prophecies of Russian intervention as a precondition of Baba Ram Singh's return to Punjab, constitutes the discursive field in which the above-mentioned imaginations are situated.

Who is a Sikh – value-based Sikhi and its derivatives; Nam as internal glue along with material benefits; Ramdaspora – Ramsarovar; Putting oneself to test – a radical stance. Not me but the prophecies of 10 Gurus to his followers.; Pujaris are roundly condemned.; identity Udasis and Nirmalas; gurmat as orthopraxy vs. manmat/1867 debate with Kesgarh granthi ;Damdani Taksal and Nihangs were considered with favour; Sant Khalsa Vs. Malechh Khalsa (Khalsa is not enough); BRS love and longing for Punjab; Deep concern for everyday life of his followers possibility of shared vision with the Khalsa.; 'Kuká' – courting potential dishonour to confront the pujaris regarding the prophecies; Ten Gurus – GGS – Khalsa – BBS- BMS – BRS⁴⁷.

Chanda Singh's Baranmaha is supposed to be composed during 1872-1884, the phase of continuing hardships faced by ordinary Kukas. Their religious duty had an umbilical relation with their anti-British political stance. The popular domain impacts on this text in a variety of ways e.g. in the manglacharan his primary loyalty is towards Baba Ram Singh addressed as Satguru followed by Hindu deities and Guru Nanak's *bani*. Placing Baba Ram Singh in the line of avatars it has taken recourse to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Elements of Punjabi *vars* are also discernible regarding the millenarian war between Russians and the English. Its consummation is attempted through '*asursanghar*' derived from the '*Chandi Di Var*' of Guru Gobind Singh. Our contention is that these seeming divergences of influence should not be considered a limitation of their endeavour with respect to a homogenous ideal but its relevance is underwritten by their effort to carve a liberatory discourse from their received tradition and existential conditions.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.190

⁴⁷ its continuity can be traced to Bhakna, Ghadar, Communists.

These three narratives take the '*Sant Khalsa*' category coined in 1857 as their starting point after Baba Ram Singh's Hajro episode. This invention of new terminology is predicated by the irrelevance of 'Khalsa' because it includes the fallen Sikh nobility, religious persons belonging to Guru clans and the thorough degradation of the '*pujaris*' which includes the Sikh *granthis*, the Gurdwara personnel, etc. The self of 'Sant Khalsa' was pitted against '*Malechh Khalsa*'. The British were contemporary malechhas and battle against them was a fundamental religious duty. However, the servility of the components of Malechh Khalsa necessitated the new order of the 'Sant' in the body of Sant Khalsa, whose distinctive initiation ceremony, strict adherence to Namdhari *rahit*, special concern for cow welfare and a thorough boycott of British institutions. Thus we arrive at a peculiar situation in which elaborate *rahit* procedures for inculcating purity of the self is conjoined with an equal emphasis on such secular issues as attitude towards the state. This stretching of limits on both sides results in an ambiguity paradox which will unveil in the coming phases to pose challenges for the reconstitution of Namdhari self-identity.

Surviving in a situation of all round social attitude of hostile indifference the Kukas consider themselves as the moral custodians of the Panth with Bhaini turned into Ramdaspur by establishing Baba Ram Singh's *dera*. Ramdaspur in this context displays the polemical finesse which challenges the notion of Amritsar as the religious center of the Sikhs. Bhaini is Ramdaspora only through the act of naming after Baba Ram Singh but henceforth his moral vision will determine the content or substantive dimension of what does it mean to be called a Sikh or Khalsa (p.524-25).

Another noteworthy feature is the tirade against caste practices and varna hierarchy. The Namdhari *rahit* with its robust espousal of social egalitarianism reminds one of similar emphases in the *rahit* discourse of Bhai Nand Lal Goya and Bhai Mani Singh (This point needs further elaboration in which the *Rahitnama* genre and its mutations need careful reinvestigation and analysis). This elaboration of the social space has a futuristic dimension when Russia would be the agent of apocalypse to destroy the British. The Kukas would deliver the order of the divine to Russia and the Russians would be duty bound to hand over the rein of Lahore. The great upheaval wrought over Punjab would result in all-round destruction and only those would survive who will come to Baba Ram Singh's beneficence. Thus the contemporary condition of severe social isolation is sought to be overcome by the predestined return of Baba Ram Singh whose actual realization is made contingent upon the Russian intervention. In the Sant

Nihal Singh's *baranmaha*, Baba Ram Singh's imprisonment is presented as a voluntary exile (*banvas*) due to divine orders and thus the British agency is erased in his account and consequently the Russian dimension is also muted and the onus is now upon the *sangat* to seek forgiveness to ask for his return. Kahla Singh's *Ustatnama* enlists multiple restorations of *Gurmat*; of the Sikh Rāj; of the status of cow – in order to establish '*Satjug*' on earth. The secular dimension of the welfare of people is entrenched as a cardinal element of the panth. Thus, the initial attempts towards secularizing the self of Sikhism are underway. Any new project to restore Sikhism to its pristine heights would necessarily include Sikh Raj and gurdwaras, rahit, welfare etc..

The peasant and tribal uprisings of the colonial period have been looked at in different ways. The British administration considered them as problems of law and order; the rebels were portrayed as primitive savages resisting civilization. The nationalists later on tried to appropriate the peasant and tribal histories for the purposes of anti-colonial struggle and projected them as the pre-history of modern nationalism. Eric Stokes would call them 'primary resistance', i.e. a traditional society's act of violent defiance, from which usually follows the imposition of colonial rule in response.' Others like D.N. Dhanagare would regard the peasant rebellions as 'pre-political', because their lack of organization, programme and ideology. Ranjit Guha, on the other hand, has argued that "there was nothing in the militant movements of ... (the) rural masses that was not political."⁴⁸

The rebellions... were not apolitical acts; they constituted political action that demonstrated, although in different ways, the political consciousness of the peasantry. As Guha has shown, they exhibited, firstly, a clear awareness of the relation of power in rural society and a determination to overturn that structure of authority. The rebels were quite conscious of the political sources of oppression and this was demonstrated in their targets – the Zamindars' houses, their grain stocks, the moneylenders, the merchants and ultimately the state machinery of the British, which came forward and ultimately the state machinery of the British, which came forward to protect those local agents of oppression. A clear identification of the enemies was matched by an equally clear marking of the friends. What we often find in these peasant rebellions is a redefinition of the relationship of the oppressed to the language, culture and religion of the dominant classes, although the protests took myriad forms. The rebellions were political action,

⁴⁸ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2004, pp. xix+523, p.167

different from crime, because they were open and public. There were public conferences, assemblies, and planning which definitely spoke of a programme. There were grand ceremonies of rebel marches. Drawing on the corporate labour activity reinforced the public character as the Santhals characterized the rebel actions as their traditional hunting activity; but now hunting had acquired a new political meaning.⁴⁹

As for the leadership of these peasant rebellions, it came from the ranks of the rebels themselves. Since the leaders belonged to the same cultural world of the peasant and tribals whom they led, they could provide more effective leadership. The mobilization took place along community lines, an exception being the Rangpur uprising.⁵⁰ The colonial rural societies experienced varying degrees of tension between class, caste, ethnic and religious groups, which were articulated in a violent condition of oppression and poverty in the countryside. Religion in many cases provided the bond of unity among the poorer classes and the leaders were the holy men who promised a new millennium to be achieved through supernatural means. In pre-Capitalist societies, where class-consciousness was ill developed and class ideology absent, religion provided an ideology for rebellion. The holy leaders referred to the loss of a moral world and thus expressed the anxieties of the peasants in religious idioms. Religion thus provided legitimacy to their movements. In such revolutionary messianism, the charismatic leaders were thought to be endowed with magical power; their empowering was thus an act of God. The rebellion was therefore divinely ordained and legitimized through reference to a higher authority. This provided both an ideology as well as motivation for peasant action.⁵¹ The rebels' own perception of time plays a significant role as well. There is often an evocation of history in the conception of a Golden Age' in a distant past. An urge for the restoration of that imagined golden past provided an ideology for peasant action, the Faraizi and Santhal rebellions being prime example of that.⁵²

I have forsaken thematic continuity over chronological evolution of these hukumnamas by Baba Ram Singh to appreciate his views and voice. The numeral at start of paragraph conveys the number of hukumnama.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.167-68

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.168-69

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.168

⁵² *ibid.*, p.168-69 Apart from the more organized movements described earlier, violent armed rebellions, social banditry or general 'lawlessness' were endemic in the first century of British rule in India.

1. This foundation of Sant Khalsa has been lain by the Guru himself men are not enough to overturn it... it is Guru's will that I along with my sangat endure this suffering.⁵³

2. These are the only Sikhs worth their salt. If the earlier ones were authentic then why did they condemn Guru's Sikhs? Why would they stop them performing bhog of akhand paths. I have also stayed with Sikhs at Lahore and you know rather well the Sikh condition in Lahore. Prostitutes, homosexual relations, meat, liquor were commonplace whereas piety, reading bani was extremely rare. Have you ever seen them conducting akhand paths in such numbers even when nobody prohibited the same. Even now except for the Namdharis, who performs this? Do they have the heart to call themselves as Sikhs.⁵⁴

The pujaris, mahants, granthis, gyanis all are one in calling us tankhahia and you just compare the bhogs performed by these tankhahias and these so called 'true Sikhs'⁵⁵

Who is a Sikh, seems to be their rallying cry, their ideology and motivation all rolled into one defining question. The rest of discursive elements appear as derivatives of this poser.

3. Everyone should perform prayers with a stout heart otherwise the offerings render one hollow and corrupts the mind. The pujaris have suffered due to this. That's why the Islamic way has scored over the Gurumat and all the gyanis, dhyanis, Bedis, Sodhis have degenerated on this count. The leading Muslims constantly convey this to me.⁵⁶

Thousands rever me, despite my ironsmith origins along with offering thousand of rupees. Since you are a Brahmin, prayers by you will be more effective.⁵⁷

Prayers have a material benefits also – that a 'low-born' is revered only due to prayers) caste consciousness.

⁵³ Ganda Singh, *Kukian Di Vithia*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, year not mentioned, p125 On Sant Khalsa – Guru's will.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.125

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.125-26

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.128 Prayer as an internal glue to keep intact the fledgling social organization as was witnessed during medieval Christianity where crusades and asceticism complimented each other.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.129

4. Not the Guru rather I am his messenger... No one should indulge in female infanticide and bartering of girls should come to a stop. Sikhs have suffered heavily on this count. And the cow slaughtering malechhas will come to an end, as has happened in past.⁵⁸ Messenger of guru passing strictures against female infanticide and barter amongst Sikhs while simultaneously protection of cows and opposition to malechhas are upheld as principles. And those who are Namdharis should call this village as Ramdaspora Not the others but the sangat should call Ramdaspora.⁵⁹ Ramdaspora was suggested by Baba Ram Singh according to Chanda Singh.

If I am the designated figure as prophesied by Guru then I will reach the dera any day. And if I am not the same then why to have my *darshan*, you must think over it.⁶⁰

To desist his followers from visiting him, he takes a radical stand of putting his own self to test-a radical stance in any case. The baranmaha writers calibrate this eventuality by linking it with Russian intervention as a pre-requisite for Baba Ram Singh's return to Punjab.

6. Take care that words are not joined together. These are written with great care at the cost of prayers... write correctly. I am not the Guru.⁶¹

This heightened concern about correct spellings or words is striking. Does it emanate from his act of publishing the Adi Granth from Lahore at the press of Diwan Buta Singh?

8. No point in sending ardas to (Maharaja) Dalip Singh, a beef-eater, he is of no use to us.... I would not have been imprisoned if I had some magical prowess. It is the word and the Guru which possesses magic so pray.. Guru Granth Sahib is the Guru Supreme over and above any Guru, hence it is the Shabad Guru.⁶² Dalip Singh's help is discounted on account of his 'malechh' conduct – emphasis on his lack of magical prowess with Guru Granth as supreme.

⁵⁸ ibid., p.129

⁵⁹ ibid., p.130

⁶⁰ ibid., p.130

⁶¹ ibid., p.132-133

⁶² ibid., p.135

10. Accord your beneficence to the poor and the cow. These Namdharis are the poor. As you deem fit.. As the Guru had proclaimed, disorder would reign, each one will suffer. So has happened in the thirty-fourth. Now the rest should also follow... Guru had proclaimed that along with Bhai Jaita would descend from the western side to save the Sant Khalsa. So this Bhai Jaita is the same fellow, was the saviour.⁶³

His tone is humble regarding the Namdharis and their condition with an unshakable faith in God/Guru as their solitary hope. Baba Ram Singh attempts to temper their excessive emphasis on his own role as the saviour and cites the ('Sau Sakhi') prophecies as a measure of hope. The western direction implying Russia is the functional arm of these distant prophecies). However, this focus on prophecies, apocalypse, Russia, etc. leaves no space for any strategic, organizational advance for that we have to wait until the 1920s and the Akali movement.

11. Prahladsar Pothi.. Prem Sumarg.. pujaris have given up on the true path, thus they are anti-Guru. It is not I but this Khalsa belongs to the Guru and this is heartening... Since these pujaris have sought to disobey the Guru's proclamations... You do not require their ardas for your purpose, they are evil, thieves... I had many considerations before accepting anyone, firstly the Udasis, then the Nirmalas then I got baptized through the double-edged sword. Now the word(Nam) is my solace.⁶⁴

Listing the approved texts – Prahladsar Pothis and Prem Sumarg – for their prophetic sayings. It is the correctness of these sayings which forms the asset for Baba Ram Singh to join issue with the pujari class who have given up on this path and their criticism of the Namdharis is a misdemeanour against the Guru and the panth. It is their conduct that renders them incapable of any grace. His critique also includes the Udasis and Nirmalas. However, in this listing of his former associations Baba Ram Singh highlights a process which has historical parallels. As the remarkable historian Christopher Hill notes: "Given then this breakdown of confidence on the one hand, and the prevalent millenarian enthusiasm on the other, it is hardly surprising that men and women, faced with an unprecedented freedom of choice, passed rapidly from sect to sect, trying all things, finding all of them wanting."⁶⁵ This seems to be the general social condition in the Punjab during the nineteenth century. Sadhu Gulab Das's biography also shows similar characteristics.

⁶³ ibid., p.136-37

12. Without *gurmat*, no utterance, even bani, is of any use. The condition when bani is read but is not practiced is *manmat*. Later on bani also gets shelved.⁶⁶

BRS is strikingly clear on issues of a value-based manner of being a Sikh. This rendering is bereft of any sectarian closure and principled conduct is made the lynchpin of their order. So rather than hankering after or striving to demarcate the sectarian boundaries, Baba Ram Singh is waging an ideological contest within the Sikh movement. In the process, he is putting forward the strenuous test for his fellow and would-be Namdharis. His debate with the Kesgarh granthi (1867) elaborates this formulation. Christopher Hill remarks: "The eloquence, the power, of the simple artisans who took part in these discussions is staggering".⁶⁷

13. People keep on maligning us by calling us liars, I am called a *thoka* (a pejorative for carpenters), we are variously attacked. However, we are at peace. Never to show our back to the Guru and his command qualifies as *sidq*... I am not the Guru, merely a messenger.⁶⁸ The importance of a Sikh term is enunciated in time of crisis.

15. It is surprising that the Damdamis prohibited the (Namdhari) *sangat* from offering prayers by force.⁶⁹ The Damdami taskal in this sense was considered slightly apart from his usual distrust of the *pujari* class. That is why he is surprised.

16. It was Guru's saying that with the exception of Sant Khalsa, the rest would join Malechh Khalsa. They are all the same, like the Britishers (*bille*). Malechh Panth's annihilation is prophesied and the time has arrived. The guru's grace knows no bounds.⁷⁰ Sant Khalsa is perceived in splendid solitariness whereas the Malechh Khalsa has become a shadow of the Britishers.

17. Be kind to your servant and they will respond... take care to remain united, as two brothers, together, do not be separated at the behest of womenfolk.⁷¹ Here a certain folksy understanding about women seems to underpin his pragmatic advice to

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.137-39

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.137-39

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.139

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p.139

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p.140

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.142

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.142-43

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.144

two brothers. In the everyday affairs, this famed radical attitude towards women had yet some ground to cover.

18. You are my own flesh. If any one from Punjab comes we would take an excellent care.⁷²His concern for any one from Punjab is transparent.

21. By traversing this long distance, you have proven your Sikh credentials I do not have an iota of Guruship in me. You are my body and soul. I am overwhelmed even at the sight of a mere bhangi from Punjab. Even the glimpse of a Punjabi is extremely rare.⁷³His concern for Punjab is continuing. This demonstrates the fact that although the organization had formally spread to far off centers, Punjab was the epicenter of their universe.

24. Visiting the prostitute harms the body, wastes money, dharma is deserted, image is tarnished in the community. The bhangis, Muslims all visit prostitutes, anyone who comes in their contact loses his Hindu standing. As Guruji says one does not become a Muslim until one comes in their contact, so the English, Brahmans, Kurangis, Muslims are all alike. And, in your house your wife would get the disease on contact and abstinence is also a sort of wrongdoing.... You have been reckless.⁷⁴BRS is very much alive to the everyday life of his followers even to the extent of advising and dilating on the question of venereal disease. Derived from visiting a prostitute the ethical, medical, social and economic consequences are detailed by him. Of course, the clincher remains the Guru's injunction in a Rahitnama which is stretched to a logical conclusion of treating Britishers, Muslims and others as one against the Namdharis.

27. Visit the gurdwaras. Ask for their version of imposing the tankhah, note down whatever they may say. Do not indulge in skirmishes or to make any request. Write down the names of all miscreants present there, and then we will see what the Guru wishes.⁷⁵Baba Ram Singh asking to prepare a digest of the reasons proffered for imposing tankhah on the Namdharis.

⁷² ibid., p.145.

⁷³ ibid., p.147

⁷⁴ ibid., p.150

⁷⁵ ibid., p.153

28. I have discovered new meanings of other Sakhis (on my return) I will disclose those.⁷⁶ His power to decipher new meanings from Sakhis is a marker of his salience and authority.

29. I may figure in the one indicated by the Prahadsar pothi
Then I will come to Punjab on my own. And if I am someone else then why at all to visit me. Then there are innumerable carpenters like me, even better are found in Punjab and if someone says that I am the same Ram Singh of the twelfth place, then he should obey, whatever I may say (about not visiting him)... and if he comes to know that I am not the same son of a carpenter who is called by the name of Ram Singh then why to come all the way. Moreover, to be called a kuka is an invitation to infamy all over the country.⁷⁷ His strenuous efforts to desist his followers from visiting him continue and new accretions are made over his usual stance of undergoing the test of proving his credentials. Significant is his perception about courting the potential dishonour by calling oneself a Kuka. One is reminded of Sainapat's familiar characterization about the Khalsa in the early-eighteenth century.

31. (I pray to the Guru to)... mend the breach with the Khalsa, which at present indulges in denigrating the Guru's command.⁷⁸ Baba Ram Singh keeps alive the possibility of a shared vision with the Khalsa. They are not totally given up. They are asked to follow the Guru's command, which the Namdharis are adhering to. However, rather than extending a logic Baba Ram Singh is asking them to believe in prophecies and it seems there must be a current of opinions against their insistence of this) his detailed response to such insinuations is found in hukumnama no.33. Can we say that in the absence of a general outlook-except in social reform, boycott of the English institutions coupled with their own conception of time and space which had a cyclical nature their rejection of British colonialism was often 'backward looking, negative and unrealistic', in the words of Christopher Hill.⁷⁹

37. Blue is the colour of malechhas, even the Nihangs have fallen prey to the evil influence of this colour. Earlier Naina Singh was prudent then he consorted with a *chuhri*, then hit a cow while buying vegetables then he did, later on fought amongst

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.153

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.154

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p.156-57

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.156-57

them, then picked up battle with the British...⁸⁰Nihangs were considered comparatively pure and potential allies however, their hostility is explained by their blue attire alongwith other coordinates.

40. If the Guru brings me along to Punjab....the centrality of Punjab)⁸¹He is consistently asking his followers to confront the pujaris regarding the prophecies contained in relevant texts.⁸²Baba Ram Singh prohibits his followers not to address him with excessive epithets and yearns for broad-based information rather individual focus.⁸³

44. You see that after the ten Gurus, the guru established Guru Granth Sahib which is the Guru eternal. However, in our Khalsa a phenomenon has occurred. First they showered their 'grace' on Bir Singh and then on Maharaj (Singh) now I am the one to invite their wrath.⁸⁴In a unique manner with immense historical value Baba Ram Singh delineates his position. The gurus and Guru Granth are supreme. But in the corporate affairs of the Khalsa panth especially in his times he chooses to place himself in the lineage of Baba Bir Singh Naurangabadi and Bhai Maharaj Singh who led anti-British charge in their own time and were the targets of entrenched interests within the Sikhs. There is a definite advance in this proposition because a tangible current of anti-imperialist resistance is celebrated and contemporanised. Its next manifestation is seen in the Ghadar movement, which appreciates the Namdhari resistance. The first president of the Ghadar Party, Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna mentions the definitive influence of a Namdhari, Baba Kesar (Singh) cultivating anti-British sentiment in him even though baba Kesar did not adhere to the Namdhari rahit. In a way, the Kukas' anti-imperialist stance secured their place in the evolving historical dynamics in the Punjabi. In this context, the centrality of the Khalsa army is noteworthy.

45. Do not imply that Ram Singh is imprisoned due to reciting bani and we will meet the same fate. I am here due to my own ill luck.⁸⁵He is responding to popular view in Punjab- however, a note of despair is unmistakable in these lines.

⁸⁰ ibid., p.163

⁸¹ ibid., p.165

⁸² ibid., p.166

⁸³ ibid., p.167

⁸⁴ ibid., p.170

⁸⁵ ibid., p.171

And as for your mentioning about the disarray in panth...⁸⁶ Anxieties about the Namdharis' potential disarray are being expressed with Baba Ram Singh striving to invoke the Guru's word as the only solace. However, the refrain about their unfortunate karma is getting voluble. His internal sentiments are echoing the external adversity].

50. File an appeal by consulting Mangal Singh, hire a white lawyer, .. you haven't done the right thing by not appealing till day. Now file the appeal immediately... these folks wanted their pound of flesh and they have got it.. I had no inclination that they will mistreat me. I was scapegoated for all their doings. Only if the government might care to ask me I informed the government whatever I know. To save their skins I was made the accused.⁸⁷ Boycott of British institutions now gives way to filing appeals in their court even hiring a white--hitherto malechh--lawyer. Without mentioning the prophecies ,the government and his foolhardy followers are castigated by him. Confronting an all round disaster he is distraught but valiantly struggles to keep his composure. His karmic vision is foregrounded. His intention of performing Hindu rituals at his death is repeatedly mentioned. According to Baba Ram Singh coupled with his *karma*, the widespread opposition to him is also responsible for his misfortune. His total dejection comes through. Even the solace of Nam has deserted him.⁸⁸ He has hardly anything to offer to his followers. Baba Ram Singh leaves everything to his followers' wisdom. ⁸⁹

There is not any scholarly claim in these utterances in the kuka adherents whether leaders or followers. While it shows the relative unity of their discourse it also hints towards their distance from centres of learning that were otherwise flourishing during this period. While fighting for the Sikh raj and afterward the Sikh community managed to support a fairly sophisticated educational programme. Many Sikh villages had a gurmukhi school, with was part of the local gurdwara and supported a bhai qualified to offer the basic tools of Sikhism education; while these schools were sustained by local Sikhs, larger centers of learning, the scholars bungalows, and taksal, ran on royal patronage and the support they received from various Sikh chiefs. Apparently,

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.172

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.175-76

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.175

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p.175-76

the network was sufficiently dense that in several instances large donations of land were offered to the Nirmala ascetics for setting up new centers of Sikhism learning.⁹⁰

Built during the later half of the 18th century around the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the Bungas were both a mechanism of defence as well as significant seats of Sikh vernacular education upto the 1870s. The Sikh learning owes much of its evolution and furtherance to the teachers in these *bungas*. Various Sikh missionary orders of Nirmalas, Udasis, Granthis, Gyanis, etc. were operational on the grants received by the Sikh Chiefs. Instruction included advanced learning of Sanskrit, Vedant, etc. as well as other specialized instruction in music, calligraphy and medicine. In the 1800s Amritsar was a great center of Sikh education. About 300 dharmshalas were devoted to the promotion of Gurmukhti education.⁹¹

Imparting the Rag Vidya (vocal and instrumental music) the Bungas of Ragis Kahan Singh, Charat Singh and Dhanpat Singh were very famous. The Bunga of the Ahluwalias was an academy of music. The Maharaja of Kapurthala was the chief patron of this center. Raja Fateh Singh Ahluwalia was himself adept in Rag Vidya. The young trainees having attained suitable proficiency in the basic ragas were trained in advanced courses and specialized in ragas and ruginis. Particularly, great stress was laid on how to sing the Japgi, the Asa di Var, Sohila and the Sodar. At the initial stage, some rudimentary knowledge of Gurbani was imparted and afterwards the higher ragas were taught. A Gurmukhi pathshala was attached for this purpose in the Ahluwalia Bunga. The Ahluwalia Bunga specialized in instrumental music with its courses on *rabab*, *sarangi*, *mirdang* and *kacchawa*, the musical instruments used in the Golden Temple. Many a ragis and rababis were trained for service at the Golden Temple as well as for other Sikh Shrines. The music centers of the bungas welcomed all pupils earnestly interested in learning music notwithstanding their hereditary occupation or otherwise.

The chief seats of Sikh learning in the early-nineteenth century were Amritsar and Damdama Sahib in Bathinda. In Amritsar, the Golden Temple and the bungas were popular centers of learning. The bungas played an important role in imparting

⁹⁰ G S Mann: *Sikh Studies the Sikh Education Heritage in Studying the Sikhs: Issues for North America*: eds. John Stratton Hawley and Gurinder Singh Mann, SUNY Press, 1993, New York, USA. , p.99

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p.11-14 Hans&Sagar

indigenous education to the Sikhs. These bungas belonged to orthodox Sikhs and other dispensations, like Udasis, Nirmalas and Seva panthis. A number of poets were the product of these bungas.⁹² Broadly, the Sikh learning comprised of Sikh religious literature, Hindu religious and philosophical works, rhetoric and prosody. Vedant however, was the major subject in the Hindu religious writings.⁹³

There were four major traditions in Punjabi literature. The first was the Sikh religious literature in the form of janamsakhis and gurbilas. The vedante dialect was the third. The fourth belonged to kissa poetry, which was, to some extent, secular in character. Its exponents were mostly Muslims. The Sikhs to some extent also adopted it. However, kissa literature was not in the curriculum of religious education.⁹⁴ The janam-sakhi genre was developed by the Sikh community in early-sixteenth century to spread the myth of Nanak and discuss his doctrines. The expression of piety was J.S. genre for their own ends. "Thus the period of the geography of the conflicting claims to religious loyalty called forth an intense janam-sakhi debate to constitute its Golden Agriculture. After the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1675, the genre did not remain relevant. The Sikh struggle for power in the mid-eighteenth century necessitated a new genre the new condition and the Gurbulas genre. Its main purpose was to cultivate a militantly heroic spirit with a built in social urgency even at the cost of doctrine.' In this sense, gurbilas is just the opposite of janam-sakhi. The orthodox janam-sakhis never departed from doctrine. With the rise of Sikhs to power the spiritual supremacy of Guru Nanak did not remain problematic and emphasis on political urgency was lost. Consequently, e.g. -janam-sakhis and gurbilas literature of late -18th to early- 19th century are full of 'magic and the decline of religion.'⁹⁵

The Vedantic literature in Gurmukhi has an important place in the literature of Punjab. The catalogue of Gurumukhi manuscripts records a total of 1857 manuscripts i.e. 1189 major and 394 works on variety of subjects. A cursory reading of the manuscripts on Indian philosophy suggests that they are mostly on vedant and just a few on yoga. Sikh literature contains a number of commentaries of Gurbani, written by Udasis and Nirmalas which are Vedantic interpretations.⁹⁶ The earliest works on Vedant

⁹² *ibid.*, p.12-14

⁹³ *ibid.*, p.13

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.13

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.13-14

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.14 Out of them, the manuscripts on Sikh literature including Gurbani exegesis, janam-sakhis, gurbilas, Mahima Prakash and other hierarchal works are 301 in all. It includes 121 manuscripts on a

in Gurumukhi are claimed to belong to the second half of the seventeenth century.⁹⁷ Like Veantic literature the riti or scholastic literature was very popular in Punjab. Some exponents of this tradition are said to have been associated with the court of Guru Gubind Singh. They were Amrit Rai, Kavi Vrind and Sukhdev, Amrit Raj wrote chitra vilas; Vrind wrote vrind Vinod Satsai and Bhava Panchasika. The mid-seventeenth century was the period of generic of scholastic poetry in Punjab. It remained prevalent in Lahore. His works are on prosody, rhetoric, and nine-feelings (nav rasa) etc.⁹⁸ In the second half of 18th century, important riti works were translated. They were Mati Ram's has Raj and Lalit Lalam, Bhanu Duttk Rasik Priya and Kavi Priya, Kavi Deuts has Biles and Padmakar Jagat Binod. Some Sanskrit riti works were also translated into bhakha eg. Kavi Nihal translated the Kavya Prakash by Mammat under the title Sahit Siromani.⁹⁹

Santokh Singh died at the age of 56 in 1844. He started his career as a Katha performer at Buria. Nanak Prakash and Gyan Prakash Suraj Granth are in the form of Katha.¹⁰⁰ His commentary and his works on history have Vedantic elements. His riti style is patently there. His Garab Ganjani Tika discusses the alankars of Guru Nanak's Japuji. His merit lies in Sikh historiography. He surpasses Sarup Das of Mahima Prakash and Kesar Singh Chhibber of Bansawali Nama. In Santokh Singh Vedant and the riti poetry are socially significant.¹⁰¹

Like other works of Sikh literature, Nanak Prakash's nature is cognitive. In such works, literature and doctrine are complimentary as well as autonomous. The historical study of such literature needs a different approach. It is not only essential to look into the doctrinal aspect of the work but also to analyse the genre. Both the aspects are rooted in the socio-political conditions of the period.¹⁰² The chief interest in taking up the study of Nanak Prakash is to find its hierarchical outlook from the perspective of his

variety of topics. But the manuscripts under the title 'Indian philosophy' number 120, out of which 66 are on more than one topic.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.15 Some of the prominent Vedantic scholars of the period were Dyal Anemi, Anath Puri and Kavi Sukhdev. Kavi Sukhdev is also said to be associated with the court of Guru Gobind Singh for some time. The earliest Vedantic literature in Punjab was taken up by the Handalis. Manohar Das Niranjani wrote Gyan Manjari, Vedant Paribhasha, Gyan Churan Vachnika, Sat, Prashan Uttari and Khat Prashmi. Amritdhara and Vedant Vivek Granth Satik were the works of Bhagwan Das Niranjani. The rise of Sikh power revived literature on Vedant especially by the Udasis and the Nirmalas. The Sikhan Di Bhagatmal and the Mokh Panth Prakash by Gulab Singh Nirmala are two major works of the period. However, throughout the Sikh period, the translation of the Shankar's commentaries was undertaken.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.16

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p.16

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.19

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p.20

literary imagination. The evidence on early-nineteenth century society and politics can be understood against this backdrop.¹⁰³ In Nanak Prakash, the continuity of the literary tradition has a parallelism in the continuity of administrative institutions.¹⁰⁴

The work is based on a number of sources. They are Bala janam-sakhi, Gyan Ratnavali, the Miharban janam-sakhi, the Adi Sakhian, the B-40 janam-sakhi and the Puratan janam-sakhi. Other works used are Mahima Prakash by Sarup Das Bhalla, Sikhian Di Bhagatmal, Varan by Bhai Gurdas and Guru Nanak's composition entitled Siddh Gosht. There are a few sakhis in the work whose sources could not be traced. Besides, the poet has made use of the Hindu and Muslim mythology. The work narrates the legend of Kala Bhushand, Dattatreya, Prehlad, Vrah, Dhru Pankar and an account of Emperor Karan. Furthermore, the work bears the influence of Dasam Granth, bhakti literature and the poetic tradition of riti literature. Even in the first canto an invocation, the direct borrowing from the Gyan-Ratnavali can be seen. However, the major part of the work is based on the janamsakhi material.¹⁰⁵

As the Bala janam-sakhi is the most popular janam-sakhi, dependence on it underlies the element of popularity. The popularity of the Bala janam-sakhi lies in the exception and treatment of the theme. The work claims to have been written in the presence of Guru Nanak. Other elements that lend popularity to it are elaboration of narrative in order to give a 'lifelike picture', exactness and specificity of material and the detailed characterization. It is the only janam-sakhi that gives chronology of events, names of relatives of Guru Nanak and also the names of islands and seaports said to be visited by the Guru. Adding new sakhis in order to enhance its popularity further enlarged the tradition. Also, there is a 'greater emphasis on detail in the later janam-sakhis. Similarly, the characterization and other elements are expanded. The redactors of later Bala janam-sakhi do not hesitate even to include some sakhis from other traditions, particularly from the Puratan janam-sakhi tradition. All the popular elements are present in Nanak Prakash. It adopts the pattern of the Bala tradition wherein Bhai Bala is the narrator of the account of Guru Nanak in the presence of Guru... The poet's special interest in the tradition is apparent from the fact that he makes an effort to come to terms with the doubt of the readers regarding the genuineness of the Bala janam-

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p.3

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p.3

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p.4

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p.24

sakhi. In this regard, the poet's approach is not rational, but devotional.¹⁰⁶ The other element that seems to have contributed in relying mostly on the Bala material is the fictional element.¹⁰⁷ In the Nanak Prakash, the attitude of the poet towards the Bala tradition is paradoxical. Though the poet condemns the Handalis for polluting the original janam-sakhi yet he does not make any effort to recognize the anti-Sikh stance of the janam-sakhi. Though the poet excises the sakhi of Baba Handal and yet Nanak Prakash contains the idea of instantaneous redemption. A touch is sufficient for the knowledge of all the three lakas and God.¹⁰⁸ One can discern a contradiction between doctrinal aspect held by the poet and the pulls and pressures exercised by his patronage, advanced by the Sikh rulers.¹⁰⁹

Nanak Prakash describes the greatness of Bhai Bala. Even Kalu Mehta considers him a wise and trustworthy person. In fact, it indicates the dominance of the Jats... In fact, the predominance of the Jat in Santokh Singh's work merely reminds us that the Sikh rulers were Jats. In the Gur Pratap Suraj, the narrators of the account of the ten Gurus, Bhai Ram Koer is a Jat. He is said to have a ruling ancestor.¹¹⁰ Poet excludes the Sakhi that narrates the higher spiritual status of Baba Handal but not of Bhai Bala. Similarly, the Handali doctrine does not seem to be anti-Sikh in the nineteenth century because with rise of Sikh power, Sikh devotionism became irrelevant. The underlying idea of inequality of the Handali doctrine suits the ruling class well. Santokh Singh curtails much of the detail from the Sakhi of Swampur, utopian city of the Bala tradition. Poet is of the opinion that the Sikh rule was Satyug. It suggests obliquely that the Sikh rule is the transformation of utopia into reality.¹¹¹

It is also significant that the Vedantic ideas were propounded in the form of Guru Nanak's instruction to Bhai Lehna before his installation to guruship. In late-eighteenth to early-nineteenth century there is an influx of the Vedantic ideas in Punjabi literature. This has a social significance. This rise of Sikhs to political power was a significant development. It was viewed as the establishment of satyug in kaliyug. Its implication is that there is no possibility of change in future. The Vedant suited the

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p.25

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p.27

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p.27-28

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.27-28

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.29-30

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p.30

occasion.¹¹² The Handali theology and Vedant have a common basis. Not only the social inequality is taken for granted by the Handalis but also their attitude towards the state is ambivalent. Their idea of equality remains an illusory utopia. The vedant has no faith in social phenomena. It works in favour of status quo, social and political. The heterodox material does not indicate an individual choice only. In fact, the choice has been conditioned by the contemporary society.¹¹³

The content of janam-sakhis has three salient parts; the image of Guru Nanak; its doctrinal basis and its efforts to give meaning to the genesis of the Sikh faith. (Hans).¹¹⁴ A corpus of sakhis is constituted of traditional material. But the selection of material and their arrangement is intentional.¹¹⁵ The Bala tradition preaches its own doctrines. As the Handalis have no scripture it advocates the fetishes of spirituality. The basic doctrine of Handals is that of the degree of Yogic adeptness. Spiritual strength is serially arranged. There are four categories of the redeemed in Handali doctrines of spiritualism; Slok, Samip, Sarup and Sayij, Bjs.¹¹⁶

The self-image of the Sikh, in the Adi-Sakhian is significant for the cohesion of the Sikh community. The Sikhs were beyond the evil influence of the kalyug. They feel that both the Hindus and Muslims were spiritually poor. Hence to be a perfect Hindu or Muslim one had to be a Sikh. This self-image gives a sense of pride to the community. By making the Sikhs conscious of the present, and articulating their relationship with the Mughal Empire the janam-sakhi helps them to organize politically.¹¹⁷

In the characterization of Bala, he is portrayed as a wise, pious and equal to Guru Nanak... Bala is said to have declined the offer of guruship. He said that guruship should be entrusted to someone else. The Handalis appealed to the Jats to have Jat Gurus inventing a Jat utopia.¹¹⁸ The Bala janam-sakhi not only exalts Handal over Guru Gobind but also puts forward the Jat claims through the characterization of Bala. The further ascendancy of Bala in Nanak Prakash is manifestation of the rise of Jats as ruling class. Bala's decline of the offer of guruship provides them justification as a

¹¹² *ibid.*, p.34-35[(264) – J.S. Ahluwalia and N.R. Ray have failed to see the social relevance of the process of vedantization.

¹¹³ *ibid.*, p.35

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.41

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.43

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.46

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.47-48

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.50

ruling class. The rise of Baba Buddha in Santokh Singh's Guru Pratap Suraj and Kavi Sohan's Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin points in the same direction.¹¹⁹

As we know Janam-Sakhis do not discuss Sikh theology as a whole but expound key principles. They are: the nature of Guru Nanak's guruship, the line of succession, and the idea of time.¹²⁰ Guru Nanak's guruship lies, infact, in his relation with God, Gurus, Sikhs and Panth.¹²¹ Nanak Prakash as janam-sakhi is nothing but a vehicle of magic and superstitions, which speaks of the lack of religious dynamism during the period. Whereas the janam-sakhi takes up the doctrinal aspects the Gurbilas is primarily concerned with the socio-political urgency. The Maharaja Ranjit Singh reign, all these genres had formally collapsed, thus the Nanak Prakash is a double failure. It lacks all the dynamic elements of both the janam-sakhi and the gurbilas.¹²²

In the janam-sakhi genre, the shabads of Guru Nanak are used to 'lend a semblance of realism or moral support to the narrative preceding it.'¹²³ *4 The historical make-believe of janam-sakhi writers lie in the facts made from the shabad. Santokh Singh is more concerned about the fictional element of the bani. He is not aware of the institutional use of the janam-sakhi tradition.¹²⁴ For him, 'nam' is supreme and should be remembered even at the cost of ignoring other works because it is 'nam' that liberates man from Yamas. In fact, nam is emphasized in a way that it amounts to departure from the basic tenets of Sikhism... Indirectly, it suggests that nam is necessary even if it is antithetical to any idea like nam, the concept of sewa is also discordant. According to him, sewa is the service of the Guru in the form of washing his clothes and feet. The major thrust is on providing comfort to the Guru. Even the social norms have been ignored at places. A Sikh sells his daughter in order to serve the Guru... Santokh Singh's concept of sewa is, in fact, an aspect of his conception of Guru-Sikh relationship, visualized as one between master and slave of his time.¹²⁵ This notion of key Sikh doctrines actually serves the communitarian notions, Also important is the literal meanings gives to these symbolic terms. No wonder Singh Sabha and Bhai Vir Singh eulogize Santokh Singh.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.50-1

¹²⁰ S.S. HANS , Janam – Sakhis as a Performing Art, *Journal of Sikh Studies*, GNDUL, Vol.IX, No.1, p.16, p.59

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p.59

¹²² *ibid.*, p.65

¹²³ *ibid.*, p.70-71

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p.70-71

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p.78-79

Poet feels the need for communal harmony. But he provides its solution in the realm of religion.¹²⁶ Nanak Prakash is the only source that emphasizes the need to minimize the distinctiveness of the Sikh community in order to provide stability to Sikh rule. Fateh Singh Pratap Prabhakar by Ram Sukh Rao juxtaposes Guru Nanak and Lord Krishna, Har Mandir and Thakurdwara or Jwala Mukhi Temple, the Guru Granth and the Mahabharata¹²⁷ Guru Nanak as chakravarti – Literalisation from Bhai Gurdas' connotative use of the term.¹²⁸ Panth gives way to sangat, gurdwaras, satnam – literalisation. Though the political power weakens the religious bond yet social inequity had to be legitimized by the political hierarchy.¹²⁹ Muslims are portrayed to have an inferior status.¹³⁰

Social order consisted in four social entities, king, merchants, Brahmins, and the Sikhs.¹³¹ Portraying Sikh rule as satyug in kalyug the Handali or Vedantic theological orientation shows the reflection of the contemporary society.¹³²

Gyani Gyan Singh offers a number of openings into the mutual relations between popular and scholarly domains within popular culture in nineteenth century Punjab operating through his biography; his relations with other sects; and his later involvement in Singh Sabha movement and the attendant controversies.

During the period when the ecclesiastical social doctrines were being developed this spirit and type of Sikhism did not exist at all. The society of that day inhabited regions that had been recently cleared, the population was sparse, the death rate high; means of communications were primitive and life itself was insecure. The social system was intelligently organized on an individualistic basis in direct dependence upon nature, an association that was based partly upon brute force, quite rationalistically conceived, and upon the sentiments of inward reverence and loyalty. High culture and literature were limited to the smallest groups, popular thinking was dominated by phantasy and symbolism.¹³³ Both in the spiritual and temporal realm the social fabric was held together by habit and custom, by reverence and faith, agreement and loyalty, by means

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p.91

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p.92. See Joginder Kaur, (ed.) *Ram Sukh Rao's Sri Fateh Singh Pratap Prabhakar*, Patiala, 1980, (Ph.D. Thesis), p.64.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, p.118

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, p.118-9

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p.121

¹³¹ *ibid.*, p.123

¹³² *ibid.*, p.123-24

of the customs involved in the holding of property in common, and in the absence of a money economy traffic in goods, is the natural basis for the existence of the individual group.¹³⁴ The only sovereignty that existed was that of the popular cultural practices; there was no sovereignty of the state, or of the economic production, or of science or art.

The popular cultural universe and warlike spirit of feudalism manifested through feudal principle of honour constituted a foil for the ecclesiastical system impelling it to a vigorous assertion of its existence, while preventing it from degenerating into mere hypocrisy or sentimentality. Popular narratives ethicalised the feudal spirit – by consecrating its militarism to ideal ends – by transforming the idea of honour into an obligation towards God and man. Cultivating a virile loyalty towards an ethical human choice for instance remains a principal feature of qissas. Thus, a strong secular lay civilization, governed by the ideals of chivalry, came into being along with strong ecclesiastical institutions.¹³⁵

By and large the characteristic of traditional peasants in a collectivity, which both tends to inhibit permanent social differentiation within the peasantry and to facilitate, or even impose, communal action.¹³⁶ This vague consciousness of 'peasantness' as a variant of subalternity, rests on the mutual recognition by peasants of the similarity of their relation to nature, to production to non-peasants. Ideally, humanity is the limit of this consciousness, and the political action that corresponds to it is the brief but vast millennial sweep or surge that is supposed to embrace the whole world.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, such sweeps are necessarily as brief as they are numerical in scope, precisely because they are based on recognition of similarity or identity, rather than on the firmer base of a concrete system of economic or social interrelations. Modern politics belonged to the cities and the rich, and were either irrelevant or hostile to the politics and the defence of the old ways against the new implying the rout of traditionalism.

¹³³ Troeltsch, E.: *Medieval Christianity*, in Roland Robertson (ed.): *Sociology of Religion*, Penguin, London, pp.115-126, p.120-21

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p.121

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p.124

¹³⁶ Hobsbawm, E.J., '*Peasants and Politics*' in *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz*, Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1998, pp.146-165, p.148

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p.150. "Thus it is evident that in the 1870s the Russian politics, to the grief of Narodniks, were still quite inaccessible both to them for more receptive to new ideas and methods. Economic changes, urbanization, migration and so on are obviously very largely responsible for such changes".

The spread of Namdharis, would have been impossible in the mid-nineteenth century Punjab without the antecedent millenarian excitement promising material heaven on earth after the imminent millennium. New sects were organized expressions of new ideologies projected as social visions. Although, these visions could not transcend the millenarian paradigm still, the eloquence, the power, of the simple rural folks who took part in these discussions is staggering.¹³⁸

Modern nationalist agitation captured the peasants rather late than social agitation had gripped the Punjabi elite during late nineteenth century. Almost mirroring the Russian case where 1905 revolution ushered in onset of modern political agitation thus outgrowing the Narodnik efforts, the “Pagri Sambhal Jatta” agitation pitchforked Punjab peasant onto modern institutional arena. Sardar Ajit Singh crafted a secular idiom for this purpose during his leading role in 1907-1908. There were many in succeeding movements who claim to be inspired by his oratory. Referring to Sikh lore and its history of struggle, he projected gurus as patriots eschewing any communitarian closure to their legacy. His effort was anti-thetical to ongoing discursive thrust of Singh sabha. Sardar Ajit Singh, to my mind, remains the architect of a *sikhi* that went on to become a bridge between kuka articulation on one hand and the Ghadarites on the other.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p.362

CHAPTER FOUR

Kaveeshars, Qissakars and the Reconstitution of Sikh Identity

"Politics often functions...not...as a conscious struggle or strategy formed by history and by theory, but as a routine reproduction of controversies or competitive interests without relation to the basic deep movements of society."

-Raymond Williams

Besides wider socio-political developments during annexation, the literary developments on the two sides of the divide took different directions – linguistically, stylistically and culturally. In areas falling within Lahore state, the Muslim stream of Punjabi poetry, both mystical and secular, formed the mainstream with only marginal participation by Sikhs and Hindus. On other side of the divide, however, the literature flourished under court patronage and developed a pronounced tendency to imbibe the influence of Braj classicism. The movement found its fulfillment in the vast storehouse of literature of the Punjab known as Hindi writing in *Gurumukhi* script covering a broad spectrum: scriptural exegesis, theology, metaphysics, history, religious biographies, statecraft, etc.¹

While the missionaries were engaged in their self appointed task of bringing the message of Christ and the light of the West to the Sikhs of the Punjab, the Sikh chiefs of Patiala, Jind and Kaithal, whether deliberately or otherwise, were encouraging Sikh literature and scholarly traditions to seek identification with the classical Hindi-Indian tradition through active court patronage.²

The classical qissas became thinner in content and casual in rigour losing its vitality in the process. The idea of spirituality yielded ground to the idea of renunciation. The Sikh militancy of the eighteenth-century became an anachronism in the new political set-up. The idea of renunciation was more monotonous in the new dispensation gained after a country's hard struggle. Long heroic poem of Var Hari Singh Nalwa also gives way to the predominance of pathos. The shifts are direct

¹ Singh, Attar., p.536

² *ibid.*, p.539

consequence of the changed dynamics of power.³ The disintegration of the Khalsa Raj and consequential loss of sovereignty in the mid-nineteenth century led to a traditional belief that life and its boons were all transitory was accounted. This feeling generated sentiments, emphasizing seclusion and lack of faith and hope in life and its bounteous potentials.⁴⁵ Another response was manifested in the form of *prasangs* of martyrs or benevolent robbers fighting against state power. The Muslim poets continued the old tradition of qissas and its protagonists as symbols of their socio-religious identity. The themes of romance, renunciation, reform and transitoriness of the world manifested as they are in Punjabi during the nineteenth century, especially its later half, are symptomatic also of the gradual decay of the genre.⁶

This excessive focus upon classicity of high literature and its 'degeneration' under colonial conditions, eventually clears way for the emergence of novel as a form most capable of conveying meaning. Incidentally, Bhai Vir Singh surfaces as the first modern writer in Punjabi. Whereas, according to this view '*lesser poets*' chose to produce on mundane themes of social reform to meet the challenges posed by the advent of western civilization and culture. Unable to comprehend the real and big challenges, reduced to petty issues like the dispute between tea and milk and wove narratives around them, interspersed by dialogues *that could not go beyond regaling the audience* (emphasis added)⁷. However these attempts should be seen as carrying a whole range of features of mentalities, the translation of a deeper level of ideology, the traces of fragmented ideologies.⁸ That is what remains of ideological expression, once embedded in a specific local context, when they become at variance with reality to become free-floating, almost hollow structures. Reminds of the narrative strategies of Kaveeshars as embodying and expressing these features displaying the particular modes of experience and the practices peculiar to popular culture, namely non-literature traditions, non-verbal

³ *ibid.*, p.532

⁴ *ibid.*, p.532-33

⁵ *ibid.*, p.533

⁶ *ibid.*, p.533 After the advent of colonial rule in Punjab qissa writers made vain efforts to sustain it through a clever play of words, quick-placed metres and over- tried versification . The rise of novel in Punjabi terminated the onward march as a living form.

⁷ *Ibid* ,p533. E. P. Thompson comments on such attitudes: "The descriptive material gathered by the nineteenth century folklorists was of value and can still be drawn upon with caution. But custom and ritual were seen, often by the paternal gentleman...from above and across a class gulf and divorced from their total situation or context". In, E.P. Thompson: *Folklore, Anthropology And Social History*, The Indian Historical Review, vol.-III, No.2, Jan. 1977, pp.247-266

communication and ritual and customary action, constituting a decisive obstacle to the advance and triumph of the cultural norms of elite and civic culture in late nineteenth century Punjab. The peculiar independence and capacity for resistance of early modern popular culture against the attacks and inroads of domination and hegemony was anchored in the domestic and peasant proprietor mode of production and, relatively undifferentiated relations of production. It is this compound of simultaneous resistance but also of dependence upon the 'civilised', elite culture that we seek to unravel.⁹

However, the *Kaveeshars* (lesser poets for Attar Singh) had come to acquire a pivotal position in the rural society by the first quarter of the twentieth century and the state took note of this development. Two examples can be cited: the Kaveeshari group of Maghi Singh Gill was especially asked to enthuse Indian soldiers during World War-II; however they refused.¹⁰ Secondly, the composition of many a '*Bharti-name*', a chronicle of the recruitment, with Milkhi Ram's '*Nama*' being a representative one, pleading for joining the British ranks against the Germans and assuring him the heaven, if dead :

'One who sacrifices his life in war heavens welcomes him.

While respect is showered on earth.'

The space occupied by these assorted kaveeshars spanned across rural gatherings ranging from everyday village gatherings to marriage parties to local or regional fairs. Kaveeshari's discursive field is constituted by dispersed utterances with a great emphasis upon descriptive principle¹¹. It had two distinct levels of norms – the first comprised of one's personal affairs and second concerned the general plane.¹² The village society allows certain latitude to communitarian deviance, of course if it nominally respects the general sense of moral order. If anyone breaks this august link,

⁸ *ibid.*, p.8

⁹ *ibid.*, p.86

¹⁰ Bedi, S.S.V.: '*Kaveeshari: Uthan Te Vikas*' pp.10-22 p.14 in '*Malwe di Kaveeshari-Parampara*' (eds.) Jaggi, R.S. and Singh, Ajmer; 1988, Publication Bureau, P.U. Patiala, (pp.xiii+338).

¹¹ Thompson, E.P. *op cit*, p.266. "Change in material life determines the conditions of that struggle, and some of its character; but the particular outcome is determined only by the struggle itself. This is to say that historical change eventuates, not because a given 'basis' must give rise to a correspondent 'superstructure', but because changes in productive relationship are 'experienced' in social and cultural life, refracted in men's ideas and their values, and argued through in their actions, their choices and their beliefs".

¹² *ibid.*, p.78

the village assemblies start disparaging the offender as a necessary mechanism to keep these affairs smooth in a face-to-face community.¹³ To patronize singing parties, male dancers or such like persons - who commanded audience during their performance - was a sure sign of social status. Often such exhibition of money spilling was accompanied by challenging others to complete.¹⁴

Most friendships had their inception in sitting together at street corners, or in open corner and persisted until their marriage. During the winters they gathered around fire and discussed the affairs of village and any new happening. After exhausting their wares, it was the qissas and other adventurous tales that occupied them.¹⁵ Sun and Moon controlled the flow of time and boys after finishing daily chores joined in these gatherings, usually determined by the familial enmity or by mutual friendship. However, the gatherings led by the opium - eaters were united by their commitment to opium and caste, religion and family matters never posed any trouble. Not all the members were addicts of the same degree and their sitting had great attraction due to their never ending tales, remembrances, witticisms, etc. They enjoyed a solid membership and longer sitting. The opium addicts maintained this alternative channel of sagacity alive after the departure of mirasis.¹⁶

These sect-like gatherings provided the necessary knowledge to live in a village. Three main courses were offered: *chori* - petty thuggery and dealing with the aftermath; *yaari* - establishing sexual relations and extracting the best deal;¹⁷ and *duniyadari* - how to deal with unwanted situations, when in trouble. *Chori* was the preferred vocation starting from consuming intoxicants under cover stealing fruits from orchards was the next step which kept of expanding. To endure police beating was also a part of the usual raining schedule. *Yaari* provided the cultural basis to their sect where often the methods of *ishq/yari* were imparted, although the contemporary affairs were rated lower than the

¹³ *ibid.*, p.78-79

¹⁴ Thompson, E.P. *op cit*, p. 263 "...‘economic’ categories of explanation, which may be adequate for industrialized societies, are often less adequate for this earlier societies. This is not to argue that there cannot be no valid economic of pre-industrial societies, but to remind ourselves that the expectations and motivations of the people who then lived cannot be understood in anachronistic economic terms".

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.34

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.34-35

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.36

classical aashiqs of Punjab. The debates about *ishq majazi* and *ishq haqiqi* consumed the most of time.¹⁸

The business of *duniyadari* comprised the conscious indoctrination of the abusive universe with the task of evaluating the grade of an abuse or tolerance of abusive language being the primary one. One learnt to differentiate friendly vituperation from the malevolent one. One learnt to pile intentional abuse and developed the acumen to be silent when under attack.¹⁹ The general common sense was also articulated in these gatherings. The social exchange that was so typical an expression of popular culture strengthened the bonds of kinship, neighbourhood and friendship. Thus, it produced or reproduced just that solidarity to which the small producers could most easily have recourse.²⁰

Usually this wisdom comprised of the crux of any narrative. The sexual regimentation and desire were the main sources of this common sense.²¹

Gidha is a sign of women's independence in a strictly regimented society where they had few occasions to assemble without the prying gaze of the men folk. *Gidha* is fundamentally linked with her creativity, rebellion and most significantly her identity.²² *Gidha* gains momentum in a specific manner. In the first phase when everyday is around, the *holis* are generally sober meant also for maintaining a rhythm and tempo accompanied by dance.²³ Second phase consists of some action and rudimentary choreography with objects. The foot movement leads the accompanying percussion – usually *dholaki*. *Dholaki*'s sound, *thikri* on its body and clapping provide the necessary musical score.²⁴ Third phase introduces sexually – saturated *ishq* into the arena. *Ishq Brandy* is its denomination. The choreographed movements bring alive the lovemaking and the accompanying verses prise open the veneer of the respected fellows e.g. father-in-law, *sadhu*, etc.²⁵ The sexual prowess of a *jatt* male is the cause celebre by the female

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.36-37

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.37-38

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.92

²¹ *ibid.*, p.38-39 What mattered to the *jatts* was the 'fertility' of a women not her caste.

²² *ibid.*, p.54-55

²³ *ibid.*, p.55

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.56

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.56

jatt with a female Brahmin at the receiving end.²⁶ Thus, gidha can be taken as a distinctive sphere of women similar to male spheres in villages.

The Punjabi village life has a distinct articulation of anti-jatt utterances emanating from various marginal social groups. Interestingly these are mostly targeting the uncouth, crude tastes and skills of jatts with the coarseness of agrarian practices.²⁷

The abovementioned village spaces delineate the socio-cultural setting where these dhadis, kaveeshars or singers operated. Now we focus on the repertoire of these performers having many registers comprising gurbani, sufi, vedantic and other assorted influences. Perhaps Heer Waris is canonical text of this stream where the critique of formal religion by Ranjha (a jat) has come out in full force. Thus the formal pretensions and the everyday practice/life are in conflict. The character of Hir is ambiguous in its criticism of existing structures. Her sexuality overrides her subordinate position in her relation with Ranjha where she does not raise questions about the value of this alternative. Thus, we can see the limits on the alternative imagination being imposed by the mid 18th century socio-political forces. With the fundamental change not occurring in the modes of production, the mobility of peasants/tribes/castes gets rather easily recommended in the existing structure.

Majority of Punjabis view this poem expressing an ideal cultural unity that is lost to both modern Punjabs.²⁸ The story behind the poem provided one of the major sources for the cultural cross-referencing that was the genius of 18th century Punjabi Sufi lyric poetry, and remains central to the Punjabi episteme today.²⁹ Written by a village maulavi in 1766 against the backdrop of events that saw the Mughal order in Punjab successively replaced by Afghan and mist Sikh ones, Varis's poem stands in an already long complementary tradition of Persian and Phi treatment of the story.³⁰ Indeed... a totalizing allegorical reinterpretation of the entire poem that may well have

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.57 Most of the verses were mentioning sex implicitly only to be explained by physical movements. However, a Balmiki woman broke this charmed circle and explicitly narrated the lovemaking, with a sadhu doing the male counterpart.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.53

²⁸ Deol, J. *Sex, Social Critique and the Female Figure in Premodern Punjabi Poetry: Varis Shah's 'Hir'*, MAS Vol. 36, No.1, Feb. 2002, pp.141-171, p.141-42.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.142

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.142 The earliest written version of the story would appear to the Hayat Jan Baqi Kalabi's Persian. *Hir o Ranjha* (1581-85), which initiated a series of Persian version of the legend that continued to the late 19th century (Baqir 1956-60). The first Phi poem to narrate the story appears to be that of Damodar Gulali, who claims to have been a contemporary of Akbar (Damodar 1974, 1986), followed by the qussahs of Ahmad Gujjar, a contemporary of Aurangzeb, and Muqbil, probably, a contemporary of Mohd. Shah. The story of H & R is ripe for a number of different types of analysis.

its roots in sufistic reinterpretations of the narrative is part of the text.³¹ I will concentrate instead on Varis's rich and deeply ambiguous text, his poem is at once the most sexualized and the most socially conservative of the pre-modern Punjabi treatments of the story and is the first of the Punjabi versions that explicitly adopts the 'classicism' of the Persian as its model³². Partially due to this almost exaggerated classicism, the text displays an ambivalent attitude to the explicit sexuality of the text at the same time as it creates a markedly subdued Hir who speaks from within the bounds of social and literary convention.

There is a fascinating similarity between the notions of the noble thief and the 18th century Sikh martyr'. This approach takes us many a step closer to the other folk heroes of Punjabi cultural episteme especially the Dulha Bhatti (a rebel of Akbar's time, associated with Lohri); Raja Rasalu (Puran's brother, rebellious fighter); Jeona Maur (a bandit of the British times) and; Mirza (Sahiban's lover who runs away with her, is pursued and killed with arrows).³³ In all these accounts their daunting spirit refuses to surrender even after their physical death. This also points to the fact that the Sikh martyrs encompassed almost all the characteristics of folk hero (irrespective of the religious denomination) which ensured their reverence by all the Punjabis³⁴. However the neo-Sikhs claiming to uphold legacy of martyrs in communitarian parlance were derided. Supporters of Singh Sabha were scorned and ridiculed for their so-called novel ideas. An epigrammatic couplet satirizing their new fangled enthusiasm has become part of Punjabi folklore:³⁵

"When the barn is emptied of grain,

What better can you do than turn a Singh Sabha?"

³¹ *ibid.*, p.145

³² *ibid.*, p.145

³³ Thus to trace the routes by which the masses gained consciousness. see Michel Vovelle: *Ideologies And Mentalities*, p.2-11. in Samuel, Raphael and Jones, Gareth Stedman (eds.): *Culture, Ideology And. Politics, Essays For Eric Hobsbawm*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1982, pp.x+368

³⁴ Their relation with the Hindu goddess in popular religion is mentioned in L.E. Fenech's; *Playing the Game of Love*, pp.160.

³⁵ 'Origins of the Singh Sabha', 273-282 (eds.) Harbans Singh and Barrier, N. Gerald, in '*Punjab Past and Present, Essays. In honour of Dr. Ganda Singh*, 1996, PU. Patiala, 2nd Edition, (pp.xxiii+511), p.280-81 That this was a widespread phenomenon is also born-out by a similar reference mentioning the Singh Sabhas as a butt of jokes by Punjabi Sikh women of villages see Judge, P.S.: Peetu, Kuknus, Jalandhar, 2003, p.115.

More mordant in humour was the villagers' deliberate corruption of the name of the movement from Singh Sabha to Singh safa, the word 'Safa' signifying widespread destruction caused by the plague epidemic of 1902³⁶.

Malwa region was overwhelmingly under the provincial rule. The vedantic orientation coupled with recourse to braji or sadhukari poetic tradition was infused with distinctively Punjabi themes and treatment in the works of these popular performing poets. The biography of Kaveeshar Bhagwan Singh and his family, offers interesting insights into this phenomenon. Related to a khatri, Bhai Mul Chand, a disciple of Pandit Ganga Ram of Bathinda, who himself was a disciple of the fifth guru Arjan, undertook service during the construction of Harimandir. The Sikh rahit was imbibed by Mul Chand from Ganga Ram. Bhagwan Singh and other Khatriis are recorded as Hindu-Khatriis however with names having Singh or Kaur. Bhagwan Singh himself comes across as a devotee of Devi.

Qissas were recited in public before putting them into writing thus representing sedimented orality in qissa-culture.³⁷ This ensured a certain popular appeal, qissas rhyme or musicality was tested and a sort of ready readership was available. Bhagwan Singh can be considered as organic intellectual, well versed in Indian and Persian language, respected widely for his knowledge in the Malwai and his books were legends. Bhagwan Singh calls himself a 'frolicsome kaveeshar' with pride and abandon.³⁸ Malwa as well as Punjab are mentioned together. A distinct notion about being a Punjabi and a Malwai is apparent in Bhagwan Singh's texts.

Bhagwan Singh's content is predominantly traditionalist but his style is all his own; totally committed to the cause of Kaveeshari this was certainly approved by the people, it seems.³⁹ Bhagwan Singh singing was his asset which people liked a lot and also his warmth and affectionately frivolous nature had many admirers.⁴⁰ Bhagwan

³⁶ In a similar context, see Deboran Valenze: *Pilgrims And Progress In Nineteenth Century England* pp.113-126.p.115 "Piety itself thus became a weapon in private conflict, as servants used religion as a bludgeon against sinful masters.... In a distinctly uppers-class, established church atmosphere, sometimes the most pointed response was a Methodist one".

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.3

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.16

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.17

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.17 His friends were from all the castes.

Singh remained abstinent; wore white, starched clothes and was sufficiently aware of the elite style.⁴¹ Qissakar Daulat Ram also carried himself in similar fashion.

Kaveeshars were the medium through which a rural community could communicate, both vertically and horizontally. In addition, the Kaveeshars were distinct from the local elites in the same that they valued their contact and intimacy with the masses whereas the traditional elite avoided these loose encounters. The dharamashalas, chaupal, shop of a petty – trader, etc⁴². were the usual spaces where such an exchange took place. Kaveeshars had the knowledge about matters sacred and profane, they moved around the countryside, collected information, had links with elites and their culture, made money out of Kaveeshari – all this was attractive enough for the villages to look up to the Kaveeshars.

To be the one to liberate the marriage – party, Kaveeshars were in great demand. In fact, it can be safely assumed that a search must have been launched for an able Kaveeshar, to keep the honour intact and to come out of the encounter with flying colours.⁴³ This encounter involved another element – the women in a public arena, ritually contesting with males of *baraat*. In our hierarchy of public arenas, this should come at level II. Level I belong to women alone having their *trinjan*, *gidha*, etc. performed mostly in their own sexual space e.g. *Giddha* where males are generally prohibited.

Bhagwan Singh never enjoyed any prolonged affection of his parents, so his companions provided him solace and support. Secondly, his remote village with a simple structure influenced his creative works that lack any notion of social complexity. Bhagwan Singh comes across as a person saturated with his social surroundings, his village environs, the village – pond and its *shishams*, ploughmen, pastoralists, etc.⁴⁴ After these two circles, we can say that his world-view is mediated by a notion of

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.67 Whatever he earned was consumed in his *mehfils* where liquor flowed. He wore the *churidar pyjama* – a *riyasati* influence – and his general upkeep and cleanliness was a hot topic amongst the rural folk.

⁴² Thompson, *op cit*, p.254. “.... Historians have been looking in new ways at long familiar aspects of the life At the market or bazaar when considered less as an economic nexus than as a social nexus, and as a gathering-center for news, gossip, rumour, and at the symbolic meaning of forms of popular protest”.⁴²

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.18

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.19 In fact, this chapter is a documentation of village life refracted through an individual in the 19th century Malwa region of Punjab. Bhagwan Singh’s life also qualifies as that of a quintessential Kaveeshar which can be easily and profitably complemented with other such accounts.

Dharam that has a fragile bearing. His Devi, is 'Jotan wali', 'Ishari' having a benign bearing.⁴⁵

It means that social medium has gained ascendancy and no direct contact with the transcendental is now available. Ajmer Singh in his book on Maharaja Ranjit Singh mentions Hasham Shah who has consciously eulogized aashiqs by raising them to a higher status. Heer becomes a medium for propagating Islam, Vedanta or Sikhism, etc. Bhagwan Singh carries the same process forward in the Malwa. Against such defined categories of aashiqs, shahids and so on denominational religious concerns are subsumed under the dharm employed to administer conduct.

The ruling nobility had penetrated the creative recesses of that society and Bhagwan Singh is a telling example of this trend. His views reflect the demi – God like status of the nobility and other elite. Even Queen Victoria becomes a benevolent ruler whose writ ran against lawlessness and peace and order were ensured. The political notions of freedom or slavery are still alien to Bhagwan Singh. The village priests, hakeems, saints and astrologers as well as the Sidhu Sardars, mahajans or traders are fondly mentioned with respect.⁴⁶ Kings or rulers in Bhagwan Singh parlance are bearers of exceptional ability and divine acumen. Rulers are inherently just and it is the responsibility of the ruled to obey them. Anyone who militates against this order is bound to be killed, sooner or later.⁴⁷

Bhagwan Singh created or wrote his qissa of '*Jeona Maur*' that became a canonical text for later kaveeshars. Bhagwan Singh does not have any sympathy for Jeona Maur and he is a petty-dacoit for him however, the later writers have imparted heroic glow on Jeona Maur posing him as an anti-establishment figure. Astrologer predicts about Jeona :⁴⁸ Bhagwan Singh's fatalism is apparent and he provides us with a

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.20 It is benign because his grief is taken – away and distant enough to allow him indulgence in worldly life without any brahminical sense of remorse or sin, etc. His dharam is a gentle, innocent creation of rural social values having similarities as well as sharing with other denominational identities

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.20-21. see, Maurice Godelier: *The Ideal In The Real* pp.12-38 .p.24."...In pre-industrial societies, by the very nature of the relations of production, the primary aim of production is not the accumulation of wealth but the preservation, the representation of the status of industrials or groups within the community, the representation of their relations with the remainder of this community, and hence the representation of the community itself and its structure".

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.22

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.22-23 Bhagwan Singh lists common superstitions prevalent in his times. Also, Eric Hobsbawm: *Uncommon People; Resistance, Rebellion And Jazz*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1998,

veritable list of potential crimes of any deviant. This is an interesting exchange of injunctions between the little and great traditions.

Persian/Arabic literary tradition were a major influence on Punjabi Qissakars; '*Alif Laila*', '*Masnavi-ul-Manvi*' by Maulana Rumi and Sheikh Sa'adi's '*Gulistan-Bostan*' had a huge impact on its narratives of *Kam-Kandala*, *Nal-Damyanti*, *Raja Rasalu*, *Rup-Basant*, *Luv-Kush*, *Sassi-Pumu*, etc. However the popular narratives of '*Heer-Ranjha*', '*Sohni-Mahiwal*', '*Mirza-Sahiban*', '*Puran Bhagat*', etc. are native to Punjab.⁴⁹ Both Damodar and Hasham have used *dawayya* metre. Elsewhere we have noted that Hasham is attempting a major internal critique of the received tradition in the early-nineteenth century to negotiate a changed social order. Tejwant Singh Gill also places Damodar in a similar structure, during Akbar's reign. This connection demands further exploration.

Bhagwan Singh accepted influence of many reputed master qissakars, especially Piloo, Waris Shah, Fazal Shah in his own *Mirza, Heer & Sohni* respectively.⁵⁰ Bhagwan Singh's, *Mirza Sahiban* is heavily inspired by Piloo's, even the metre used is similar. Many lines resemble very closely in many episodes. Their narration of *Mirza's* legendary mare, the *Bakki* is extremely significant for it provides a handy list of Punjabi heroes and the subsequent selections and omissions made. Descended from heavens, *Bakki* has five more siblings (Piloo), seven (Bhagwan Singh).⁵¹ Bhagwan Singh adds two more to Piloo's six; *Guru Gobind Singh* to account for his religious sentiment. Similarly, the addition of *Amar Singh Rathore*, a Rajput, assuages Bhagwan Singh's Hindu Khatri identity. He accepts other Muslim figures in his account but gives primacy to *Guru Gobind Singh* and *Amar Singh Rathore*. It seems that Bhagwan Singh is a crucial link both in terms of his caste, religion, and region as well as in drawing direct inspiration from the classical qissa tradition. In addition to these two features, his period is also significant. With no great *Kaveshar* preceding him, he occupies the generational space, which later saw the emergence of the four greatest *Kaveeshars* ever namely,

pp.viii+360, p.192 where he discusses the 'people's bandit'. If he had any instinctive politics, they were populist. Further for our relevance," -.... Social bandits without good political sense, aims or advice inevitably became pawns and victims of the ruling class, 'even though you are loved by the people and surrounded by sympathy, admiration, respect and kar'(p.198).⁴⁸

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.26-27

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.29-41

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.29-33

Heer Bhagwan Singh is dependent on Heer Waris for its narrative. Although Waris goes at length to call it an allegory but Bhagwan Singh just mentions Ranjha as *kalboot* (body) and Heer as *rooh* (soul). However, he goes at length in his Mirza-Sahiban to call it an allegory.⁵² Waris provides an exhaustive list of various panths, silsilas, etc. and their respective masters. Bhagwan Singh list:⁵³ Ramanand – Bairagi; Nanak-Udasi; Shaitan – Mirasis. Heer Waris has a dialogue between Heer and Ranjha where they enlist the characteristics both malevolent and benevolent, respectively. Bhagwan Singh also carries the baggage of simultaneously following Waris in retaining the form of this stylized dialogue and drawing upon Guru Nanak to praise women.⁵⁴ Heer Bhagwan Singh is in Kabitt metre and Malwai dialect.⁵⁵

Bhagwan Singh's Sohni was written after a through process of reading and understanding the preceding texts. Of this Fazal Shah exercise a huge influence. However, he has left out the details about Balkh, Bokhara or Delhi, Lahore and starts right away from Gujarat. Narrative is modeled upon Fazal Shah. Bhagwan Singh wrote it in Kabitt. Their respective manglacharans are different.⁵⁶

Every qissakar has attempted to write a qissa of outstanding nature by outlandish elements. Bhagwan Singh's worth lies in the process through which colloquial words and quotidian details were woven into a poetic pattern and thereby attained a depth and glow thereby little tradition of Punjabi literature transformed into the great tradition.⁵⁷ The linguistic repertoire of any poet throws light upon the socio-religious and emotional life-worlds of that era. Bhagwan Singh is inspired by the *ishq* tradition of Punjab.⁵⁸

⁵² *ibid.*, p.33-38

⁵³ *ibid.*, p.34

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.34-36

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.38

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.38-39

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.43

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.43 Prof. Puran Singh considers every Punjabi youngster as an image of Ranjha in terms of romantic and boisterous attitudes. His notion of Punjabi youth is idealized as Ranjha's brothers, either elder or younger. After establishing a connection with the romantic heroes, Prof. Puran Singh also advances his understanding of Ranjha as a 'Sikh of the Guru.'⁵⁸ Immense project of wholesale interpretation of Punjabi ethos is evident in Prof. Puran Singh. For him the experiential domain is common for Sikhism and Punjabi folk tradition i.e. why he is highly skeptical of exclusivist boundaries. Single symbolic field of Punjabi tradition providing habitus for the co-existence of different religious traditions.

Bhagwan Singh's three qissas include – Heer-Ranjha, Mirza-Sahiban, Sohni-Mahiwal and Janjh – are written under the influence of other qissakars of fame, whereas his Jeona Maur is his original work.⁵⁹ This fact underlines the immense worth of Bhagwan Singh for the succeeding Kaveeshari generations. A Malwai Kaveeshar, Bhagwan Singh relied heavily on the classical or great tradition of Punjabi qissas while simultaneously imparting an authentic Malwai idiom to the narrative. Consequently, the later kaveeshars were provided a native landscape and the golden generation of Kaveeshari form in the 1890s took it to great heights. In addition, it would be interesting to observe the process of cultural translation in Bhagwan Singh's attempt at constituting the Malwai sensibility through the qissa genre. Further, his choice of these romantic legends over any other religious or exegetical work is significant with respect to Malwa.

Bhagwan Singh has not contributed anything to the received narrative of romantic legends, his narrative plot and characters are one-dimensional and the immutable utterances of astrology impart a certain regressive colouring to the entire rendition.⁶⁰ His characters being unidimensional, their etching is not deep enough to convey the hitherto unuttered desires or ambiguities (a feature which Hasham excelled in despite his brevity).⁶¹ In contrast to the written texts of legends, Bhagwan Singh based his narrative of Jeona Maur on the oral accounts of Sheikhs, Mirasis, etc. and he composed it:⁶² His Jeona Maur can be provided the same pedestal as that of *Dullha*, *Jagga*, etc. however, with one crucial difference – his dacoit is totally devoid of any hint of nobility of character, purpose and action.

This negative portrayal of Jeona Maur, lacking anti-establishment features, Bhagwan Singh's Jeona is a conscious ideological text which must be having a relation with his close association with the Phulkian states either at the level of class or through a benevolent patron according him enough respect at a personal level. We must look up to any connection with the rulers asking Bhagwan Singh to compose a text, condemning Jeona Maur for his lawlessness and convincing the rural populace to repose their faith in the Rajas as well as Queen Victoria. This connection – if established would also provide a definitive answer to the structural location of a Kaveeshar as an organic intellectual and penetration of its discursive appeal.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 44

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.44-45

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.45

⁶² *ibid.*, p.45

Bhagwan Singh's oeuvre has a lilting simplicity of language and treatment that is nearer the spoken colloquial idiom instead of the vaunted classicism of the learned. His easy brevity has helped him to steer clear of the intricacies of the craft although he is steeped in *shringar* ras.⁶³ Jeona Maur is his classic piece displaying his skill and maturity with an alive narrative. In his other qissas he has followed the received tradition with loyalty and distinction having his own evaluative criteria for the preceding Heerkars.⁶⁴

By using the Malwai dialect, Bhagwan Singh has underlined his unique contribution with an added advantage of creating new audiences-hitherto. In addition, this shows us that Heer-Ranjha and its qissakari had breached the limits of romance or titillation and had acquired a status of knowledge. If Fazal Shah displayed his prowess in Farsi, Bhagwan Singh has translated that pure knowledge into the ruggedly robust Malwai. This also means that Malwai itself was not considered a language of learning at that time. Bhagwan Singh's labours in arriving at correct narrative is evident from his efforts of collecting all available writings on 'Sohni'. His qissas have a profusion of dramatic action and his dialogues have further accentuated this tendency. This is one feature that he shares with Waris Shah.⁶⁵

Bhagwan Singh's concept of *ishq* is synonymous to chivalry and martyrdom. It is only in the realm of *ishq* that woman is accorded equality. In fact, the *mashuq* is the medium to access the utopia.⁶⁶ Women are one of the oppressed who are provided an avenue for emancipation through *ishq* where they symbolically invert every conceivable opposition. Her call to freedom is refracted through *ishq*.⁶⁷ Even the strict discipline of religion is torn asunder by their according the status of Haj, Ka'aba, Haji on to their lover. The respect for religion is strongly predicated through *aashiq*.⁶⁸

Bhagwan Singh's characters include popular figures of devotion:⁶⁹

- Five Pirs; Khwaja Khizr, Sakhi Sultan, Qutab Pir, Khwaja Ajmer, Wali Gauns.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.45-46

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.48

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.48-49

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.60

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p.60-61

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p.61-62. Reminiscent of Prof. Mohan Singh in post-colonial Punjabi literature where he blends *aashiqs* with Punjabi civilizational ethos.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.63-66

- Sita, Ravan
- Sultan, Gugga, Bhairon
- Gopi Chand
- Gorakh, Balnath
- Bali
- Noah
- Mansur
- Bharthri Hari
- Shams Tabrez
- Shiva etc.

His main protagonist are imbued with the single-minded pursuit of their calling, having no doubt, ambiguity, fear, etc.⁷⁰ Thus the complexity of Hasham gets compromised by the time qissakari reaches Bhagwan Singh for instance Ranjha as a faqir having many miracles to this credit.⁷¹ The Adali Raja sends Hir to the Kheras and later repents his decision and sets the record straight by bestowing Hir to Ranjha.⁷² The latter innovation as against Hir Waris shows the increasing hold of the state and lessening of the tribal hold. All the aashiqs have a single tribe where they act as worldly beings with each other,⁷³

To be beheaded for your friend's cause is the ultimate or the only value to be cherished. Rest is just details. In addition, we can see that '*sees dena*' was earlier meant for ostensibly religious purposes with the martyrdom of Gurus, their followers and the eighteenth century warriors, etc. Then we come across Qadiryar's description of sees dena during the battle of Jamraud in the service of Lahore Darbar. Now the state of Punjab was the haloed aim of the prospective martyr. Bhagwan Singh further

⁷⁰ ibid., p.67

⁷¹ ibid., p.112

⁷² ibid., p.76

⁷³ ibid., p.77

plebeianises this concept where courting trouble for '*dost*' is akin to *sees dena*. Ranjha is depicted as a Sardar.⁷⁴ This is the next step at the secularizing dialectic of the concept of Punjabiyyat. The contemporary Punjabi popular culture production does not represent martyrdom but an adventure which imparts a flavour to *ishq*. The preceding paradigmatic metaphors of Punjabi qissa-genre are now reduced to empty conventions for Bhagwan Singh. The next step is Dev Tharika Wala in the 1960s.

Born in Maur Majra, near Sangrur, Jeona Maur occupies a very interesting space in the qissa – world. He is a yar, not an aashiq. His being a yar clubs him with social deviance lacking any virtue at all. This is a peculiar arrangement where two types of deviance are implicitly contrasted. Alternatively, we can argue that the earlier rebellion of aashiqs has now been reduced to a law and order problem sans any agenda. Description of both as Ghazis and vengeful louts. The tribal honour is now dominant over any notion of grace.

Bhagwan Singh on Muslims:⁷⁵ Being a Muslim is a value, ethic and norm. Not any formal or ritualistic closure. Similarly there are many such praxis-oriented terms in his repertoire e.g. Jogi, Seth, Badshah, Rajput, Sati, etc. It seems that the everyday context actualizing these terms is prioritized over any formal closure. Ranjha after initiation into jog asks Balnath to allow him to have a *didar* of Heer's *husn*.⁷⁶

Bhagwan Singh's pioneering efforts at *kaveesheri* and *qissakari* paved way for emergence of next generation *kaveeshars*. Maghi Singh Gill is the typical representative of this making. Maghi Singh Gill's (1892-1963) mother Prem Kaur was dexterous in composing folk compositions e.g. *boli*, *geet*, etc. and she was frequently invited to village marriages for her singing and composing prowess.⁷⁷ Maghi Singh Gill's father Hazara Singh was adept in singing *Kaveeshari*, having memorized a lot of compositions which he recited in small village gatherings.⁷⁸

Maghi Singh Gill's early influences are home made and tell us about the daily life of ordinary villagers and their attempts to make sense of their surroundings. Also the creativity of women showed in their special talent of inventing new compositions

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.111

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.125

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.140. Again this dialectic of Ranjha's jog is continuing due to its immense power of gesture. This reaches its peak in Puran Singh.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.6

and the self-assured presence of an exclusive women's public sphere, which had a carnivalesque character, operating within the consensual discourse of the village normative order. Parallel to this we can discern a male public sphere where bolis, geets and Kaveeshair, etc. occupied the prime space and had a definite role to play in determining the ethical universe of a village. We can also map-out the hierarchy of various public arenas in Punjabi and the matching poetic output.

Bhagwan Singh wrote about the 1862 famine and Maghi Singh Gill about the 1899 famine. The Phulkian provinces paid no attention to public welfare and the local Charan Dasi Mahant Mohan Singh of Jhandu Ke village come to villagers' rescue.⁷⁹ The village pathshala was run by an Udasi, Sant Khushal Das, a wandering soul. He had mastered the Pingal, was an indigenous physician; having knowledge of Hindi, Urdu and English. He learnt English while serving in the British army and expired in 1917. His syllabus included Vichar Sagar, Varan Bhai Gurdas, Hanuman-Natak, etc.⁸⁰ Maghi Singh Gill started with the 'Panj Granthi', 'Bhagat Bani' and ultimately the Adi Granth. His diction was exemplary and his hard work earned him the epithet of 'Gyani'. He was taught many books of Udasis and Nirmalas. 'Suraj Prakash was considered as a narrative of Sikh history. Pingal was his speciality and his 'Pattal' (pub. 1910) earned outstanding popularity due to his felicity with the Pingal.⁸¹ Maghi Singh Gill's daughters – Budhwan Kaur and Katar Kaur – especially the latter were named under the influence of the Singh Sabha movement.⁸² Maghi Singh Gill and his brother Kundha Singh were agriculturists. Kundha Singh was once so enamoured by the wandering Rasdharias and especially Barkat Nachar, that he followed them for months in other villages.⁸³ This fascination with wandering parties was very deep-rooted all over Punjab. Maghi Singh Sohan Singh Sital also credits these parties for his initiation into the Dhadi tradition.

However, Maghi Singh Gill was hooked onto Kaveeshari and his perusing of Sikh history, published qissa, Dingal texts, Neeti books, etc. went on and carried his passion of composing.⁸⁴ Chet Singh Pitho was the first disciple of Maghi Singh Gill in

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p.6-7

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.7

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.8

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p.9

⁸² *ibid.*, p.10

⁸³ *ibid.*, p.12

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.12

1914 with the final count resting at 250. The 'offering the disciples' was a permanent share of his income.⁸⁵

Maghi Singh Gill learnt Urdu and English from Master Narsi Ram in 1925.⁸⁶ Maghi Singh Gill baptized in 1930 at Damdama Sahib on the Vaishakhi fair. He institutionalized his Sikh upbringing in this manner and supported the Akali Dal. Later he joined the Lal Communist Party of Teja Singh Sutar. He sung for the working people from their platforms.⁸⁷ Sikh ethos of the family led to his baptism and the next logical step was to support the Akalis and later the communists. Hira Singh Dard also illuminates this transition. Maghi Singh Gill refused to both entertain and rouse the soldiers' morale at the behest of British during WW-II in 1942. Refusing a monthly pay of Rs.300, at the height of his popularity, Maghi Singh Gill was anti-British to the core. He never wrote anything in favour of the British. Declining the offers of British, Punjab government and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Maghi Singh Gill supported the Akali, national and workers movements and continued his Kaveeshari as his passion.⁸⁸ His contemporary, Babu Rajab Ali also declined to write favourably towards the British. Babu Rajab Ali was refused promotion but he persevered. Maghi Singh Gill and Babu Rajab Ali are contemporaries, whereas Bhagwan Singh was forthright in praising the British.

Maghi Singh Gill advocated girls' education along with his anti-casteism.⁸⁹ Maghi Singh Gill's relentless quest for knowledge, his linguistic repertoire was continuously expanding, he thoroughly studied ancient classical texts, and he read and reflected upon Sikh history. Most significantly, he was an avid reader of such progressive Punjabi journals like 'Phulwari' and 'Preet Lari', etc. His notebooks contain articles pasted from these journals. His reading continued throughout his life. He repeatedly used to revise his text.⁹⁰ Maghi Singh Gill's individual creative quest and effort spanned the traditional as well as the modern texts. Particularly important in this aspect is his fascination for Phulwari edited by Hira Singh Dard. That he also referred Preet Lari tells us about the pioneering role essayed by these journals. I suppose it can be conveniently shown that their vision of Sikhism was identical and spans a social

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.12

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.14

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.14

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.14 Maghi Singh Gill's fame as a Kaveeshar ensured the lack of violence against the Muslims during 1947 in his village.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p.15

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p.18-19

space at a very significant period when the Punjabi countryside was moving towards a modern political movement. This structural linkage of ideology across the social groups moulded the modern Punjabi identity as an able sequence to the ideals propagated by Hasham and Shah Mohammed during mid nineteenth century Punjab.

Maghi Singh Gill earned the epithet of 'Gyani' from his disciples and other commoners to account for his scholarship. His personal library consisted of the Mahabharata, Ramayana, Puranas, Arthsastra by Chanakya, Vairag Shatak, Prabodh Chandra Natak, Saruktavali, Vichar Sagar, Suraj Parkash, Panth Parkash, Tawariakh Guru Khalsa, Varan Bhai Gurdas, Chand Prastar and texts on Pingal. Urdu, Persian texts were in his collection.⁹¹

Harjot Singh Oberoi mentions the popular respect accorded to Gyani/Bhai/Baba. However, he associates it with a certain ascribed legitimacy with people having no role in determining whom to accord such a status. Maghi Singh Gill was accorded such a status due to his unique contribution in being a local role model. Secondly, the knowledge or was traditional texts of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh and not confined to any particular religious tradition.

Maghi Singh Gill's first performance in an *akhara* was at the much-celebrated Chhappar fair in 1915. He had prepared a code of conduct for his disciples to adhere. Maghi Singh Gill was acutely aware of the Kaveeshar's success in holding an akhara together.⁹² The performing sphere was the point on which any Kaveeshar's reputation rested and local folk fairs provided such opportunity to test their mettle. Disciples provided another axis on which the fame of a kaveeshar spread and this relation was codified and strictly practiced.

Maghi Singh Gill performed at all the major fairs of the Malwa region e.g. Chhappar, Muktsar, Jarg, Damdana Sahib, Sel Barah, Maisar-Khana, Takhtupura, Roshni at Jagraon, Kapal Mochan, etc. His signing amount was the highest but he also conducted some '*punn de akhare*' – without charging. He used to have a drink or two occasionally.⁹³ Maghi Singh Gill wrote his *chhands* after bathing in early morning or he used to walk alone in his fields and write during the evening. His talent was his only asset. He had a good musical sense and quite adept at playing *sarangi* and

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p.20

⁹² *ibid.*, p.20-22

⁹³ *ibid.*, p.22-23

harmonium.⁹⁴ Maghi Singh Gill was in love with a Mirasan, Aasi belonging to the same village.⁹⁵ Maghi Singh Gill's register noting his daily income and expenditure and other information is still available.⁹⁶ Maghi Singh Gill was a devout Sikh with emphasis on daily living. He kept a diary to record his annals of journey to Lahore, Gurdwara Dera Sahib (1944). He was particular about noting relevant details in his diary.⁹⁷ Maghi Singh Gill's political acumen was sharp from the very beginning. He versified only those aspects of Sikh history having the potential to generate a political impact.⁹⁸ This choice and treatment is very significant.

Maghi Singh Gill was against untouchability and religious sectarianism. He made his share-cropper Haider Khan lift a water pitcher and bought ghee from them.⁹⁹ Maghi Singh Gill's creations are 100. Out of these 85 texts are available at present. His first text was a '*Pattal*' published in 1912 and he continued to compose until 1963-a period of 50 years. Of these 85, 8 are published and 77 are in manuscript form.¹⁰⁰ A list of the 85 texts can give us an idea about his range, oeuvre and treatment of the given subject. To contrast it with other mainstream genres would provide the different texture of literary spheres e.g.¹⁰¹

(1958) – it can be contrasted with the account given by Kesar Singh Chhibber in his *Bansavalinama* (1929) – how it differs from the one by Bhai Vir Singh. Maghi Singh Gill's treatment must be reflecting the laity's viewpoint about Baba Ram Singh's biography. contrast with the elite Singh Sabha movement version)

Maghi Singh Gill wrote two *Mirzas* one in *chhant* and the second in *sadd* metre.. Guru Nanak is remembered in the *manglacharan* of *Mirza*. Maghi Singh Gill contradicts the usually lower position accorded to *Mirza* – *Sahiban* in Punjab pantheon e.g. *Qadiryar* treats them as fructifying the foundational role played by *Heer-Ranjha*.¹⁰² Maghi Singh Gill's *Mirza* in *Sadd* is said to be written in his youth (1918). Maghi Singh Gill seems to be addressing the usually negative role ascribed to *Sahiban* in *Mirza*'s death. This fits well with his overall concern for the women.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.23-24

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.24

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.24

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.25

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.25

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p.26

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.31-32

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p.32-35

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p.36-39

Qissa-genre has four fold layering of Manglacharan:¹⁰³ However Kaveeshari has simplified this division and manglacharan is used for all these categories. Maghi Singh Gill is perhaps the only one – or certainly the first one – to compose a mangal eulogizing the *sangat*. He develops a scheme in which the *panj piaras* signify the idea of higher status for the Sat-Sangat. In his contemporary time, the same institution is called as the Panchayat and Democracy with the *sangat* as the organizing unit.¹⁰⁴ Another mangal encapsulates the folk-wisdom.¹⁰⁵ The dialectic developed by Hasham is now freely used for the just warrior. Especially the term (shahid) although comes from the Sikh-lore but its thorough secularization is the popular credence ascribed to such phrases.

Kaveeshars have not particularly narrativized the life of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh instead has received their attention in abundance. Maghi Singh Gill is one of those few attempting this task. He has relied on two main sources for his narrative: the *janam-sakhis* and Gyani Gyan Singh's 'Panth Prakash'. It seems awesome to think about its impression on the rural audience when performed in full glow.¹⁰⁶

Maghi Singh Gill deftly dissects the comparative incidents from the lives of Krishna and Guru Nanak. He places Guru Nanak higher than Krishna implicitly, never stating his obvious thrust. A text composed for performing in rural and folk fairs, seeped in folk elements, is nonetheless marvelously clear-sighted in putting forth a particular order of things. The constant osmosis between various domains is not just a feature of Maghi Singh Gill's own life but also a feature in the very architecture/structure of his texts. Harjot Singh Oberoi must take note of this element while theorizing about the domains of Tat Khasla and the Sanatan episteme.

Maghi Singh Gill was the first one to compose a biographical narrative of Guru Amar Das in 1958. It includes the 'Guru Ustat' by Jalab Bhat (Swayya) with its exegesis by Gyani Bhagwan Singh of Sharda.¹⁰⁷ The martyrdom of Guru Arjan has been extensively written in the Kaveeshari genre with Bebu Rajab Ali and Chand Singh Mehraj being the leading lights. Maghi Singh Gill's text has special status by foregrounding the political reasons for his martyrdom whereas; the major explanation

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p.42-43

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p.44

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p.45

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p.45-46 To insert lines from 'Panth Prakash' is to impart a historical element for a wider impact.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p.47

was sought in the family discord with Pirthi and Chandu. In his text, the joint front of the emperor with the orthodox Islamic personnel had problems with the increasing popular support as well as treating the Adi Granth as a holy book, respectively. However, the Sufi Saint, Sain Mian Mir is deeply perturbed by the events and has a very moving dialogue with the Guru.¹⁰⁸ These dialogues are amazingly aware of the doctrinal thrust and its political overtones.¹⁰⁹

Maghi Singh Gill's *prasang* (episode) on Bhai Bidhi Chand is sourced from 'Gulbilas Patshahi 6' and 'Panth Prakash' Gyani Gyan Singh. Its ideological significance is to elucidate the political clash between the Mughal Empire and the Sikhs, with the Sikhs now answering the challenge.¹¹⁰ The Patiala riyasat got its prominence by Guru Har Rai according to Maghi Singh Gill.¹¹¹

Maghi Singh Gill has very tenderly mentioned the character of a sufi saint, Sain Bhikhan Shah while narrating the childhood of Guru Gobind Singh.¹¹² Maghi Singh Gill's '*Dasmesh Charitra*' has a historical sensibility attached to it with the Panth Prakash being a major source.¹¹³ Again based on Panth Prakash-Gyani Gyan Singh, '*Jang Bhangani*' is the narrative of the first battle by Guru Gobind Singh against the Hill chiefs. Pir Buddhoo Shah's four sons and 700 murids joined the battle in support of Guru Gobind Singh. Maghi Singh Gill mentions Pir Buddhu Shah.¹¹⁴ Maghi Singh Gill is conscious enough to mention the abiding relationship of Muslim Sufis with the Sikh Gurus, Miān Mir, Bhikhan Shah and Buddhu Shah. This emphasis keeps the sectarian impulse in proper check and carries forward the Hasham dialectic in the twentieth century Punjab. Maghi Singh Gill's '*Prasang Bibi Yakstan*' is also sourced from the Panth Prakash.¹¹⁵ Maghi Singh Gill's 'Bibi Sharan Kaur' is known for its positive portrayal of a woman to the extent that she fights in a battle.¹¹⁶ Sharan Kaur's initial impression is of a warrior, then, as a concretion of kindness and virtue. Her third image is of a 'Shaheed Brahmgyani' (martyr saint).

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p.48-49

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.48-49. The political thrust of the Sikh movement is astonishingly kept alive by Maghi Singh Gill whereas the Singh Sabha had constructed an loyalist Sikh identity.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.50

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p.52

¹¹² *ibid.*, p.53

¹¹³ *ibid.*, p.53-55

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.56-57

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.57

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.62-63

In this context another cardinal feature of Kaveeshari is admirably carried out. Description is fundamental to this genre instead of abstract imagined principles. Sharan Kaur is felled by arrows and she dies while uttering: these sharp arrows are sweeter than sweet meal. It is surmised that this line is derived from another line from the Gurbani. To convey this principle of Sikh lore Maghi Singh Gill has ably deployed the malwai idiom and communicated the abstract in everyday colloquial manner.¹¹⁷

'*Saka Sirhind*' is the most popular amongst the kaveeshars with Maghi Singh Gill also contributing in this stream.¹¹⁸ Maghi Singh Gill has written a number of prasangs about the facets of Guru Gobind Singh. His '*Lalan De Vichhore*' concerns the martyrdom in Sirhind of the younger Sahibzadas. Mata Gujari, their grandmother is favourably compared with Mata Ichharan, the mother of a Punjabi legend, Puran Bhagat.¹¹⁹ The folk-lore of Punjab views the pathos of these two women as essentially one. The Punjabi folklore is strengthened as well as given a historical dimension by the Sikh history and its characters. In fact, these nodal events and characters are a viable mode of mapping the folk-pathways in the Sikh history and tradition.

Maghi Singh Gill's '*Shahidi Bhai Mani Singh*' contains a eulogy to Longowal, his birth place.¹²⁰ '*Massa Ranghar*' is another very popular Kaveeshari prasang along with '*Saka Sirhind*'. The value extracted is pro-people¹²¹

Maghi Singh Gill's '*Sundari*' based upon Bhai Vir Singh's novel is the first narrative in Kaveeshani. 18th century /Sikh character is his focus and he has described it in a glowing manner.¹²² The Singh Sabha movement and the rural cultural universe were not two separate domains; a process of selection was going on. We should be focusing on the precise dynamics of this process and this prasang can serve this task quite fruitfully. What are the selections made in this prasang from the version of Bhai Vir

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.63

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.64

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.66-68

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p.68. A possible source can be Panth Prakash-Gyani Gyan Singh.

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p.69-71

¹²² *ibid.*, p.71-72. His other writings include '*Baba Ram Singh Bhaini*' – 1961. '*Anand Vyah*' – Maghi Singh Gill has counted the advantages of Anand marriage and the folk customs. Maghi Singh Gill's, '*Qissa Pakistan*' blames the British for the Partition. The women's trauma affected him deeply.

Singh? This also brings into sharp relief the structural role of the Kaveeshars, as distillers of knowledge, wisdom and common sense for the rural populace of the Punjab.

The protagonist of '*Jang Qila Daryal*' by Maghi Singh Gill is Gulab Kaur, who battles against the rioters as well as the Baloch military and is murdered. Significantly, Maghi Singh Gill mentions the Muslims leaguers as vile, as against the ordinary Muslims.¹²³ The Muslim League is seen in the sequence of 18th Century Muslims.

Bhagwan Singh is credited with the first qissa of 'Jeona Maur' in the nineteenth century. Quite famous in the Malwa region, many kaveeshars have written this qissa. Maghi Singh Gill praises Jeona.¹²⁴ Bhagwan Singh portrays Jeona as an outlaw, who had no future with the glory of the Queen the only benefactor of Punjabi prosperity. However, we see that the subsequent glorification of Jeona Maur by Maghi Singh Gill and Babu Rajab Ali is a profound inversion of the moral order created by Bhagwan Singh. Now, the people treat Jeona Maur as one of their own. Secondly, we can fathom the seamless transition from the righteous martyrs of the Sikh lore now joined by the bandits, honour-killers, etc. Although the Punjabi folk-lore distinguishes amongst them but simultaneously regards their essential qualities.

'*Sucha Singh Soorma*' by Maghi Singh Gill was an enormously popular qissa in malwa villages. Legend has it that wherever this qissa was sung, people indulged in rivalry. Kabir's doha is deployed to eulogize Sucha Singh Soorma.¹²⁵ Very moving, pulsating rhythm makes it a masterpiece. This qissa also contains a kernel of his religious ethical vision, asking to usher in advaita by lifting the veil of dvaita.¹²⁶ This vision of essential unity of all religions is shared across the board among the kaveeshars e.g. Babu Rajab Ali, Maghi Singh Gill, Daya Singh Aarif, etc. One source could be the Nirmalas.

The local bandits '*Raman Jangu*' (1925) of village Chak Bakhtu belonging to Kumhar and Jatts, respectively.¹²⁷ The local history can be derived out of such writings.

Maghi Singh Gill's '*Bahadur Bibi*' (Harnam Kaur, 1935) is about the valour of a woman who successfully resisted the Bandit Lal Singh and his associates. Maghi

¹²³ *ibid.*, p.81-82

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p.84-85

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p.85-86

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p.85-86

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p.86-87

Singh Gill also mentions the bravery displayed by the malwai women in the political movements e.g. Jaitu da morcha as essentially in consonance with Harman Kaur. His chhant mentions Bibi Kishan Kaur of Kaunke village who moved ahead in raining bullets during the Jaitu satyagraha. Harnam Kaur scolds the bandits by challenging them to take on the police if they intend to test their courage and then recounts her ancestors' assistance to the Guru Gobind Singh and from this aspect draws the immediate grace of valour.¹²⁸

Resistance to the bandits is premised upon the spiritual asset of Guru Gobind Singh as well as on the Brar clan's association. Further, if the bandits take on the police it is valorous whereas, if they start tormenting the people then the moral order is subverted. In this condition, kaveeshars reinvent the Sikh-lore in order to restore the moral order. Thus, the thrust on justice is clearly emphasized in the Sikh-lore. Secondly, this prasang also introduces a critical merit between those bandits who challenge the might of the state as against those who torment the simple folk. Jeona Maur and Lal Singh epitomize these differentiations. We see that in the Punjabi-lore, such distinctions are vital to the entire social edifice – distinction between various aashiqs of Punjab, between Ichharan and Mata Gujar, between bandits, etc. This aspect requires sustained attention.

Chhants about counts are considered the ultimate achievement in the Kaveeshari tradition.¹²⁹ Maghi Singh Gill's '*Sass Noonh da Saka*' considers the economic condition as the principal reason for such domestic episodes with education and mutual respect as the only way out. Otherwise, the jatts are condemned to be ravaged by much bigger forces.¹³⁰

Maghi Singh Gill comes across as a master of publicity/propaganda. His reformist message is couched in extremely lucid and entertaining episodes. This is a unique achievement wherein the Kaveeshar is projecting a modernist message to the ruralites. His cultural capital acquired coupled with his own sensibility imparts his status greater effect.

'*Azaadi de Kaare*' (1947) published in 1964, enlists the contribution by the Punjabis and Bengalis in the freedom struggle. Nevertheless, the partition ravaged these

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, p.87-88

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, p.92

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p.95-96

lands and Maghi Singh Gill is profoundly hurt.¹³¹ Maghi Singh Gill introduces the dimension of political economy in 1947 with the rich reaping the rewards and the labourers, peasants suffering its aftermath.¹³² 'Rangle Punjab di Barbadi' (1947) again records Maghi Singh Gill's anguish¹³³

These couplets give us the popular perception about partition in the Punjab where Maghi Singh Gill considers the prevalence of liquor and plunder as the main reason for 1947 instead of any religious, social or political cause. Also, the subsequent acceptance of liquor and petty-crime, according to him is an outcome of 1947.

Maghi Singh Gill's '*Kirti Kisan de Chhand*' resulted from his long involvement with the Communist Party, Lal Party and the peasants' movement. His treatment of the precarious economic circumstances of peasantry is very moving. These were sung in conferences, conventions, etc. His progressive attitude is evident in these chhands.¹³⁴ These chhands provide as with a home-grown variety of progressive poetry. In fact, it would be worthwhile to explore the writings of other minor progressive poets like Barkat Ram Yuman, Gurdas Ram Alam and others. Also the transformation from Sikh-lore to progressive mores in Maghi Singh Gill is seamless. He seems quite impervious to the claims of a divine resolution of people's woes.

Maghi Singh Gill is the most committed narrator of labouring consciousness¹³⁵ The economic condition is the fountainhead of daily travails and the backward rituals further yoke the peasant households into indebtedness.¹³⁶ This concern or analysis is astoundingly contemporary about rural indebtedness in the Punjab. These concerns were tampered by his participation in peasant movements and one reflection is his '*Sangat da Mangal*'. The concept is derived from Sikhism but it is interpreted to embrace the ascendancy of popular movements against the oppressive state structures. The history of visions of Sikh identity in this sense becomes the study of the mediations and dialectical relationship between the objective conditions of the life of men and the way they perceive them.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, p.97

¹³² *ibid.*, p.97

¹³³ *ibid.*, p.99

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p.100

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p.109-110

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, p.111

The Sangat for him stands for one organization committed to the cause of the people.¹³⁷

This longish extract contains the essential elements of his discourse. He is consciously politicizing tradition and transforming the religious discourse of the Sikh movement. His list of anti-people personalities seamlessly weaves the eighteenth century Mughal apparatchiks as well as the twentieth century despots including the British officers in India. Unity, organization and struggle of and by the masses are the only guarantee of prosperity. This force, according to him, is now about to capture Delhi, the seat of political power. Sant Ram Udasi comes across a genuine successor of Maghi Singh Gill. It is also possible to infer the decisive influence of the Ghadarites, Babbar Akalis, etc. in Maghi Singh Gill's orientation.

Maghi Singh Gill's political attitude in the pre-1947 period was consistently anti-imperialist, with pronounced sympathies for the anti-Raj activities. The Akali movement was especially close to his heart. The post-1947 phase saw him opposing the Congress rule.¹³⁸ Maghi Singh Gill has consciously avoided woman baiting in his poetry to the extent that he composed verses in their honour.¹³⁹

His Sakhi-related texts have five fold significance; i) numbering 34, these consist about the 40% of his total oeuvre, ii) the historical aspect is central to these texts from the Guru Nanak to his contemporary events; iii) in these texts, 4-5 are written for the first time in the Kaveeshari genre; iv) Sikh history, tradition and thought inform his texts; v) his acute devotion and knowledge to the Sikh lore has contributed in keeping these texts in perspective.¹⁴⁰ Sikh movement is synonymous with people's movement in his ideological universe with every political advance was mediated by the decision to stand up for the cause of poor. Both the martyrdom of Guru Arjan and the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh are meant for the welfare of the downtrodden.¹⁴¹ Khalsa as an organization of the oppressed in his view.

For him, Sikh movement is not the ascendancy of a new religion alone but a comprehensive socio-economic and cultural movement with Guru Gobind Singh as its undisputed inspiration and leader in history to such an extent that the later events are

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p.112-13

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p.113-14

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p.114-16

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.116

also aglow with his persona. The Panth is the embodiment in history of the Guru. Maghi Singh Gill's praise for Guru Gobind Singh is robust and vigorous. The 18th Century Sikh struggle and the sacrifices undertaken is inspired by Guru Gobind Singh.¹⁴²

Martyrdom invites comparison with the Sufis. Hakam Singh Darwesh employs this strategy for conquering Multan with Guru Gobind Singh mightier than Shams Tabrez.] Perhaps the most significant aspect in Maghi Singh Gill's endeavour is to portray Guru Gobind Singh opposed to an oppressive state and not to any person, ethnicity or religion. He has clarified this understanding at numerous points by presenting evidence from Sikh history.¹⁴³ The universality attempted by the Sikh movement is stoutly asserted in this stanza. Against the common sense, that Guru Gobind Singh was against the Muslims or Islam, Maghi Singh Gill enlists the Sufis who were active in the Sikh movement. It is the shared concern for the downtrodden and the willingness to stand up for justice that provides the space for those social linkages (in his view). The Singh Sabha movement's entire project was to negate this assimilative aspect and it stands challenged. The mendicant popular kaveeshar was a bearer of plebeian righteousness in the form of religious activity and its relation to labouring experience.¹⁴⁴

Maghi Singh Gill contrasts Guru Gobind Singh with Mahatma Gandhi in the aftermath of 1947. The Father of the Sikhs' Vs. 'The Father of Nation'.¹⁴⁵ For him, the partition is the reference point to compare Guru Gobind Singh with Gandhi. Gandhi is associated with the Congress government and Guru Gobind Singh with the Punjabis. The mass killings during 1947 are blamed on Gandhi and Guru Gobind Singh is characterized as the one who suffered a lot but never allowed the poor to suffer.

Maghi Singh Gill has portrayed the Sikhs as 'Teesri Kaum' (The Third Nation lit.) However, this assertion is not sectarian because universality and inclusivity, which stands apart from both the political Islam as well as the brahminised Hinduism, undergird it.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.116-17

¹⁴² *ibid.*, p.117-8

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, p.190-20

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.123

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.120

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.120

Maghi Singh Gill is categorical in castigating the Sikhs for abandoning the path of justice, equality and fraternity. Who is a Sikh – this question is imparted an egalitarian edge and rejecting the usual argument of the Rahit Maryada as the hallmark of a Sikh.¹⁴⁷ Maghi Singh Gill is against any attempt to segregate humanity on sectarian lines. Advaita is MSG's belief, viewing the divine and the quotidian in the same light. Against any ritual he curses the divine for its heartlessness.¹⁴⁸

Maghi Singh Gill wrote 13 qissas of aashiqs in all with '*Chand Kaur*' and '*Zebunnisa*' written for the first time in Punjabi. Aashiqs are protagonists against the oppressive medieval structure and their martyrdom is a certainty. This ensures a high status for aashiqs in his pantheon. Ishq encompasses new unities between the physical and the metaphysical. The martyrs of ishq are also the flagbearers to the path of justice.¹⁴⁹

Increasing secularization of poetry – now even Amritsar has a lowly position vis-à-vis the aashiqs. The received tradition about aashiqs encompasses the essence of all religious virtues and this understanding is his concern.

The bandits have a major space in the Kaveeshari genre. The Malwais worship their tombs or memorials. They are supposed to possess the following qualities.¹⁵⁰ Extremely sensitive to their honour, they could undertake any adversity. Their life-style was adventurous, bold and chivalrous. They had the courage to challenge the rulers, injustice; etc. They had their own values strictly adhered to. Their nature endeared them to the ruralites. They freed cows from butchers. He has narrated their tales in glowing terms especially his '*Sucha Singh Soorma*'. Significantly, he explains the conditions that led them towards banditry.¹⁵¹

Kaveeshari genre does not pay much attention towards Baranmah and Satwara.¹⁵² A Kaveeshar and folk-wisdom are dialectically related with Kaveeshar profiting from the sedimented wisdom while simultaneously infusing it with his own experience and attempts to make it a part of the erstwhile wisdom. His skill at

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.120-21

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.122

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.123-24

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.124-25

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.124-25

¹⁵² *ibid.*, p.134

Kaveeshari is particularly suited to succeed in this effort.¹⁵³ The questions regarding a customary culture may often be concerned less with the processes and logic of change than with the retrieval of past conditions of consciousness and the layering of social relations. Although the 'common sense' of the time is laden with the weight of the status quo the notion of 'theatre' helps in viewing this conflict in perspective: "In all societies, of course, theatre is an essential component both of political control, superstition, power, wealth, sublime justice; the poor exact their counter-theatre, occupying the stages of the streets for markets and employing the symbolism of ridicule or protest".¹⁵⁴

The structure, in any relation between elite and popular, runs in both directions, and the same bond, when turned around and viewed in reverse, may present, an alternative conception as demonstrated by the robust universe animated through kaveeshars along with other cultural agents in late nineteenth century onwards in Punjab. The total structure is to be situated in the local particularity of 'the ensemble of the social relations' and not in a particular ritual or form isolated from these. Thus to define control in terms of hegemony is to prepare for analysis at the nodes where the images of power and authority, 'the popular mentalities of subordination' operate and offer resistance. The mode of transposing anthropological findings to history is wrong if it denies any voice to the subordinated. "This provides the 'general illumination in which all other colours are plunged and which modifies their specific tonalities'".¹⁵⁵

Overwhelmingly, any comparison of local evidence leaves the impression of mainstream similarities – a unified ideology, a dream remarkable in its consistency, overriding the socio-economic, regional and local differences.¹⁵⁶ The terminology of peasant political thought is itself of interest... words to express the new experiences and demands were sought and found in tradition or in legend as much as in the new vocabulary of the newspapers and towns.¹⁵⁷

The forms in which it was expressed have shown it clearly: cognition and terminology of conservatism, conventionality, patriarchalism, and semi-magical beliefs injected with new words, views and experiences and put to use to grasp and shape a

¹⁵³ *ibid.*, p.149 Maghi Singh Gill's total output would require approximately 3000 pages¹⁵³

¹⁵⁴ Thompson; *op cit*, p.254

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.264

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.138

rapidly transforming society and to this a revolution in which the peasantry was massively involved.¹⁵⁸ The Russian peasant struggle of 1905-7 has shown what was called in a different time and place the peasant 'moral economy' – a peasant ideology of righteousness – at the root of their revolt. That is where the patterns of cognition and dreams link directly into political confrontation and peasant war.¹⁵⁹

Issues of consciousness and struggle cannot be disconnected from the Russian peasantry's past. In the most direct sense, its older generation still remembered the emancipation from serfdom in 1860, both the dramatic change and the many disappointments. However, one can and should go further back historically. There is enough evidence to show that well hidden from 'official Russia', the memory of great peasant rebellions of the 16th and 17th Centuries was never quite extinguished in some areas of Russia, especially in the mid-Volga.... For centuries the state meted out punishments even for remembering Ryazin and Pugachev, the church anathemised them, yet legends were told, ballads sung and millennial dreams woven – well described by a writer as a veritable 'samizdat of those literate'. Those songs and legends carried the message of peasant defiance, but also some basic ideas round which new ideology could take shape.¹⁶⁰ Similarly the memory of Sikh struggle with Sikh martyrs and militants along with a conception of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as benevolent, merciful king in Punjabi ballads kept alive the essential features of Punjabi utopia and its extended network.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.138

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.239-40

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.240

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.240

CHAPTER FIVE

'Sikhi' and the Question of Inclusivist Punjabi Identity

The reformist ideology percolated to the Sikh peasantry primarily through soldiers serving in the army or those who had retired. One of the regiments had constituted a choir of reciters to go around the villagers and sing the sacred hymns at Singh Sabha congregations. The movement picked momentum and rocked the Punjab from one end to the other.¹

Sohan Singh Josh tries to capture the elevating experience (Charhdi Kala) of the times of Akali movement. To describe the robust and infectious atmosphere on the basis of his being a participant in the purpose. Josh's leading role gives him a vantage point along with his treatment of the government records.² The Akali agitation for Gurdwara control went on from 1919 to 1926.³ SSJ credits the success of AM to their resolve to endure sacrifices, unity and agricultural resoluteness channelised through the non-violent Satyagraha. The AM accounted for more casualties than any other episode in the NLM.⁴ AM enjoyed the support of Hindus, Muslims and Christians even while its form, and, to an extent, content was religious. As the movement became by of anti-imperialist character it gained even more support from these groups. The government efforts to alienate both the Hindus and Muslims from AM failed and not to give adequate weight to their contribution would be an injustice.⁵ This agitation effected a change in mentalities of the Sikhs. This deep-rooted change in political attitudes had a wide canvas – they ceased to be loyalists of the *Raj* and were counted as patriots.⁶ This that change had a significant social dimension is routinely overlooked in the Sikh studies by limiting the problematique to Sikh identity alone. Our study takes up this question.

Army recruiting regime – material races – 'rural classes' as a secure resource for British to be insulated from political issues at any cost. The brutal repression unleashed on the Layallpur agitation in 1906-07 and the Ghadar movement flowed from the aforementioned **** Punjab's strategic role in British imperialism. As a further strategy Punjab was kept backward in economic, religious, educational and social spheres, heavy taxes, low food prices to induce recruitment, educational backwardness to shackle their political consciousness. A significant flank of this offensive was the religious establishment of H, M and S who exercised their influence in the service of the colonial

¹ See, "Origins of the Singh Sabha" (273-282) in Harbans, Singh L. Barrier N.G. (ed.) *Punjab Past and Present, Essays in Honour of Ganda Singh*, 1996, 2nd Edition, P.U. Patiala, xxiii+511, pp.281.

² Josh, Sohan Singh: *Akali Morchian Da Itihas*, Arsee Publishers, New Delhi, 2000, pp.520, p.3

³ *ibid.*, p.4

⁴ *ibid.*, p.4

⁵ *ibid.*, p.4

state.⁷ How this dialectic continued when General Dyer was honoured by the Akal Takht and the Ghadarites were characterized as 'Fallen'?

By ascribing to the Ninth Guru's 'proclamations' Sikh religious sanction for loyalty towards government was propagated through Sikh organisations. Mr. D. Petrie was given this charge to evaluate the politico-religious attitudes of the Sikhs, SSM, CKD and SEC, etc who prepared his memorandum in 1911 as an effort to maintain the Sikhs as a 'fighting machine' for British war purposes.⁸ Singh Sabhas of the late-nineteenth century were following the British policy. With Chief Khalsa Diwan, Sikh principles attracted sustained attention. Preachers, emphasizing the martyrdom of the Gurus, the lofty standards set by various Sikh martyrs and the need for organization, were employed. Khalsa College, Amritsar emerged as a source of propagating Sikh values amongst the students with educational backwardness identified as a stumbling block. The state looked suspiciously at such activities by having confidential reports on these organizations. Loyalty demanded a 'Sikhism' suited to British interest banishing all talk of 'unity, martyrdom in the service of Sikh army, the fallen state, Sikhs and other principles of political propaganda.'⁹ The historical gurdwaras were cultivated as a source of power, self and political hegemony for the British in convenience with the caretakers and priests/mahants. The clubbing together of SSM coupled, with the entry of Dalits into gurdwaras was a call to arms for the mahants. All these factors had effectively reduced Sikhism to British loyalty in which Sikhs were a 'military asset' whereas Punjab was the key to 'military situation'.

This British version of Sikhism and its local agents (indigenous agents) were squarely challenged by the Akali movement (AM) or Gurdwara Reform Movement (GRM), to the extent that Chief Khalsa Diwan was exposed as loyalist, incidentally considered rebellions by the British. Such wide-ranging ideological impact invited unprecedented state repression.¹⁰ Inflation, epidemics, communal outbreaks, suspension

⁶ *ibid.*, p.4

⁷ *ibid.*, p.25-26 (p.27) – Gen. Nicholson converted to Sikhism during 1857 to enlist and cement the Sikh support for the imperial cause. Surviving the Suka episode the British were greatly perturbed by the Bar Agitation in Lyallpur (1906-07) which was geared towards those districts providing largest number of army recruits. Nazer Singh deals with this aspect in detail in this 'Delhi and Punjab'. His treatment supports SSJ while acting as a counterfoil to HSO.

⁸ *ibid.*, p.28

⁹ *ibid.*, p.28-29

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.30-31

of civil liberties along with severe excesses committed during recruitment in Punjab were creating unrest in the populace.¹¹

The young ones were made to stand naked to compel them to join the army. They were forcibly made to stand in thorny tracts, quotas were determined along with monetary rewards, innocent youth were threatened to with incarceration of they refused to join, *zaildars* and *nambardars* took to scouting the potential soldiers with a vengeance, canal water was withdrawn from non-recruiting units. However the Loyalist Chief Khalsa Diwan was continuing with its servility and in unison with the British designs obvious to the popular resentment against the Raj.¹²

The experience of World War I for Sikh sepoy was manifold: having had seen his British officers behaving in a cowardly manner, the 'invincibility' of British empire was severely dented; every Sikh soldier brought home an incipient/subterranean resistance/unrest against the daily routine of poverty and tough conditions. Their complaints regarding the post war benefits not materializing further aggravated the anti-government unrest.¹³ The second week of April, 1919 in Amritsar witnessed unprecedented show of Hindu-Muslim unity when they drank water from each other and these fraternizing acts were on the eve of the congress session organized by Dr. Satyapal and Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew.¹⁴ Such were the general conditions of unprecedented anti-imperial upsurge all over India, now channelised through non-violent methods in which the GRM was launched. The congress as well as the Khilafat supports it throughout its course.¹⁵ AM attracted the rural populace, rural poor and peasantry.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.31-32. All these factors resulted in a very high ratio of deserters with *tehsildar* Nadir Hussain being murdered due to excesses committed. Similar coercive methods were adopted while collecting the 'War Fund' or 'War Loan'. Given these coercive methods it is difficult to agree with Amarjit Chanda that these 'contributions' were almost 'voluntary', if conditional, by looking at the cash/land/honorific rewards promised by the British. The Ghadar movement along with the Komagatamaru incident and the resultant BajBaj massacre also imprinted itself on the Punjabi countryside.

¹² *ibid.*, p.31-32

¹³ *ibid.*, p.32-33 [Parallels with the mid-nineteenth century Sikh soldiers who undertook socio-religious reform, millenarian zeal and armed resistance against the British]. 1917 USSR – agrarian issues and the GRM.¹³

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.34 [Jallianwala Bagh massacre – Punjab on the national firmament – 'massistation' of the INM – non-violent satyagraha – non-cooperation – Khilafat – Swaraj – honours to be returned – non-complaints were termed 'Toady Bachcha' – they were ridiculed : SSJ, p.36/K.L. Tuleja – Social Scientist – Ravinder Kumar on Lahore].

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.36

The continuity of the peasant society – relatively undifferentiated nature of the peasant society – ‘peasantness’ as a category in social history – historiography about Punjab case. It revived and brought alive the Sikh lore and historical significance of martyrdom and selflessness. Gurdwara Reform Movement was essentially an anti-imperialist movement that reestablished the Sikhs as patriots. The conflict was manifold e.g. the mahants frequently issued strictures against voices of Gurdwara Reform; no ardas was done for dalits and untouchables, etc. All these ‘religious actions had an externality attached to them i.e. to employ the gurdwaras in the service of empire. A striking episode in this series was to baptize both Gen. Dyer and Capt. Briggs during 1919 at Gurdwara Guruser Satlani. Their ‘conversion’ was preceded by.¹⁶

The British records tell the story of how the ‘*dharmarth*’ property was steadily refashioned as private property. Consequently the Sikh ‘*sangats*’ were deprived of its legitimate rights to monitor, control and participate in the matters related to local shrines or gurdwaras. Some of these shrines were administered by the government through the agency of *Sarbarah* or patron. The regime of democratic checks and balances was quietly sidelined; as a result corrupt practices were introduced. It financial impropriety was one offshoot the daily ritual was also compromised e.g. the idols in Golden temple were not lifted until 1905. The third component of this design were the ‘natural leaders’ of the Sikhs clubbed together in the CKD with S. Sundar Singh Majithia as their sole representative. Although it carried out religious propaganda it also invited ridicule from the younger sections, “High is the Sikhs but higher still is the English government cooperation with the government to extract benefits for themselves and for Sikhs was their supreme motivation.” This government – CKD bonhomie was cultivated and nurtured from 1857 onwards. CKD leaders were the traditional nobility who were respected due to their ancestors’ exploits during MRS rule. Believing in the invincibility of the British, they had no perspective independent of Br loyalty, cemented by their help in educational institutions, in granting land to Sikhs in canal colonies, in army recruitment, etc.¹⁷ In the aftermath of WWI, the CKD leadership did not take cognizance of the changed circumstances threatening to break apart the political logjam. The Lyallpur Group, led by S. Harchand Singh, Teja Singh Samundari and others, made these political initiatives by launching ‘*Khalsa Akhbar*’ in Urdu in which they criticized the CKD’s loyalist stance. Some of these efforts were undertaken even during the war

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.37-39

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.39-41 CKD’s social base – ideology and politics – (NGB – Joginder Singh

years e.g. on 10-12 April, 1914 during the Jalandhar session of the Sikh Educational Conference (SEC), the Lyallpur Sikhs sought to place a resolution asking for a forceful criticism of the government regarding the Rakabganj affair. They boycotted the proceedings when their appeal was rejected. Sikhs living outside the Punjab even some Singh Sabhas were asking for autonomy regarding gurdwara control but the CKD took no heed.¹⁸ The post-WWI conditions saw the heightened concerns of Khalsa college, Amritsar students as well as the discharged Sikh soldiers who had gathered valuable experiences and ideas coupled with a broadening outlook.¹⁹ In addition to these two factors, to crystallize these rebellious feelings, the Lyallpur group decided to issue a daily newspaper the 'Akali' on May 21, 1920, the martyrdom day of the fifth guru, Arjan Dev. It proved to be a historic event because the Akali propagated a new idiom to the Sikh masses and became a veritable force against the 'hereditary' and 'natural' CKD leadership.

The Akali proved to be a distinctive effort which introduced a rebellious kind of journalistic practice in sharp contrast to earlier loyalist attempts. Its editorial team was prepared to suffer all oppression coming in the form of jails, heavy fines, impounding, etc. Their brave conduct set new standards for the future writers. We can say with reasonable accuracy that the theory and praxis of the 'Akali' discourse revolutionized the socio-political culture of the Sikhs. Later the weeklies '*Babbar Sher*', '*Kirpan Bahadur*' etc. also followed the same kind of journalist.) The aims and objectives enunciated by the 'Akali' team also provided the substantive programme for the existing conditions. They articulated a 5-point agenda: i) democratic control of the gurdwaras by removing the mahants and others; to bring khalsa college Amritsar into a democratic control; Rakabganj wall to be reconstructed; to rouse the Sikh masses, make them participate in the INM; and to build a representative organization of the Sikhs according to 'Panchayati principles'.²⁰

The essential significance of 'Akali' lay in its leading role that guided the Sikhs on every emerging issue in changing pol-circumstances. 'Akali's appeals and analysis were followed by Akali propagandists and then by the commoners. It was an innovative exegete of popular sentiments, opinions and demands. Its wide appeal attracted many

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.43 initial challenges to CKD's hegemony in the institutional arena.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.44 ppp – essays for Ganda Singh – WWI Soldiers.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.45-46²⁰ ('Akali' CKD- its distinction – HSD, SSL – future Punjabi writers journalism in Punjabi – Public sphere

adherents to various agitations during the GRM bestowing a mobilizing and organizing status in the emerging scenario of anti-imperial, secular struggle.²¹

The Lyallpur group under the leadership of S. Harchand Singh was the first to raise issue about Rakabganj and Golden Temple. Master Sundar Singh Lyallpuri strategised the Khalsa College agitational plan as well as for publishing the 'Akali'. Renowned for his patriotic fervour Lyallpuri brought Gyani Hira Singh 'Dard' and S. Mangal Singh, who resigned their jobs to join the editorial staff of Akali. SSL's various articles from 1908 onwards on various issues were avidly read. In one such piece he equated the British control of KCA as a piece with the annexation of Punjab in 1844. He also declared S. Sundar Singh Majithia a traitor of Panth for letting the British take control of KC, Amritsar. Given to educational expansion and religious propaganda, SSL later became a staunch anti-imperial patriot. His spirit was also manifest in refashioning the Sikh lore against the existing loyolism carried under the garb of extracting benefits from the government. He implored Hira Singh Dard: "The Sikh leaders, gurdwara mahants and chiefs have reduced Sikhism as an exercise in Loyalty. We have to enter the arena to remove this black spot on our honour."²²

The stellar role carried out the 'Akali' and its editorial team has not been studied in a precise manner. It has the potential to resolve certain issues of GRM as well as the organization of national liberation movement in the Punjab Countryside. The loyalism of the Chief Khalsa Diwan was attacked by 'Akali' and followed by almost everyone, which created an alternative discursive/ideological space for articulating an anti-government Sikhism. Akali took up the religious, political and educational matters that were a major source of concern amongst the Sikhs. Their massive journalistic output especially S. Mangal Singh's rebellious articles and Dard's political poems written in a popular idiom of qissakars, kaveesharn etc. went a long way in reviving the spirit of martyrdom, selflessness and sacrifice for a just cause. This just cause was the freedom of gurdwaras and the national movement. Perhaps the most durable impact was to inspire the formation of various Akali *jathas* due to their propaganda. Diwan was the only central organization of the Sikhs till this time along with some regional platforms

²¹ *ibid.*, p.46[('Akali's role stated formal aims – campaigning arm –a new anti-imperial discourse – building bridges – reconstituting Sikhism – established a modern idiom of ideas]

²² *ibid.*, p.46-47 Lyallpur as a nursery – Bar agitation of 1907-08 – SSL's articles from 1908 onwards .Sikh issues to anti-imperial patriotism – strategies, organizers, opinion – makers - refashioning the Sikh lore – Akali]

but there was no central organization to lead the Gurdwara Reform Movements. The sprouting of numerous Akali jathas went a long way in creating a central organization.²³ The first test for these initiatives appeared in the form of Rakabganj wall. S. Sardul Singh '*Kaveeshar*' wrote a piece in Akali and proposed a Martyrs Band (Shahidi jatha) for which he invited 100 martyrs. Along with Sardul Singh Caveeshar the Akali editorial staff was the first to give their names. Coupled with the journalistic propaganda, populist poetry, this agitation organized public conventions all over Punjab. Caveeshar, S. Dan Singh Vichhoa and Jhabal brothers – S. Amar Singh and Jasuvant Singh - delivered fiery speeches resulting in a surge of prospective members of the Shahidi jatha wherever they spoke. Some of them even wrote their letters addressed the meetings in Lahore; many names were given for jatha. These concerted efforts were directed towards Dec. 1, 1920 when the first jatha would march to Delhi. However, the government built the wall on the intervention of Maharaja Nabha.²⁴ Sohan Singh Josh credits this political victory to unity, organization and spirit of sacrifice exhibited by the Akalis contributing to their enthusiasm, broadening and strengthening their movement. This success paved the way for freedom of gurdwaras. The year 1920 proved to be paradigmatic in swelling of public sentiment. The gurdwara mahants, Khalsa College administration and the patron of Golden Temple were the local arm of the British state. British agenda in the Punjab revolved around cultivating the loyalty of Punjabis especially after 1906-07. The successive Lt. Governors pursued this policy.²⁵ The agitation for gurdwara *Babe di Ber* provided the opportunity to test the strategic weapons eg. The Jhabal brothers addressed meetings on gurdwara reform, Khilafat, independence and Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity in Sialkot. Stressing upon the unity of masses they succeeded in isolating the mahants and his cohorts from the general masses. New tactics evolved included using the mass support to challenge the government and

²³ *ibid.*, p.47-48 Akali's contribution – impact on countryside thro' articles, poems – resulted in organizational and political initiatives – reviving the Sikh lore in the service of anti-imperial nationalism – embryo of many later developments]

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.48-49 institutional arena – the juncture of 1920 – Shahidi Jatha (reviving the Baisakhi of 1699) – Shahidi jatha as a strategic tool for widest possible mobilization. Sohan Singh Josh gave his name on one such occasion (p.49).

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.49-51 Rakabganj affair demonstrated the ground situation of awakened masses in an organizational platform bringing the state to its knees. Gaining strength the internal contradictions within the Sikhs were set to sharpen along political axis, which will become the dominant mode to determine – 'Who is a Sikh'? – 1920-1930]

coercive measures were successfully resisted. The imprisoned leaders were soon released.²⁶

The Golden Temple was the key to gurdwara reform question. Both the sides understood its historical significance very well. At the beginning of AM, H.M. Arur Singh Naushehra Nangli was the loyalist patron of Shrine. The SS movement and Khalsa Diwan, Majha had documented the 'degenerations' in detail at Amritsar and Tarn Taran. As a strategic tool to involve masses, the British government, in alliance with the mahants was held responsible for this 'moral decline'. The mahant faction countered this charge of moral decline through declaring the neo-Sikhs as apostates, who intermingle with the mazhabis, introducing new maryada, etc.²⁷

It is instructive to note that the issue of 'maryada' was a site of contestation throughout the AM (the new committee established in 1930s arrived at a compromise this process requires separate attention). The peasantry indulged in revelry on massya /amavas at Tarn Taran which has a great sanction in folk songs and the everyday life of Majha (GNDU fieldwork). The 'reform' such practices by involving peasantry by harnessing its cultural idiom and memory mediated by the martyrs invites a grand project with polyglossia. However, the peasantry had its way in both removing the corrupt mahants and also retaining its carnivalesque domain relatively unscathed. During the 1980s, the revelry at Tarn Taranis involved in the act of resisting the coercive measures adopted by the Sikh militants in W.S. Sandhus' Main Hun Theek Thaak Haan'. The vivid narratives prepared by the reformist factions also all us in a graphic fashion the peasantry's notion of religion – culture celebration.

The daily 'Akali' passionately pursued the gurdwara question unleashing the subterranean political initiative. Akali Jathas emerged almost everywhere almost on their own will and prepared for GR carrying swords of all sizes. Village after village and market after market prided itself in calling itself Akali. Some initial victories had widely enthused the masses but there was no principal organizational platform for GR, which could channelise this enthusiasm.²⁸

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.52-55, Josh infers from this episode the basic apparatus of British interventions; false assurances to manage gurdwaras with no government interference; 'two parties' amongst the Sikhs to divide the Sikhs and rule by proxy; and to prevent any flow of money from gurdwaras to the Prabandhak committees, which will found it towards the Sikh organization resulting in a strengthened gurdwara movement detrimental to government interests.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.56-60

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.60-61

The absolute centrality of 'Akali' to the GRM in its early incipient phase is underscored through its unprecedented popular appeal and its contribution to the organizational issues. All these factors demand further research on this issue (its content analysis). Sant S. Sekhon records the enthusiasm for baptism and becoming an Akali amongst the rural youth, which also provided them an avenue to change their rustic sounding names into weightier ones having choes of the martial notion of Sikh lore. Passages to modernity through baptism in rural Punjab. The next stage was to harness this massive rural eruption into the public – institutional arena and infuse the same with this newfound idiom. The range and depth of this idiom stretched from poetic metres to political speeches, if not the political paradigm itself. In this sense, the various elements of a 'Punjabi modernity' were operationalised during the 1920-1930 period in which the Akali movement until 1926, 'Kirti' paper onwards, and Hindustan Socialist Republican Association until 1931 carried this strain further.

Meanwhile the sarbarahs were continuing with their agenda that included calling the Ghadarites as 'non-Sikhs' while simultaneously honouring the British officers involved in their repression. Komagatamaru episode was denounced and General Dyer was offered a '*siropa*'. These explicitly political acts were complimented by the confrontationist posturing over *maryada* issues, etc. 'Darbar Sahib is our shop as others have theirs,- "Pujari said ²⁹[Opposition to the Golden Temple patron was acquiring a mass character which got a fillip when the rahit – maryada was bypassed. All efforts to seek redress were exhausted and agitational path was adopted. Resolutions were passed condemning the patron and priests. Even the Sikh women started an agitation. A public meeting at Jallianwala Bagh resulted in victory with the D.C. appointed S. Sundar Singh Ramgarhia as the new Patron. Unity had resulted in victory for the masses.³⁰ During these circumstances, an extraordinary event took place that ultimately resulted in the seizure of Golden Temple by the Sikhs. Mahtab Singh – a Chamar Singh given to eradicating untouchability and converting the 'lower-castes to Sikhism, - under the banner of his organization 'Khalsa Baradari' organized a Sikh baptismal ceremony for the chamars and mazhabis on Oct. 12, 1920 and decided to seek blessings and offering prayers at the Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. The Khalsa Baradari had invited many reputed

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.61-63 SSJ and others routinely entwine the corruption of mahants with the peasant – folk elements on display during festivals. What could be a peasant notion of shrine?

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.64

personalities on this occasion. Three professors of Khalsa College Teja Singh, Bawa Harkishan Singh and Niranjana Singh participated in this event.

However, the pujaris refused to accept their offerings and even after many confabulations, they remained adamant. However with the entry of S. Kartar Singh (Jhabbar), Teja Singh Chuharkana and Teja Singh Bhuchchar armed with light weapons, rented the environment with five jaikaras. Emboldened by this support a 'VAK' was taken from the Guru Granth Sahib followed by other rituals. Khalsa Baradari asked the steadily swelling gathering to accompany them to Akal Takht where an impromptu diwan was held. Chuharkana thundered, 'Look you priests, we are the jatts. We placate the cow before milking it, sit calmly to extract milk, but if it still picks us then we know how to handle it by trying it with a rope. Now you decide upon the suitable method because ultimately it is our writ that will run.

However, when the sangat reached upstairs at Akal Takht there was no one there-causing anger and excitement. The entire sangat resolved to declare the priests as apostates and to take over the shrine. S. Teja Singh Bhuchchar, Jathedar of Central Khalsa Majha Diwan offered services of his jatha that was approved. A 25-member committee was also formed under the leadership of S. Kartar Singh Jhabbar for the daily running of Shrine.

All these events happened so fast that the administration as well as the priests was taken aback. The priests especially had lost their source of earning and they took to instigating the Nihangs. They were later counseled to remain calm by others. Meanwhile the administration moved in to form an interim committee consisting of nine reformists and the patrons until a proper one is formed.³¹

The overarching significance of this event has not been given adequate weight that is so richly deserves. Dalits converting to Sikhism and leading to the democratic seizure of the shrine on the question of accepting their prayers. (Prior of Mahad Satyagraha by Dr. Ambedkar). This occasion also articulated a 'jatt' discourse on the side of mazhabis through the idiom of everyday labouring experience in Punjab countryside. This labouring tradition in alliance with the social dignity question enunciates a version of 'Khalsa' by bringing in Shah Mohammad's Jangnana verse into play. The reconstitution of Sikh lore in a new context made its selections not just from

³¹ *ibid.*, p.64-65

the 'Sikh' sources but from a wider category of Punjabi popular confusing the two seamlessly.

The occupation of Golden temple paved the way for the emergence of centralized organization to 'monitor' the jathas, gurdwaras, etc. Akali was crying aloud to form such a platform in order to check the divisive tendencies which could benefit the government in playing one against the other. On Nov. 15, 1920 the jathedar, Akal Takht called for a gathering of almost all the representative organization, sabhas, army, schools, colleges, Sikh states, etc. SSJ comments that after the Lahore Darbar this was the most representative and broad based. Unanimous resolution favouring GR were passed after discussions that were still not clear enough regarding the strategy, tactics to be adopted SGPC was elected comprising 175 members including those 36 nominated by the government.³²

A prominent natural and traditional leader S. Sundar Singh Majithia had to apologise in the public gathering for his toadyism. However, their subsequent election to SGPC top post (SSM – Pres.; HS Attri-Vice-Pres, SS Ramgarhia – Secy) is an acute reflection of the tenuous and fragile political opinion of the time. Now the moderate faction leading the SGPC provided some relief to government however, by the early 1921 the militant faction lead by Chuharkana and Jhabbar started the movement to occupy the gurdwaras. This phase also saw the political – religious propaganda in the countryside and the religious fervour was assiduously nurtured. The central role of SGPC came to fore in uniting multiple tendencies for a shared purpose.³³[(1921) saw the rural areas targeted with religio-political propaganda with the GR becoming the main issue. SGPC undertook its initial steps towards an ever-expanding engagement]

In Josh's opinion, there was no appreciable lag in the Gurdwara Reform movement and the formation of Akali jathas. It is worth noting that 'Akali' was emphasizing on both, the gurdwara reform as well as the need to organize. Amritsar was the first district to start enlistment of Akalis followed by Central Punjab districts and others. The elementary sense of building on organization to thwart government designs and GR had acquired a common sensical dimension. Of particular significance in this regarding the role played by the historical traditions of Sikh movement – mediated by the forming of 'Shahidi jatha' (martyrs' band) during the Rakabganj affair in 1925

³² *ibid.*, p.67-69

³³ *ibid.*, p.67-69

which proved extremely rewarding. This various jathas so formed were invited to amritsar where the principal organization, Shromani Akali Dal, was formed under the presidentship of S. Sarmukh Singh Jhabal. Its organizational rules and regulations were drafted and in a short while, it became alive force bristling with militant fervour. Full of enthusiasm, the Akalis hit the countryside with confidence and adoring the 5 ks. Their efforts at making the villages join them were hugely successful. Their favourite *chant* was a hymn of Kabir, included in the Adi Granth:

“soora so pahchaniya jo larai din ke het,

purja purja kat marein kabahun na chhade khet.”

Spring of 1921 saw the fear of British government significantly reduced in the countryside. On the other hand, the government viewed emerging movement as insignificant and described it as a movement of “menials”, heaped ridicule at the Akali bands, called them thieves or bandits after some initial gurudwara occupations, etc. However, when all these stratagems failed to achieve their assigned purpose then the local zaildars and safephoses were instructed to keep an eye on the new recruits along with asking them to prevent the Sikhs from joining the Akalis and disallowing their public programmes in their respective areas.³⁴

Nothing of note is available on the early history of the evolution and development of Akali jathas, which employed the Sikh historical traditions to form these bands. The increasingly felt need to get organized reflects a certain modern (ist) inclination in the Punjab countryside with the ‘Akali’ playing a stellar role, once more. 1921 as the turning point in Sikh – British relations with two blocs appearing, namely, pro- and anti – government. Taking recourse to other categories amongst the Sikhs, e.g. menials, bandits, etc. seems a shift in the discursive norm where the internal differentiation also registering itself while categorizing the Akalis. The massive campaign in Punjab countryside also included the deployment of Sikh religious insignia in an anti-imperial political stance complete with Kabir’s call to arms (vernacular revolutionary traditions). We can surmise the reconstitutive process underway to remake Sikhism as a vehicle of anti-imperial movement and its theological, cultural, political, social, literary dimensions we intend to take up in this study.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.71-74 SSJ records that a new spirit of fearlessness was palpable in the wake of this campaign in the Punjab countryside.

All these organisational initiatives crystallized the new spirit bordering on rebelliousness. This process got a fillip with the election of Baba Kharak Singh as SGPC president, who was a vehement anti-Raj figure. His exploits included the tearing down a resolution Sikh Educational Conference in 1915 at Tarantaran, singing hosannas to the everlasting British Raj, who was well aware of the 'treacherous' role of British government with Sikhs; who despised those Sikh leaders who had mortgaged the cause for their personal aggrandizement and above all who was ready to offer his life to rekindle the flagging spirit of the Sikhs. Baba Kharak Singh embodied the rebellious spirit in his speech and rousing public lectures, in his robust moustaches, in his radiating face. With the heady impact of such subjective factors, the organisational capacity increased manifold and caught hold of popular imagination. The instilling of discipline in Akali organization surprised the government to such an extent that in its attempt to discredit and defame the Akalis it routinely discussed these as rival military organization.³⁵ The increasing mass base of the Akalis coupled with the leadership provided by such figures as Baba Kharak Singh went a long way in arousing the rural masses into modern political activity.

The juncture of 1921 brought forth new hurdles as well as new opportunities. Against the hardened posture of government to rely on the overwhelming repressive measures, the Akalis adopted non-violence as their strategic weapon. The operationalisation of the non-violent praxis also demanded a 'just' cause and organisational ethic of high standards. Another vital dimension lying at the periphery was the resolute unity in the Sikh masses coupled with attaining solidarity and support of the Hindus and Muslims. A sign of things to come was demonstrated by the ridicule heaped on the annual awarding of honours by the government. However the government succeeded in dividing the Sikh ranks by conferring 'Sir' to S.S.S. Majithia, an erstwhile Sikh leader and CKD chief. (Sir Fazl-i-Hussain and Lala Harkishan Lal).³⁶

The deviant conduct of mahants and priest at various gurdwaras was a dominant factor resulting in gurdwara occupations by the Akalis. Their hired goons were a source of terror for the pilgrims. On January 24, 1921 a woman narrated her tale of woes at the Akal Takht about the misdemeanour at Tarn Taran. Outraged, a band of Akalis led by Bhai T.S. Bhuchar, armed with small weapons reached the venue. The mahants attacked jatha members at night who were non-violent consequently two Akalis,

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.74. [Mohinder Singh: Baba Kharak Singh]

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.75-76

namely, Bhai Hazara Singh Aladinpur and Bhai Hukam Singh Vasau Kot died of the wounds. They were the first martyrs of the GRM. However, many jathas arrived and occupied the gurdwara the next day, followed by occupations at Naurangabad and Khadur Sahib (Feb., 18, 1921). SSJ concludes that the initial programme was to bring the gurdwaras under one principal centre and not to oust the priests. It was the non-obedience of priests that led to gurdwara occupations.³⁷

The precipitating factor regarding the mahants' ouster was the dishonour of women that encompasses the entire range of misconducts in the Sikh shrines. Mahant Narayan Dass gurdwara was particularly infamous due to the piety attached to this shrine, which also resulted in substantial capital from offerings. On top of it, the patronage given by the Bedi jagirdars to the mahant contributed to their clout. All these factors were enough to make the mahants and his battery of goons to prepare for an offensive against the reforming Akalis. These physical efforts were bolstered by the propaganda front organised by the mahant in the form of a meeting called at Nankana to which sadhus and mahants were invited, numbering 60-65 including Bedi Kartar Singh. This meeting declared the SGPC as null and void, decided to bring out a journal 'Sant Sevak' by collecting Rs.60,000.³⁸ K.S. Jhabbar comes across as a robust Majhail easily provoked to extremist conduct who frequently indulged in his own methods to offer redressal, even keeping his organisation in the dark.³⁹ The desire to be martyrs propelled the jathas without thinking about the strategic imperatives, which, one thinks, were considered diversionary/diluting the pious spirit of martyrdom. "*Mahant sanun katl hi kar devega na?' Koi gall nahin*". However, not only the logistical preparations were primed for this occasion, the mahant had also organised a 'Sanatan Sikh Conference' on Feb. 19-20-1920 against the Akalis⁴⁰ [The massacre was led by mahant himself on horseback, yelling, 'Kill them. No Sikh with hair should be alive.' Out of many Sikhs fatalities there was a mazhabi Sikh, Mangal Singh who was adopted by Lachhman

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.76-79. However, there are differing versions regarding the Tarntaran incident. - K.S. Jhabbar - '*Akali Morche ate Jhabbar*', pp.99-100).

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.80-83. The name 'Ranjha' of a goon also tells about the process through which the romantic rebellions aashiqs of Punjab had become anti-nomian figures. Simultaneously we come across many majawars named Waris Shah in Punjab (See Miran Shah Jalandhari). In addition, the preparations launched by Narayan Das provide us with the strategic template on display throughout the GRM. However, the government support to such efforts was complete and determining the evolving contours of the movement.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.86

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.86-87 On Jhabbar see, J.M. Walia, *Kartar Singh Jhabbar*, Publication Bureau, P.U., Patiala. '*Akali Morche ate Jhabbar*'.

Singh. Mangal Singh was discharged from the army for wearing a sword (Kirpan) and was given a little of 'Kirpan Bahadur' for his rebellious stance.⁴¹

It was the stout leadership of Jathedar K.S. Jhabbar that secured the shrine for an Akali band of 2200 chanting Kabir's hymns. During this episode, the government flinched from firing at the Akalis. The rationale behind this decision included on losing the credibility on the eyes of Sikhs; to lose faith in the military potential of the Sikhs; firing would have thrown almost all the Sikhs towards the non-cooperation faction; the loyalists, pensioners, etc. would also have been crippled and finally the Sikh regiments might have rebelled resulting in long-term losses. All these issues were being discussed in the official circles. However, the moderate leadership was put in sharp focus earlier through their placatory role to stop the jatha from marching to occupy the shrine and later when Bhai Jodh Singh while conducting *ardas* on Feb. 23, 1921 failed to mention the negative role played by the government.⁴² The subjective factor egged on by the scale of massacre committed overwhelmed the government preparations signalling the strategic threat to turn those very instruments of control in thwarting the government designs. The moderate Akali faction also unravelled at the sharp focus on them.

Post-Nankana Sahib massacre two symbiotic tendencies started gaining ground in Punjab: the progressive delegitimation of the government institution and the manifold expansion of the mass activity, propaganda and spontaneous popular support for the Akali movement. Rather than terrifying the Sikh populace, the massacre galvanised them in spontaneously marching towards Nankana in bands of 4-5 from neighbouring regions. Hindus and Muslims both expressed their sympathies for the agitators and criticised the official collusion with the mahant. *Kesri, Bande Mataram, Milap, Partap* and other Hindi-Urdu newspapers condemned the incident with the Urdu *Zamindar* using strong words against the Muslim goons:

'You are not worth calling a Muslim, you are worse than rafirs... the community leaders must pay attention to this new Jallianwala.' (Feb. 23, 1921).

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.90-93 The Akali jatha included women and dalits also (p.87). A *Mazhabi* Sikh given the subversive title of Kirpan Bahadur which was later adopted as the little of Punjabi journal.

⁴² *ibid.*, p.94-98. SSJ doubts the verity of facts cited by the book on Jhabbar but commends the leadership displayed by him.

Along with these articulations in the institutional arena, this incident reinvigorated the Punjabi writers in a big way. They put the blame of the tragedy on commissioner King and Deputy Commissioner Currie in their prolific output of Poetry. The folk-style of '*siththanian*' (pouring customary ridicule on the bridegroom's side by the bride's side) was incorporated and politicized in this manner. These poet-publicists kept on alleging the official collusion irrespective of the threats of imposing fines or imprisonment and helped in undermining the British authority in the countryside by performing in Public spaces. The Akalis in their public meetings, speeches and other propaganda activities repeated the same allegations. The Punjab countryside was roused against the British government. *Pracharks*, *dhadhis*, *kaveeshars*, etc. surfaced who further contributed towards the expansion of Akali movement.⁴³ This episode warrants viewing the Akali movement as a broad platform harnessing the popular/folk resources for an eventual political battle of national liberation mediated through the Akali movement in Punjab countryside. The emerging discourse in diwans, poetry, speeches, *kaveeshari*, journalism, especially around Nankana episode should be studied with great attention.

The Sikh demand to punish the culprits generated a momentum and the government moved to at least save its officials from the taint of a belling the massacre by launching a propaganda effort and to threaten the newspaper claiming their involvement with libel suits. Banda Mataram apologised but Akali remained steadfast by invoking the Panth and God to their side. It appreciated the sacrifices of Akalis in reviving the panth once again.⁴⁴ The government effort included filing false cases on the Sikhs, based investigation, cooked up statements as well as offering to consider a limited Gurdwara Reform bill. However, the ordinary Sikhs, especially Akalis, were resolutely against the government. All these matters came to a head at an SGPC meeting on May 11, 1921, which witnessed a clash between the moderates who desired a revised Gurdwara bill which the government is willing to consider. SSJ notes that in the garb of this bill, both the government and moderates saw an opportunity to tame the Akali movement and to desist them from acquiring any inkling of national liberation. It sought to cultivate the Sikhs as government acolytes very much in the manner of Chief Khalsa Diwan. However, the radical factor led by S. Sardul Singh Kavishar opposed this line of

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.99-100 Incidentally, the official reports also mentioned the popular anger at the government's ineffective handling of the tragedy. Josh comments that the most significant outcome of the Nankana tragedy was to remove the tag of loyalism and obedience to the Raj amongst the Sikhs, paving way for an eventual union of gurdwara reform and national liberation movement at a mass level.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.105

action and instead passed gurmatta (resolution) demanding government non-interference in gurdwara affairs. Significantly, they also passed a resolution endorsing non-cooperation. At this, the moderates resigned from the SGPC putting the government in deep quandary⁴⁵

The unfolding battle lines also involved two prominent personalities amongst the Sikhs viz. Sunder Singh Majithia hailing from an erstwhile Sikh chief family, having extremely cordial relations with the government. He was pitted against Sardul Singh Kavishar also belonging to the respected house of Bagarian leading the radical faction while also being the general secretary of both the central Sikh League and Punjab Congress. Prior to his arrest on May 27, 1921, he was the secretary of Sikh Publicity Committee formed to counter the propaganda unleashed by government machinery accusing the Sikhs of breaking Hindu idols; of pulverizing mosques and tombs and so on. Kavishar organised visits by various associations to Nankana Sahib to nail the government version effectively.⁴⁶ One notices the progressive maturity of the Akali movement in countering the government hegemony by marshalling propaganda (print) resources and keeping intact the solidarity as well as the sympathies of both Hindus and Muslims with the movement. S.S. Kavishar was the spirit behind this glorious effort in refashioning the Punjabi identity. On the other hand, S.S. Majithia, with government backing, was content to refashion/keep alive the tradition alliance of 'sanatani' Sikhs and Hindus with elite Muslim leadership. That this was an essentially elite-led venture puts paid the elaborate project of ludic culture, popular domain, etc. as heralding a promise of an alternative social vision. Harjot Oberoi's failure to see the emergence of Akali movement as essentially shared terrain between the politically advanced sections of Punjabi populace blights their analytical venture of understanding the dialectic of Sikh identity.

The radical-extremist non-cooperation faction was in leading positions both in the national liberation struggle as well as the GPM. Babu Dan Singh Vichhoa, S. Amar Singh and Jaswant Singh and Jhabal were the pioneers in initial stages. Otherwise, the movement owes its founding to the 'Akali' newspaper, its managers and editorial staff. The idea of 'Shahidi jatha' as an innovative strategic instrument owes its origin to S.S. Kavishar who were under oath to remain peaceful under any kind of repressive measures adopted against them. Their number increased rapidly showing both the depth

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.108-109

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.110-112

of movement as well as the efficacy of the organisational initiative. Apart from the afore-mentioned leaders, S. Kharak Singh, S. Teja Singh Samundari, S. Harchand Singh and other emerging leaders were fast acquiring ascendancy in Akali ranks. This was more than enough to put government in fear of losing vital support at the time of rising nationalist fervour all over India.⁴⁷

The government formulated a two-pronged strategy; to enact a Gurdwara Reform Act with provision of indirect government interference and to let loose a reign of terror by portraying the Akalis as an illegal body. The arrests started from March 15, 1921, onwards.⁴⁸

The Akalis were portrayed as vagabonds given to leading such bands in gurdwara occupations and who were quite happy to call themselves as Akalis - this was the decision of the court of J.E. Kew. The three jathedars Bhuchchar and Jhabbar, Lahore Singh were especially singled out for exemplary treatment. Jhabbar fought the case because of his cooperationist stance whereas the others non-cooperated. This judge declared the occupied gurdwaras as Udasi *deras*, discounting the evidence to the extent of not taking any cognizance of the statement of the mahant of Nanak who initially called himself as Sikh and later started calling himself as Hindu having nothing to do with Sikhism. SSJ comments that at this juncture the government sought to instigate the mahants against the Panth and in the ensuing conflict the Akalis should be terrorized by branding them as armed vandals, a threat to law and order in the region.⁴⁹

The contrasting line of analysis on the issue of conditional release of Akalis including Jhabbar, was carried out in the pages of Akali and Khalsa Samachar. The Akali while dismayed at the conduct of the leaders in accepting the terms of release, implored the people to be ready with more sacrifices to regain the initiative. The Khalsa Samachar, on the other hand wrote in its loyalist vein about the patronage and kindness of the government in releasing the Akalis and has earned their gratitude. They also

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.112. SSJ, while analysing the official attempts to portray the Nankana incident as a spontaneous happening, mentions the collusion of Kartar Singh Bedi member of Punjab council and an influential jagirdar, termed a 'natural leader of the Sikhs' who also used to call himself as '*Guru*' - both with the mahant as well as the government. In addition, their newspaper '*Sant Sewak*' openly challenged the Akalis to venture in and face the music.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.117

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.120-22

urged the government to accept the demands put forward by the CKD so that no undesirable element could succeed in distancing the Sikhs and the government.⁵⁰

The first gurdwara bill was a conduct for maintaining government, control over shrines and the mahants got hundreds of Sanatani Hindus to dispatch telegrams and appeals against the passage of bill. Hindu and Sanatani members of the Punjab legislative council opposed the bill. The Sikh members of the council opposed the bill because of lack of meaningful autonomy. The government itself was encouraging 'other parties' to stand opposed to Akali movement and exploit this two-party feud to its own designs. However, the ploy failed because even the moderate Sikh members also refused to come along.⁵¹

The Akali Jathas having a total membership of around five thousand assembled at Amritsar in a militant mood armed with small weapons. Some jathas included Ghardarites, discharged or pensioner ex-soldiers with the Doaba Jatha marching in a military fashion on Nov. 12, 1921. Public meetings by extremist Akalis coupled with fiery articles in 'Akali' further raised the pitch. The anti-imperialist Akali faction gradually gained crucial political initiative to gain increasing robust mass support, effectively marginalising the loyalist, moderate sections.⁵² The question about primacy of national liberation or gurdwara reform was vigorously debated during this juncture. The general opinion hovered around the view that unless the government is reformed the gurdwara reform cannot be accomplished. Swaraj should be the motto that will take care of other religious, social or civil liberties, etc. However, the militant Sikh patriots considered both the fronts as complimentary with the Congress as well as the SGPC as the leading platforms to be gained as the occasion demanded. Hence, they argued, it is fallacious to present these as disjointed struggles. Mahatma Gandhi also agreed with this opinion. The frozen ice was melting fast first with Nankana massacre, the keys affairs, mass arrests jolted the Sikh masses out of their loyalist slumber. The stints in prison, interference in religious affairs, employing the gurdwara establishments for the purposes of Raj and repression went a long way in arousing their consciousness.⁵³

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.124

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.125

⁵² *ibid.*, p.129-30 SSJ mentions that a strong opinion against the government became material force. With one voice, everyone said: "Return the *toshakana* keys to S. Kharak Singh! Return the keys to SGPC president! The agitation gained unprecedented momentum against the government. With its act of snatching the keys, it had presented the anti-imperialist patriots a gift while attenuating the pro-Raj elements, simultaneously.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p.130-131

The new sarbarh appointed was a pensioner caption S. Bahadur Singh Ghavind who was instrumental in the arrest of a Ghadarite, Ranga Singh at Hoti Mardan. Given the changing mentalities of Sikhs, this act seemed preposterously out of step with the prevailing mood in Punjab. However, after an initial encounter with SGPC he retreated and eventually resigned. Government interpreted this act as accruing from threats issued to Sardar Ghavind because of SGPC fears of having to contend with a rival SGPC.⁵⁴

The Akalis decided to cross-question the D.C. in his *darbars* to explain their position at which prominent Akali leaders were arrested at Ajnala on Nov. 26, 1921. Zaildar Harnam Singh was the first official figure to be arrested for wearing *khadi*. These acts aggravated the situation and the keys agitation gained momentum with a daily *diwan* in front of Akal Takht, the second at *Guru Ka Bagh* gurdwara with the speakers railing against government. Another opportunity for mass contact in the Punjab countryside presented itself and the leaders of Akali jathas made extensive campaign tours to address villagers about the government conspiracy in snatching the keys. Their warrants were trailing them while they coursed three to four villages everyday. People assembled at the beating of *dhols*, brimming with anti-imperial sentiment they provided shelter to rebels. The loyalists went into hibernation while the 'toadies' were ridiculed at length. This phase saw the SGPC reputation at sky high with people prepared to sacrifice at its call. With the leadership showing courage, the people followed suit and it virtually became a mark of status for villages and the very idea of being a Sikh. Popular support scaled new peaks with fathers sending off their sons to join the *morcha* and women sending the male members putting garlands around their neck. They were asked to be courageous and to earn grace. Such unprecedented political will activated into a material force ensured success for the agitation.⁵⁵ This popular support and its discourse need to be investigated in detail than at present especially the Sikh lore of martyrdom and its harnessing for a modern political project. The growing number of dhadhis, kaveeshars, must have facilitated this to the extent that women also composed ritual songs incorporating the political thrust now. Such instances demonstrate the dialectical flow of political agenda at the top, its transmission and active assimilation by the masses and becoming an everyday phenomenon. One can safely surmise the

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.133 SSJ notes that this was a long standing policies of the government and continued until the Akali movement ended.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.136-138. Josh cites his own case when he was saved by villagers at Jassran from being arrested and the entire village suffered military repression.

revitalisation and contemporanisation of the Sikh lore. Mohan Singh Vaid sent off his son Trilok Singh to join the morcha.

This period saw innumerable rumours, whispers and fantasies about the impending Akali agenda exhibiting its extent of hold on popular imagination. These emanations were reported through C.I.D. to Delhi e.g. Akalis wanted to break the locks of toshakhana however, they were restrained by SGPC (Nov. 12); the SGPC would pass a resolution declaring police and army jobs with the government as sinful at the coming Nankana Sahib mela, in the form of a religious edict (hukumnama); that Baba Gurditt Singh Kamagatamaru would come out of hiding at Nanakana Sahib to take over the reins of Shiromani Akali Dal; that the Akalis belonging to SGPC and CSL would ask the discharged and pensioner soldiers to boycott the ceremonies involving Prince of Wales. On the other hand, the government was upset over the insult of its nominee Capt. Bahadur Singh; secondly, Master Mota Singh made a fiery speech in the *mela* and escaped, and finally the strict militaristic discipline exhibited by Akalis, their marches etc. had alarmed it accordingly. Asking the Punjab officials to crack-down the Akali leadership seemed the way out to Delhi establishment Government of India desperately sought to stop the movement from spreading into rural areas where it would have had a two-fold impact; disruption of the recruitment process and secondly its potential to foment indiscipline or unrest in the armed forces. These factors implied either a negotiated solution with favourable terms for the government or in the case of failure to exercise the state repressive machinery to crush the movement.

The ensuing official exercise extended the fan on religious meetings also. The support rendered by the Hindus, Muslims and indigenous Christians to GRM was invaluable. They devised different ways to register protest against the key snatching. The government took note of these developments and especially tried to contain the armed forces' sentiment after two retired army officers, namely, Captain Ram Singh Patiala and Risaldar Sundar Singh Sialkot joined the Akali agitations.⁵⁶

Refashioning the Punjabi identity through shared praxis of struggle, solidarity and unity amongst various religious denominations will remain a major achievement of the Akalis during the first quarter of twentieth century. Cultural geographical identities and its respective variants of the Sikh theme were reconstructed and forged into a new

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.138-41 Workers of the Congress and *Khilafat* made speeches in support with SGPC and denouncing the official interference in religious affairs.

Sikh identity commensurate with modernity. We witness two contesting tendencies at the end of 1920s – a thorough radicalization of Sikh ideal on account of mass involvement of peasantry on the one hand (GRM, SAD, SGPC) and the institutionalization of Rehat Maryada alongwith its attendant theological closure in the 1930s by SGPC, on the other hand. These two tendencies got crystallized in this period.

SSJ appreciates the strategy of leadership offering itself for sentences arousing the masses to follow suit and in this way creating new leaders to take up organizational tasks. A persistent argument over determining-whether the agitation is religious or political- the character of movement continued during trials. The leadership did not cooperate with court. Pt. Dina Nath, S. Dan Singh, Jaswant Singh, S. Mehtab Singh, Hari Singh Jalandhari, Master Sunder Singh, Bhag Singh Vakil, Gurcharan Singh Vakt issued statements castigating the government and its machinery which went a long way in dissipating the authority of government amongst the masses. S. Kharak Singh perhaps made the shortest speech that made a huge impact:

“The government is a party to this dispute. Its servant is the judge. Therefore, I refuse to make statement of any kind. In my position as president of entire Sikh panth I am comparable to the president of America, France and Germany”.

This spirit was instrumental in mobilizing the masses behind the extremist non-cooperationists, which in turn frustrated the moderates in Chief Khalsa Diwan and Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee in their attempts to toe the government.⁵⁷ Leadership prepared for sacrifices, made brilliant speeches; inspired and mobilized masses behind its position and isolating the pro-government moderates. The general environment of high spirits was a palpable reality during this period.

The Punjab government was desperately trying to find an honourable exit while also striving to gather Sikh groups to push its agenda. Maharaja of Patiala as an intermediary sought to provide a lever to British government by helping to form a parallel ‘Central Committee’ keeping the extremists out. Such a committee representing ‘all the sects of Sikh *qaum*’ would be eligible to receive the keys for a ‘temporary period’. This committee would manage the gurdwaras by consulting with all concerned

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.142-45. Josh cites their statements to demonstrate the high spirit and ardor of the moment that reflected the wider influence of national liberation movement and Gandhi who suggested the non-violent Satyagraha as a strategic weapon for attaining Gurdwara independence.

parties under the overall supervision of Maharaja Patiala who, in turn, would keep the government suitably informed.⁵⁸ The broader unity of the Sikh panth forged in the wake of Akali movement defeated the persistent efforts of Punjab government, and its well-wishers amongst the Sikhs, in conjuring such collectivities as 'all the sects', etc. All these threads can be sewn up to say that the Panth stood against Sikh identity through an anti-imperial praxis challenged the earlier overtly political stance, the SS movement to appears to have much in common with the Sanatan episteme than with Akali movement. Another instance of this wide-ranging process was the hoisting of Maharaja Patiala instead of the CKD faction having 'natural leaders of the Sikhs' hailing from erstwhile Rajas of Punjab. On the other hand, the Akalis stood united; marshalling modernist techniques of political propaganda, having advanced political institutions coupled with solid social base derived its legitimacy through a militant, ethical and political interpretation of Sikh lore and linking it through Lahore Darbar, the Khalsa Army to their own part.

The political success of keys agitation lay in the great enthusiasm shown by ordinary Sikhs courting arrest that drew more and more Congress Hindus and Khilafatite Muslims in solidarity along with the Punjab press supporting the agitation. Attempt at finding custodian or intermediaries came to naught lastly the Udasis were asked to attack the Akalis assembled at Akal Takht which further united the Akalis. Parduman Singh Bedi was asked to be an intermediary and organize opinion against the SGPC by calling a meeting. However, the Bedi representatives in SGPC decided against this venture. Meanwhile the movement was gaining strength, a fact admitted by official reports. Village after village, men were tying black turbans and wearing kirpans to become Akalis along with women who wore black *chunnis* and swords marched along side the Akali jathas. Confronted with this burgeoning popular sentiment the government decided to hand over Golden Temple on January 11, 1922.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 146-47. S. Teja Singh Bhuchar played a crucial role in implementing this scheme having three fold objectives, firstly to form a new central committee against the SGPC to facilitate a Gurdwara act of its own liking. Seeing the progressive exhaustion of CKD as a viable force, government set its eyes on Maharaja Patiala to project him as the Sikh leader and then to draw on him to strike at the Akali movement. Moreover, this move was designed to stifle the 'conspiratorial activities' of Maharaja Nabha; to defame his political agents; to defuse his influence on the Akali movement and to strangle the SGPC having a good representation of Nabha. The government suspected Nabha's objective was to become a leader of Sikhs by helping the SGPC and by providing finances to various '*Gurumukhi Akhbars*'. Maharaja Patiala intervened to sway these publications by giving more money to his side. However, government attempts to find an intermediary failed.

The Sikh leaders were released. They were accorded grand welcomes at every railway station. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs put up a common spectacle of public spirit to honour the Sikh leaders by draping the gates with *phulkaris* and banners. This was followed by a collective procession unprecedented in the history of Amritsar. A grand *diwan* organized in front of Akal Takht was the venue where the Distt. judge presented keys to S. Kharak Singh who accepted these after duly asking for permission from the assembled *sangat*. The Congress and Khilafat members congratulated Sikhs over this remarkable victory with Gandhi saying that the first battle of India's independence has been won. Congratulations! The moderates interpreted this victory as a gesture of benevolence from the government that does not want to sour its ties with Sikhs whereas the extremists attributed to unity, organization and self-belief proving of immense help in coming battles and Sikhs will wipe clean the stain of Raj loyalty. SSJ notes that some Akalis in various Jathas had started reciting '*Raj Karega Khalsa*' with added emphasis.

The Sikhs had earned this victory turning SGPC into a popular representative body putting an end to all talk of gaining legal rights. The rhetoric of 'other parties' and 'other interests' was exposed and S. Kharak Singh emerged as a towering figure. However, government was searching for new methods to maintain its control by invoking the security of private property of mahants and to crush the Akali movement.⁵⁹ The keys agitation resulted in according a representative status to SGPC and its popular support rendered it even more formidable. Eventually this paved the way for the further marginalisation of 'other parties', 'other interests', etc. Within the corporate body of Sikhs, the Panth was able to attract adherents on a political issue, much in the manner of Gurus themselves. Of particular interest in this context is the atmosphere in villages where both men and women took to Akali attire vigorously. This fact is recorded in folk and popular literature of the period (1921-22) e.g. in *pattal* form we find references to black turbaned Akalis '*Raj Karega Khalsa*' – in the wake of Akali agitation.

A biographical look at one of the protagonists of Akali movement would provide perspective to Sohan Singh Josh. Migrating from Punchh to Ghaghrot, Hira Singh Dard's grandfather Bhai Santa Singh was an *upadhyay* Brahmin carrying on with his traditional vocation of conducting Hindu ceremonies and didactic tasks. Although he kept his hair unshorn, still he was not a baptized Singh. His son and Hira Singh Dard's

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.147-53 The government officials admitted in private that the unprecedented show of Sikh solidarity and the unassailable stature of SGPC were established during this agitation.

father Hari Singh continued initially in the family way but later on joined the Nirankari sect and in this way accepted the Sikh way of life. Already well-versed in music, he took to Gurbani *kirtan* energetically.⁶⁰ Hari Singh indulged in a rudimentary Gurbani discourse in the manner of unsophisticated rural Brahmins. His thorough contact with the Sikh preachers improved his understanding of the Gurbani that in turn affected upon his kirtan. He earned the respect of people and his economic condition improved.⁶¹ This family in a way charts the entire course of the Sikh Social universe. Originally, Brahmins turned keshdhari but continued to carry on purohit practice. Then in the next phase join Nirankaris and through this trajectory come into Sikhism. This cycle was completed by 1887 – the year of Hira Singh Dard's birth. This transition raises some questions, why would a Brahmin join the ranks of Sikhism – under what motivations, purposes, etc. – in the nineteenth century. The status of Rawalpindi as a progressive Raj town with its cosmopolitan ethos also demands further scrutiny.

Born in 1887 Hira Singh Dard's childhood was spent in abject poverty with his relatives supporting his education. He took up menial jobs at a liquor contractor, then as peon in the octroi department, etc.⁶² Sardar Ajit Singh's lecture in 1907 in Rawalpindi attracted a huge audience that the octroi personnel also attended. His lecture aroused their fervour and they gave a memorandum to higher officials for improvement in their condition. Repression followed, apologies resorted to, but Hira Singh Dard resigned in protest.⁶³ Hira Singh Dard got another job with a *seth* who was a baptized Sikh. Already fed up with the Nirankaris, he got himself baptized in a Singh Sabha diwan at Rawalpindi in 1908.⁶⁴

Hira Singh Dard read some books on Sikhism in Lyallpur. During this time, the news of Khalsa College's control by the British was fervently followed. In this environment Hira Singh Dard made his choice of engaging in active *panthic* affairs.⁶⁵ In 1908 Hira Singh Dard went to a Singh Sabha diwan and was highly impressed and immediately set off on foot for Nankana Sahib. This was the perceived when the Singh Sabha movement started a massive educational programme with the Khalsa schools

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.5 Jagirs – Mobility – Religious sectarianism – the triumvirate upwards to distract people from the colonial situation and Rawalpindi come to be a major army cantonment of the Raj, its trading potential rose afterwards.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.5-5 However, later on, he was attracted to the charms of alchemy and poverty was back in the household

⁶² *ibid.*, p.8-9

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.9

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.9-10

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.10

coming up in the countryside.⁶⁶ However, Hira Singh Dard kept up his anti-Raj stance intact and refused the government grant for the school. He had already read Lala Hardayal's articles on national affairs and was greatly inspired by the radical ideas of S. Ajit Singh and Sufi Amba Prasad. Hira Singh Dard learnt to play the harmonium, formed a jatha and carried on with his Sikh preaching. To gain further command he joined the Khalsa Pracharak Vidyalay, Tarntaran briefly. Simultaneously he opened a night school as well as a school for girls.⁶⁷ One can discern different strands coexisting in Dard consisting of his excited relationship with the Sikh lore; impact of radical nationalist ideas and his commitment to public causes. So even in the first decade of the twentieth century there were, differing strands in Punjabi society coexisting, conflicting, contesting with each other.

Poetry was Dard's response to his conditions. Full of enthusiasm he wrote mostly on Sikh subjects, presented in huge gatherings and published in newspapers, journals, etc. He also articulated said concerns. (11-13).⁶⁸ Punjabi journalism was steadily gaining ground in this period however Dard was not published by the pro-Raj papers throughout this period by the Sikh elite. '*Khalsa Sewak*' regularly provided space to him.⁶⁹ He joined '*Bir*', then came to Rawalpindi, remarried in 1913 – RakabGanj. affairs –distributed pamphlets in 1914 at Amritsar during a committee meeting. Chief Khalsa Diwan's mouthpiece '*Khalsa Samachar*' was pro-British countered the pamphlet and targeted Hira Singh Dard. '*Khalsa Akhbar*' from Lahore stoutly defended Dard in this polemic. '*Kamagatamaru*' happened during this period with the British instructing not to hold ceremonies for the victims. Dard conducted *akhand-path* and *ardas* for the martyrs. Authorities took notice and he resigned his job in 1916.⁷⁰ Dard also learnt English and passed examination in 1917; gaining fame in 1922 by composing a poem in a *mushaira* on a given problem.⁷¹ Guru Nanak's '*Babur Vani*' was employed by Dard to criticize his contemporary political order in 1919 and titled it 'He was consciously striving to reinvent the Sikh spirit through an active engagement in the anti-colonial movement. Patriotism was to be the new benchmark for being a Sikh.'⁷²

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.10

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p.11

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p.11-12

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.12-13

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.13-14

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.14

⁷² *ibid.*, p.15

The martial law year of 1919, the political tragedy of Jallianwala Bagh and the rising tide of political movements have catapulted 1920 as a turning point in Punjab. Dard was especially affected; he disregarded any notion of further education and went to jail instead. (Gramsci in Turin)⁷³

Guru Nanak's ostensibly political shabad* was the vehicle for mounting a challenge to the Raj. This reconstitution of Sikhism through a political attitude, the increasing anger against the Raj and its crony elite – can be taken as the constituting element of a Punjabi modernity in the institutional arena, complete with a launch of its own weekly, 'Akali'. How does it fit in with the earlier Hasham → Qadiryar → Shah Mohd → etc trend of Punjabi is understudied as yet but the founding of 'Central and Punjabi Sabha' in 1920s can be said to carry forward the same dialectic, as a conscious ideological choice) *(Surjit Hans, N. Gurvinder Kaur.]

Master Sunder Singh Lyallpuri, S. Mangal Singh Tehsildar, Prof. Nirranjan Singh, S. Harchand Singh, S. Teja Singh Samundari and others got together to refurbish the glory of Sikh *qaum* which had been hijacked by the Sikh elite leadership, *mahants* and chiefs in the service and British Government. '*Akali*' was launched on 21 May 1920.⁷⁴ Akali's anti-Raj stance invited repressive measures and multiple jail terms were the order of the day for almost all the editors. This caused serious trouble for sustained publication of the weekly, and Master Tara Singh and Prof. Nirranjan Singh shifted its office to Amritsar, merged it with '*Khalsa Pradesi*', and renamed '*Akali Te Pradesi*'. However, now it was just a mouthpiece of the Akali movement. Dard continued until 1926 with this weekly but in 1926 launched his monthly 'Phulwari' to carry out his literary and political ideas.⁷⁵

Phulwari was initially published from Amritsar until 1929. Dard took it to Lahore in 1930 and it continued until 1947, thereafter in Jalandhar until 1956. This journal reflected the changes in Dard's views and by 1949; it became a very political journal. By this time, he had joined the CPI and offered the journal to the CPI. Consequently, it was closed in 1956 itself. Meanwhile Dard had established his own printing press in Lahore in 1931- The Punjab Press Limited.⁷⁶

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.16

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.16-17

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.17-19

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.18-19

Hira Singh Dard's journey from a Sikh preacher to a Communist activist mirrors a similar journey of Maghi Singh Gill, a kaveehsar in remote Malwa region. What is interesting in this pattern is their opposition to the Raj and its Sikh supporters. Although both were influenced by the reformist agenda of the Singh Sabha movement, they also realized its limitations and instead of accepting communitarian closures viewing other communities as enemies and the Raj as a benevolent arbiter, they targeted the Raj and built bridges with other communities. Both were anti-caste. That their progress was so identical despite the geographical distance, social status, educational condition, institutional location – points towards some widely shared discursive field. Dard's radical temper was mediated through Nirankari upbringing and then Singh Sabha's stance, whereas, Maghi Singh Gill arrived at his understanding through the Punjabi Kaveeshari tradition and his Nirmala – inspired primitive Vedantic stance of advaita. Are we at the two contrasting poles of the early – twentieth century Punjabi society?

Phulwari and Central Punjabi Sabha were his twin efforts in Punjabi activism, which provided the requisite space for Bawa Budh Singh, Ishwar Chander Nanda, Maula Bakhsh Kushta, Dhani Ram Chatrik and others to articulate a secular Punjabi identity, built around the Punjabi language.⁷⁷ The 1920s was the time when baptized Sikhs were joining the Indian National Congress in good numbers, including Hira Singh Dard. He was also summoned at the Akal Takht for an 'inappropriate' usage of Gurbani.⁷⁸ Dard became the president of Amritsar Congress in 1925 and shortly thereafter organized a community *langar* prepared by the dalits in Jallianwala Bagh causing quite a flutter.⁷⁹

Dard was a member of the committee on *Rahit Maryada* constituted by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. The Congress and Akali workers were freely moving in many shared spaces. Until 1938, Dard was active in all social, literary and political activities along with running his monthly journal and the bookshop⁸⁰. 1938 saw Dard emerging as a socialist poet. His imprisonment in 1942 raised his stature at the national level and he was invited for the Shimla conference in 1945 along with other national leaders.⁸¹

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.19-20

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p.20

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.20-21

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.21

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p.21-22

Dard in 1948 again visited the jail for six months and on his release joined the CPI and its peasant movement.⁸² He published his short stories, poems, wrote political pamphlets, tracts especially exposing Master Tara Singh.⁸³ His greatest achievement was organizing the '*Kendri Punjabi Lekhak Sabha*' in 1962 when Dard became its vice-president, the Punjabi Suba agitation was in full flow and he wrote a booklet on this subject, joining Harkishan Singh Surjit over the issue.⁸⁴ Dard was felled by paralysis in 1964 and died in 1965.⁸⁵ Vidhata Singh Tir was his real nephew.⁸⁶ Dard met Gandhi in 1920.⁸⁷

Now we witness a conjunction of the Sikh praxis and its code of conduct. Dard was a secular, Indian nationalist in his progressive praxis as well as a proud Sikh. Babu Rajab Ali's dictum is meant for Dard. That his rahit had a strong ethical content instead of any communitarian closure is also evident in his retort to Master Tara Singh on p.28. His turn emphasis on resist orthodoxy and ethical praxis complement each other.⁸⁸

Dard kept alive his theoretical principled opposition to M. Tara Singh variety of panthic issues despite having cordial personal relations with him.⁸⁹ Although there were many organizations involved with *amrit-prachar* but the *Panch Khalsa Diwan*, Bhasaur and Bhai Randhir Singh's jatha were considered particularly orthodox than the Chief Khalsa Diwan and Singh Sabha movement. The former duo considered having meals from a non-baptised person as the fifth *kurahit* in addition to the usual four. Therefore, they asked the husband to undergo baptism again if his wife was not baptized. In addition, they interpreted a rahit injunctions forbidding copulation with a *Turkani* as applicable to extra-marital affairs. Their rigid stance attracted people towards them. Dard took up this challenge of measuring up to these ideals in order to justify his claim to be a righteous Sikh. Similarly, he was greatly inspired by the Golden Temple and its surroundings in Amritsar.⁹⁰

Dard's Sikh spirit was moulded by the Sikh martyrs and their struggle for justice. Guru Nanak's incarceration by Babar and the unraveling of Baburvani and

⁸² *ibid.*, p.22-23

⁸³ *ibid.*, p.23

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.23

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.24

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.26

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.28

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.28

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p.29

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p.30-31

Guru Gobind Singh's refuge at Machhiwara after losing everything except his will to stand up for righteousness and his unceasing struggle – continued to stir Dard throughout his life. In 1924, he left all religious, communal organizations and joined the Congress but held on to his religious beliefs that had an ethical orientation. Even his joining the communists hardly had any influence on his religious belief. In fact, it can be safely argued that his ethical religious universe found a creative connection with the socialist ideal whereas the formal Sikhs were corrupting the Sikh spirit by colluding with the British and constructing boundaries with other communities.⁹¹

An alternative discursive trope very much alive in the late-nineteenth century Punjab and even earlier. The Punjabi Sufis, qissakars, kaveeshars, etc. had eulogized the aashiq and shahid over and above any formal religions denomination. The sole emphasis on the Singh Sabha movement and the Arya Samaj style colonial modernity and its boundary making distorts the real picture of those times. Also just relegating the popular religious domain as sanatan episteme misses this internal differentiation and the ideological coherence mediated by organic individuals different from the usual 'Gyanis, Bhais Babas'. Dard is the epitome of this dialectic and by laying an institutional and organizational base for articulating a shared Punjabi identity he accomplished a Herculean task unparalleled till today, except for Jaswant Singh Kanwal.

Dard's hobbies included sports especially kabaddi and long walks; Gataka, puzzles, used to weave cots and seats, photography and trekking, planting trees, watching films, kirtan. However, his love for books surpassed everything.⁹²

Dard was a renowned literary figure who influenced many persons and infused in them a love for their mother tongue and nation. Prof. Ganda Singh, the eminent historian was his discovery. Gyani Sundar Singh, Gyani Gurdit Singh, Vidhata Singh Tir and Guranditta Khanna were his shagirds. Many poets, Gyani Gurmukh Singh Musafir were some others. Gurbax Singh Preclari's journal in 1933 was published by his press after no one was ready for the job and Dard suffered the displeasure of M. Tara Singh and other Akali leaders.⁹³ Many eminent leaders like Teja Singh Sutantar, Baba Gurditt Singh used to stay at his residence in their underground days.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p.32-34

⁹² *ibid.*, p.34

⁹³ *ibid.*, p.34-36

In addition, his active political engagement along with his literary pursuits served as a role model for other young writers and progressive politics became their way of life.⁹⁴ Martyr narratives were Dard's medium to integrate his Sikh preaching with the Indian nationalism. Writing in Punjabi and his love for Punjabi proved instrumental in many ways to broadbase his efforts. The choice of Punjabi as a political tool to unite the hitherto communally divided Punjabis was a crucial step in his life. His launching of journals, editing them and then organizing Punjabi writers on a progressive praxis point towards his fundamental contribution towards developing an alternative institutional paradigm different from already existing fora. For him building the Punjabi language was coterminous with national – liberation.⁹⁵

Prof. Teja Singh, BAS, Lala Kirpa Sagar were also pressing Dard to launch an organization on the lines of Nagari Pracharani Sabha - 'Punjabi Pracharni Sabha'. 1926, Jan. 10 saw the emergence of Kendri Punjabi Sabha which was expanded into other cities. Dard saw this effort as an essential prerequisite to further create the space for political and social movements. Thus his promotion of Punjabi language was closely tied up with his vision of a common Punjabi identity to be forged in active social praxis.⁹⁶

Dard articulated the Sikh-Punjabi-Punjab equation. This dialectic is reminiscent of an earlier transition witnessed in the eighteenth century continuing till 1849 then Punjab emerged as a geographical space where the Sikhs were in ascendance and Punjabi Sufis and qissakars were the carriers of Punjabi language and sensibility. In Dard's imagination Punjab was not just a geographical element but an idea to be developed through the Punjabi language overcoming community boundaries. That Punjabi was relegated to margins was the main grouse, which imparts a radical flavour to this endeavour.

Organising Punjabi poetic symposiums, staging Punjabi plays and Punjabi conferences were the major public activities pursued having a good response. Dard was the main figure behind this endeavour.⁹⁷ His experience was saturated by his anti-colonial ethos, the daily lives of the downtrodden found an easy expression in his poetic output. This is one feature that he shares with kaveeshars. Independence was his

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.35

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.35

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.35

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.35

objective, 1917 Russian Revolution and Dullha Bhatti co-existed in his oeuvre.⁹⁸ Dard's poetic imagination was seeped in the template of Sikhi, Patriotism and Socialism. Guru Nanak's babarwani has had a deep influence on Dard.⁹⁹

His times witnessed the onset of Akali movement, which had an element of anti-colonial politics. The freedom-loving Sikh populace was actively deriving moral sustenance from the eighteenth century struggle against the Mughals. However, the entrenched feudal interests and emerging elite had created a backward looking section amongst the Sikhs also. These contradictory stances provided the backdrop to Dard's literary output.¹⁰⁰

'Sain Mian Mir's Desperation' at the torture meted out to Guru Arjan was captured by Hira Singh Dard.¹⁰¹

Almost all the political movements had a bearing on him, with Jallianwala Bagh topping the list. He participated in every possible manner in these movements and composed two famous poem on JallianWala Bagh massacre were widely published.¹⁰²

Limits to the Singh Sabha experience were quite formidable what with anti-Raj movements claiming the allegiance of Punjab countryside as well as the organic intelligentsia. Dard is the paradigmatic figure in this sense. His conjoining of the Sikh lore with the JWB massacre is the case in point. That this output was in an atmosphere is of phonemic further enhances its value. This convergence of Sufi lore of Punjabi; the Sikh-lore; the anti-colonial sentiment in the objective of achieving socialism – this template become the archetypal formation to engage in a comprehensive project of reinterpreting/reconstituting the Punjabi tradition. Prof. Puran Singh is squarely placed in this tradition. The later attempts by Prof. Kishan Singh and Jaswant Singh Kanwal are surely are deepening of this understanding.

Dard's poetic output can be seem as a response to socio-political atmosphere in Punjab – accounting for its content and little care to its form. To make a political statement seems to be his motive. Five phases: i) and ii) Sikh fervour, iii & iv) anti-Raj sentiment and freedom and v) to eliminate inequitably even after achieving formal

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.41-44

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p.48-9

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.50

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p.51

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p.51-52

independence.¹⁰³ Although the Singh Sabha movement was instrumental in creating writers in abundance but with their pro-Raj stance, religious propaganda limited their horizons. Bhai Vir Singh is the archetypal example of this trend. Whereas Hira Singh Dard, 'Musafir', 'Gargaji', 'Saras', 'Sharf' and 'Bir' were originally inspired by the Singh Sabha movement but later on won over by the freedom struggle propagated these ideals and brought over many new entrants.¹⁰⁴

We need a comprehensive project of discerning this wider social tendency in the early-twentieth century Punjab and its ideological rootedness. Modernization of Punjabi tradition in twentieth century and its vital connection with the 1830. Punjabi identity. The anti-empire dimension unites these varied voices. The militant Akali discourse deserves serious attention in this regard.

'Aas Di Tand Te Hor Kahanian' is a good collection of his short stories, numbering ten and about partition. These sketch the problems encountered by the refugees during partition. Ridiculing the arrival of independence and glorifying the working people. The characters carry the load of narrative and discourse is generally avoided by Dard.¹⁰⁵

Lala Bihari Lal Puri, Gyani Gyan Singh, Bhai Ditt Singh and Dr. Charan Singh were some of the founders of Punjabi prose in the early-twentieth century. When Hira Singh Dard – belonging to second generation – entered the field three kinds of styles were in vogue: i) Bhai Vir Singh and Prof. Puran Singh were writing in mystical, poetic style. ii) Mohan Singh Vaid and Charan Singh 'Shahid' were narrativising their printings and 'journalistic' style was their forte. iii) Principal Teja Singh was writing differently than these two opposing styles, marked by exceptional austerity, suitably adorned with sayings et al. In close proximity to the popular language it was more suited for publicizing political, social religious ideas and Dard stood in this prose style and expanded its range.¹⁰⁶

Hira Singh Dard is the greatest Punjabi biographer going by the sheer volume and quality of his writing. Most of them still unpublished led, he is credited with biographies of over a hundred Ghadarites, patriots, etc. The statements of numerous

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p.53-61

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p.60

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p.64-65

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p.69

Ghadaritas and patriots were collected by him, which are still lying unsung and unpublished.¹⁰⁷

The 1910-20s, is a great period in the history of Punjabi literature. Bhai Vir Singh and Prof. Puran Singh occupied the entire space but Hira Singh Dard and his followers opened new vistas for Punjabi literature and brought back the socio-political dimension in the mainstream of Punjabi literature. Until the 1990s, this was the canonical Punjabi literature. Dard speaking on Bhai Vir Singh explicitly linked the Sikh praxis of Guru-period as the ethical goal and contemporary events are derived from it.

None of these publications was politically rebellions. Their chief objective was to propagate education and religious issues.¹⁰⁸ Started in 1899, Khalsa Samachar was pro-British weekly. In distinction to these strivings, Ghadar, Babbar and Akali were directly political and anti-Raj. The external political conditions and the emerging internal disputes between the Singh Sabha and the Panch Khalsa Diwan Bhasaur had suitably created the grounds for new tendencies to take root.¹⁰⁹ Who Is A Sikh? Links up identity and political issues. It is quite an explicit statement that points towards a counter-praxis in order to retrieve honour by reconstituting Sikhism through an anti-colonial political attitude]

The weekly 'Akali' derived its title from Akali Phula Singh – a legendary Sikh martyr – as explicated by HSD in his poem. Master Sunder Singh Lyallpuri and S. Mangal Singh's militant articles and Dard's populist poetry took Akali to the heights of popularity. People in villages read it aloud in their gatherings from start to finish and Dard's easy verse was particularly powerful in affecting communication, with people reciting these poems in public places.¹¹⁰

Akali Phula Singh – the nineteenth century baptized Sikh martyr was deployed against the Singh Sabha and Chief Khalsa Diwan. Villagers were suitably enthused. Popular verse was the new talisman to carry politics.][Here lies the crucial difference between the Kaveeshars and the political versifiers despite many similarities. Kaveeshars concentrated on the metrical, formal aspects whereas poets like Hira Singh Dard focused more on the context, although both had their respective audiences in

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p.71

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p.96-97

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.97

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.98-99

mind. The later artistic demise of Kavishari can be located in this dialectic whereas by developing itself the propagandist poetry was catapulted as canonical in Punjabi literature. Although both these streams had common ground of folk-metres, their temperaments determined their respective longevity.

Dard charged the journalistic scene with his militant verses and the five objectives described in the first issue of Akali became slogans for Sikh populace. 'Akali' had a fundamental aim of uniting the Hindus, Muslims & Sikhs in the cause of national movement Akali's rising stock invited government suspicion and opposition from the entrenched Sikh elite resulting in publication of many journal against Akali but to no avail. Having failed in this respect, state repression was resorted to. After its merger with Pradesi, Akali lost its independent status and continued as mouthpiece of the Akali movement.¹¹¹ 1924 Phulwari; 1926 Phulem (for women) ¹¹²and in 1932 Nawan Yug with Master Sunder Singh and Gopal Singh Qaumi¹¹³ 1938-39 saw the Marxist current taking over Dard which got reflection in Phulwari also.¹¹⁴ Dard was campaigning, crusading journalist who established institutions, traditions and brought forward a new generation .

Dard is uniformly credited with the unique contribution of harnessing the Sikh-lore for progressive purposes, for the first time. That this was the main reason for his exalted status amongst Punjabi poets tells about his comprehensive labour in uniting these Punjabi traditions.¹¹⁵ Dard has employed Baint, Shole, korra, dwayya, kabitt, etc. metres for their popularity and easy flow.¹¹⁶ Comrade Sohan Singh Josh credits Dard with 'arousing the honour of Punjabis with his verse'.¹¹⁷ Josh here explicitly links up the progressive voices in Punjab from 1906 onwards from 'Pagri Sanbal Jatta' to 'Ghadar di Goonj to Hira Singh Dard. This we need to explore further. Imaging 'Mardana' as a downtrodden.¹¹⁸

Criticism of Bhai Vir Singh and Prof. Mohan Singh in his 'Kavi', 'Uchhale', and 'Son Surabhi'.¹¹⁹ Dard is carrying the immense load of folk forms and memories as

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p.100

¹¹² *ibid.*, p.100

¹¹³ *ibid.*, p.101

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.101

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.107-255

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.113

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.114

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.116

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.117

well as infusing these with an explicit political temperament. His audience was the Kavi-Darbars thus, even the urban domain was receiving 'sedimented orality'. Sohan Singh Seetal shares this feature with Dard. Infusing the oral with the written for a political praxis.

Dard's contribution to the emerging Punjabi ethos was multi-faceted and very deep. His anti-British sentiment; empathy for the downtrodden; his sustenance on ethical Sikh lore concretized his rahit maryada; his militant verse and journalism; identifying the Punjabi language as a preliminary site to unite all the Punjabis for advanced consciousness; launching Akali and then Phulwari; most significantly the founding of 'Central Punjabi Sabha' to promote the cause of Punjabi and creating an audience by organizing Kavi-Darbar; by patronising many young poets; turning to Marxism and joining Communist Party and thus solidly combining a political praxis with Punjabi literature. A life devoted to full-scale reinterpretation of Punjab ethos sedimented over time and fusing it with contemporary concerns.

A document cataloguing the progressive change in author's views, opinions, ideas as reflected in his poems.¹²⁰ His active social life and activity started at 16 and consummated in his grasping of scientific socialism around 1940 (aged 60).¹²¹

The first of the three parts of poems in this collection concerns his output during and in response to AM. Dard considers AM as an anti-imperialist sentiment with the cultivation of freedom and egalitarianism amongst the Sikhs since the days of anti-Mughal empire resistance raised to the level of a normative order. However, the feudal and capitalist Sikh elites had subdued his impulse with their backward ideas.¹²²

Dard proclaims the deep influence of Sikh history and the lives of Sikh gurus upon his self, which sustained or seamlessly flowed into his anti-imperial and democratic sentiments. His understanding of imperialism, freedom and democracy was mediated through the experience of poverty and servitude.

For a certain Punjabi section and Sikh lore consisting of the lives of gurus and Sikh history besides other sources was an accessible resource in their everyday lives to

¹²⁰ 'Dard' H.S.: Chowin Dard sundhe; Punjabi Brothers, Jalandhar, (India), 1954, pp.144.Introductory Remarks.

¹²¹ *ibid*, pp. 6.

¹²² *ibid*, pp.6-7.

negotiate their social experience. Dard here continues in the same theme in which S. Ajit Singh interprets the Sikh gurus as patriots. The continuity of the 17-18th century Sikh resistance till the early 20 century as an indigenous anti-imperial struggle also raises the Akali movement to the same level. This normative idiom of resistance was employed in the service of freedom and democracy through a social experience ordered by imperial norms. Dard exposes his contemporary Sikh ritual practices as emptied of any concern for the suffering masses. Against this fallen state he holds up the Babawani were of Guru Nanak as the authentic expression of fearless critique which is the substance of Sikhi.

Dard sharply counterposes the most directly political and graphic portrayal of the widespread desolation in Punjab in the wake of Baburk sack of Eminabad (Saidpur) to the toadyism of Sikh religious figures and community leaders. the choice of Babuwani were is extremely significant to emphasise the political dimension of Sikh movement throughout its course and also as an alternative to narrow interpretation of Sikh theology attempted by Meleod and others.

Dard's ingrained opposition to British stemming from the annexation of Lahore kingdom, conversion of Duleep Singh as well as conquering India through 'mechinations' propelled him towards participation in every anti-imperial movement. An integral part of this process was his clubbing of regressive Sikh leadership with British Raj which demanded that anti-imperial sentiment should be enturned with a recnstitution of Sikh lore. His poems of 1920's are infused with such radical reding of Sikh lore that feeds into his anti-imperial nationalist sentiment.¹²³

Thus an analytical space is opened up of reevaluating the Akali movement as the vector/vehiclewhich/agentof a secularising of Sikh lore for the Punjabis and turning it into a common resource for all Punjabis to attempt a composite Punjabiyat. Describing the Akali movement as of limited impact regarding gurdwara reform; as a vehicle of anti-imperial politicisation of Punjabi rural masses; etc. has its relevance but it does not exhaust the space for any argument concerning desectarianising the question of Sikh identity.

Dard's succeeding poetry progressively starts distancing from Sikh lore as the fountainhead and filled with other secular issues. He joined Congress in 1924 after

¹²³ *ibid*, pp.9.

severing his relations with religious organisations and issued 'Phulwari'. This change however did not alter his religious principles which coexisted with his political activities until 1930.

Dard escatts the suffusion of literature with progressive social and historical elements. His appreciation for Ghadar poetry and Akali movement also stems from the strategic role played by literature in advancing and deepening these movements which far outweighs its artistic worth.

Here Hira Singh Dard mentions his general principle regarding literary production, its ideological orientation and historical contribution in advancing the notions of justice, etc. His 'Punjabi Sahit Da Itihas' should be compared with other such texts written for academic purposes which emphasise conventional attributes of literary aesthetics. Hira Singh Dard's literary tradition got a worthy successor in Jaswant Singh Kanwal, gursharan Singh and Paash. Regarding a political tendency in academicising Punjabi literature J.S. Rahi on Punjabi novel and Harithajan Singh on Punjabi poetry and their treatment of Kanwal. Sikhon -Kishan Singh debate."Anandpuri Pritam De Darshan Machhiware De Janglan Wich" January 1918.¹²⁴

Said to be a paradigmatic political poem responsible for the creation of generations of popular verse in Punjabi, this verse captures the severely harsh phase in Guru Gobind Singh's life when he escaped from Chamkaur masquerading as 'Uch Da Pir' and losing all his sons. this episode carries immense emotional charge with Sikh masses. Portraying the guru as a fearless patriot who sacrificed his lineage for the freedom of 'water', Dard resurrects the discursive trope made accessible by SAS's radical speeches during 1906-07 agitation. The Ghadarites kept alive this tradition and Hira Singh Dard infused it with the emergent anti-imperial sentiment. "Tain ki Dard Naa Aaya" (November 1919)¹²⁵

Carrying on with his manner of choosing an opposite instance history to convey the contemporary situation, Dard discusses Jallianwala Bagh massacre through the Babarvani verse of Guru Nanak and thus the British Raj is paired up with Babar's sacking of Eminabad. Alongwith this remarkable skill of contemporanising Sikh lore Dard is also pioneering the transition of conventional/folok metres used by rural bards,

¹²⁴ ibid, pp.19-21.

¹²⁵ ibid, pp.22-25.

dhadhis, kaveeshars, etc. into modern and political verse widely performed and diffused through print for medium and thus creating a new reading public, its public sphere and institutions and gradually establishing itself as the mainstream of Punjabi poetry) marginalising other genres like gissa, prasang, etc. "Vekh Mandanian Toon Ran Kartar De" (Nov. 1920.)¹²⁶ The continuation of Baburwani trope in describing /versifying oppressive conditions in his contemporary Punjab. "Khizan Bina Nahin Aave Bahaar Pehlan (1920)

Apart from marshalling Sikh lore Dard mentions the occasion of Khalsa in 1699 alongwith references to Heer-Ranjha and Sohni-Mahiwal, thus conjoining these two streams of Punjabi cultural formation in the cause of liberation. Radicalising the Punjabi love legends through an implicit reference to Shahids which is made explicit in mentioning the Baisakht of 1699 resurrects the aashiq: Shahid: Khalsa triumvirate/template of Punjabi discourse. "Saawan Aaya" (1921)¹²⁷

While introducing this poem Hira Singh Dard mentions the harsh conditions in Dera Ghazi Khan prison, known as the Kala Paani of Punjab. The geographical location and its features remained Dard about the punishing conditions encountered by Sassi in these very locales while courting martyrdom. he further explores the coincidence of the freedom lovers to be following in her footsteps. Punjabi geography is saturated with such instances providing a ready reference to contemporary phenomena. "Wattan Di Azaadi layee" (1923)¹²⁸

Dard has marshalled guru Gobind Singh, Sohini, Ranjha and the eighteenth century martyrs of Sikh struggle/resistance. His confidence in clubbing these legends and figures together is evident from the crystallised portrayal of these in the poem. To further advance this ideological front he includes the Russian revolution in his invention of an apt Punjabi ethos in the service of national liberation. "Ppkari Kanjhu" (1929)¹²⁹

Dard is contextualising the suffering of his times within the interpretive grid provided by Sikh lore. Guru Gobind Singh's utterances in deep sadness are the harbingers of future advances resulting in Banda's arrival and an all-round spirit and resistance in Punjabi countryside. Instructive in this context is the reference to Guru

¹²⁶ *ibid*, p.26-29.

¹²⁷ *ibid*, pp.33-38.

¹²⁸ *ibid*, pp.39-41.

¹²⁹ *ibid*, p.42-46.

Ariyan's martyrdom what did the militant turn in Sikh affairs made by Bhai Santokh Singh Dhardeo in 'Kirti' where he goes to the extent of claiming that this martyrdom was a call to party building. This sewing up of events seems to be quite a prevalent tendency in 1920s Punjab. Interestingly, Shaharyar in his recent play *Baba Bir Singh Naurangabadi* also carries on in the same vein where Baba Bir Singh's non-violent courting of death inspires his successor Bhai Maharaj Singh in organising armed resistance to British army prior to annexation of Punjab. (Sikh lore as provider of opposite lessons to contemporary problems turned it into an everyday social experience of engaged activism as against a merely ritually sacred exercise. the relevance of Sikh lore was reconstituted in this manner where the 20th Century Punjabi masses could feel themselves as a continuation of that very traditions). 'Hunen Akh Laggi Ais Thakkey hoye Raahi Di' (1929)

Guru Gobind is visualised in Machhiwara jungle in deep thought. His weary body is relaxed while sleeping. Hira Singh Dard mentions the Guru as a freedom fighter and his various exertions for the cause of freedom - a not indirect reference to his contemporary situation. However, rather than deriving a suitably pragmatic didactic meaning Hira Singh Dard ventures to reconstruct an image of the guru as a fighter for universal non-sectarian cause.

This verse /canto is reflective of a wider tendency becoming hegemonic in 1920's Punjab and Punjabi literature. BRA mentions GIO in a similar manner, as is the case with MSG, FDS & VST along with others start to purvey this conception of GIO with vigour and amongst increasing audiences. The left leaning figures also contribute in this trend. "Jallianwala Bagh Di Visakhi" (1934)¹³⁰

Hira Singh Dard reinscribes the Jallianwala Bagh massacre with an anti-colonial sentiment and in this process he secularises a traditional festival of Punjab in a modern idiom. This also tells us that a seasonal festival of peasant, was ennobled with events of a far-reaching nature eg Khalsa ceremony in 1699. How the Sikh/Khalsa sentiment with Vaisakhi got fused with a protest - meeting on Vaisakhi in 1919 Amritsar, was targeted by General Dyer and creating a crisis of legitimacy for the British empire along with launching the mass-phase of INM. thus this new question to the Vaisakhi legend

¹³⁰ *ibid*, pp.58-61.

became a source/resource of anti-imperial popular culture. "Koelo, Geet Koyi Nawan Gaa" (1933)¹³¹

Hira Singh Dard's equating freedom with a sense of beginning a fresh after resisting the 'old' yoke of unfreedom. His sense of polemics in this context also engulfs his contemporary versifiers who were still in threats of traditional values. Against their haunting or haunted calls he favours the housing call to arms. "Nau-Jawan Nun" (1937)¹³²

In his earlier humanistic phase, Hira Singh Dard lended to derive linearly the liberation from his humanist idealism whereas now we see that his humanism is being concretised in the shape of identifying social agents eg. workers, peasants along with youth. thus his content of liberation is now suffused with socialistic idealism. Also of immense value is his mention of Bir, Faqir, Aashiq template which was hegemonic discursive paradigm in the first half of 19th century. He sets into motion this template for the purpose of socialist freedom in the mid- 20th century by associating valour, selflessness and freedom respectively with these cultural formations. "Nawin Duniya Da Supna" (1938)¹³³

Suffusing as gurubani verse with his contemporary concern. "Meriyan Reejhan" (1941).¹³⁴ Hira Singh Dard links a river associated with Punjabi love legends with the cause of freedom. Another dimension of Punjabi culture formation is employed in this verse. "Adhooriyan Sadhran" (1942)¹³⁵

Reference is to Red army in Berlin. This impending victory is stirring new forces to move forward and thus if involves severing of ties of love for a newfound *ishq* in the political causes. Hira Singh Dard's 'Sajni' is the precursor of 'Hanjhoon Waliye Ni' Prof. Mohan Singh and later till the 'Meri Dost' in Paash. In fact, trope of sacrificing the love (usually the female lover) for a political cause also indicates a step ahead and reconstitution of the sufi tradition of Punjab. the problematique of *ishq* in medieval Punjab is a progressive alternative to the sectarian, coteist, claimish boundaries prevalent in Punjab and this problematique continues well into late 19th century Joga Singh a Khalsa soldier also leaves his marriage ceremony mid-way on the call of Guru

¹³¹ *ibid*, pp.62-64

¹³² *ibid*, pp.70-72.

¹³³ *ibid*, pp.79-80

¹³⁴ *ibid*, pp.83-84.

Gobind but it might be construed as willing borrowing to the authority of Gugu whereas now it is an ethical, moral voluntary endeavour that demands sacrifice of worldly comforts with the onset and modern political struggles in Punjab. This relegating of *ishq* /love to the domain of 'worldly comforts' is extremely significant departure from the conventional portrayal of love-legends in early-20th century Punjabi discourse. Seen in this manner one can surmise that the conventional treatment of love. Legends were incapable of rendering itself relevant for Punjabis now it was mandatory for these to reinvent themselves through the national liberation movement. It is a dramatic inversion of the early 19th century phase where Heer was the mediator for a wider popularisation of Sikhism/Hinduism and Islam. Thus Hira Singh Dard's efforts at secularising the Punjabi tradition to make these salient for the future. 'Bandiwan Kair Da Ikk Geet' (1944)¹³⁶ 'Sharinh Dian Chhavan' (1944, Mianwali jail)¹³⁷

Hira Singh Dard describes the everyday experience in the jails which were to become and nursery for radical ideas. His narration brings the jail atmosphere closer to the everyday village gatherings with one crucial difference that every fellow in jail had political leanings ranging from Arya Samayests, bhagats Ghadarites, communists who kept going a deep-rooted dialogue amongst the prisoners. Hira Singh Dard mentions the usual topics of discussion and the play of memory alongwith their present conditions in Jail. thus the socialising process in Jails and its normative order was suffused with the valourous Punjabi martyrs eg the Ghadarites, Bhagat Singh , etc. considered in continuation of the Punjabi heroic tradition. (Interestingly this dialectic stretches right upto Jaswant Singh Kanwal's 'Lahoo Di Low' in 1970s.) The study circles of Ghadarites for a revolutionary path a freedom is contrasted with petty scheming about leadership. In this way, the jails became a testing centre for radical fervour because many persons sought to seek release medical reasons. Hira Singh Dard considers the jail life as a harbinger of new ideas and struggles that however is not going to stay in such manner for a very long time because the workers peasants, youth have not set firm steps onto the path."Vaisakhi Di Yaad" (1948)¹³⁸

Writing in the aftermath of partition in 1947, Hira Singh Dard describes the tearing asunder of the fabric of Punjabi cultural formation. Hira Singh Dard continues his polemic with BVS even on latter's description of Kashmir. 'Shahidi Lahu'

¹³⁵ *ibid*, pp.85-87

¹³⁶ *ibid*, pp.88-91)

¹³⁷ *ibid*, pp.92-100

(1948.)¹³⁹Hira Singh Dard here conjures an image of direct lineage between the martyrdom of Guru Arjan on the banks of river Ravi during the reign of Jahangir with the anti-colonial struggle against the British. "Itihas Di Boti" (1951)¹⁴⁰

Hira Singh Dard titles his poem a boli - a folk form of Punjabi literature that is very popular in everyday or festive gatherings. Through this folk-form he strives to describe the political significance of Guru Gobind's life and times in which the oppression of Delhi was countered by Sutlej. In this way, Hira Singh Dard sets into motion a dialectic through which Satluj becomes a symbol of Punjabi resistance against the Delhi power in succeeding generations of Punjabi poets.

¹³⁸ ibid, pp.104-107

¹³⁹ ibid, pp.117-119

¹⁴⁰ ibid, pp.133-136

Conclusion

Active participation in the investigation of the everyday life of the past creates the most effective barrier against the uncritical consumption of pre-fabricated interpretations. The central criticism boils down to the view that an interest in 'everyday life' and its 'reality' serves only to over-emphasise details of secondary importance... Are we perhaps being informed only of apolitical or even sub-political forms of behaviour? Attention is to discuss the difficulties that arise from attempts to capture the 'inner perspective' of full-bodied social structures or of long-term changes. Its special feature is its attempt to expose the contradictions and discontinuities of both the modes and relations of production in the context of the life-style of those affected; to make these evident and to explain them.

'Social representation' is made possible by the mutual production of 'objective' and 'subjective' components. This demands a point of view that considers neither meaning as against socio-economic position nor vice versa. Only thus are the contradictions of society released and therewith the disposition and opportunities for alternative projects – for the overturning of society. The many implications of forms of authority of communication, especially their multiple interconnections, are only visible if they are not reduced to their final resultant. Only with this approach can 'tangential' utopias by anything more than disreputable surface phenomena predestined to be crushed by the mainstream of history.

The analysis of hierarchal and social intervention into single compartments... fails to do justice to the complexity of particular situations; it conceals the concurrence of submission, distance and insubordination. The arena of the 'political' cannot be defined in all generality and abstraction, for the political is found to the everyday realities in the lives of those involved. What is the relation between everyday politics and the politics and domination of society and the state at large? View 'from above' can only be adequately countered when the social experiences affecting the subordinated classes and strata are reconstructed. Such experiences direct our attention to relationships of daily practice. In these experiences, the intercommunication between life circumstances and subjectivity is accomplished and so therefore is that between the strategies of domination and the patterns of hegemony. In the context of experience, the conditions of action obtain significance for those involved; here then is the basis for their politics.

To this mode of experience, we must comprehend the reciprocal transformation of 'objective' conditions of action into cultural meanings or rules, in the context of daily production and reproduction. Plebeian self-consciousness was unable to develop an autonomous potential for hegemony. It remained, even in its extreme forms, on the plane of social exchange or competition. Central dimension of plebeian consciousness is that it is strongly determined by such norms as respectability, prestige and distinction.

Neither the old solidarity of the neighbourhood nor the grids any longer provided the framework in which offers of employment, demand for work and 'livelihood' could be balanced out. In their place was only the fleeting sociability of the street, the gin shop and, of course, the put, which a 'house of call' was the center of a fluctuating and seasonal labour market and to some degree and ersatz for established modes of life and labour.

A conservative – radical framework, however, limits our understanding of popular religious behaviour. During the industrial transformation of England in the first half of the nineteenth century, sectarian Methodism gave expression to significant aspects of the labouring experience. The transformation of traditional ways of working uncover religious belief resistant to change. Sectarian Methodism in late-eighteenth century and early-nineteenth century England was a distinctly popular faith. What followers considered 'real religion' was simple in theory and free in style. Eventually certain characteristics of sectarian Methodist worship become identified with lower-class status. Primitive Methodists acquired the name 'Ranters', reminiscent of political radicalism and religion, heresy, but more directly referring to their loud praying and relentless singing. Comparison with Kukas is required – also sectarian formation in 19th century Punjab.

Communal atmosphere of contemporary Punjabi in 1945 and memory of Maharaja Ranjit Singh The religious harmony becomes a central feature of Maharaja Ranjit Singh rule and the visions of a common Punjab are actualized. Lala Kirpa Sagar's two dramas 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh' and 'Dido Jamwal' are accounts of protagonists who bravely resisted Maharaja Ranjit Singh portrayed as an imperialist. Sant Singh Sekhon focuses on the palace intrigues of the Lahore Darbar and the machinations of Sikh Sardars who were colluding with the British according to their class character. Bawa Pran Singh Hoti is the most prolific biographer of the Lahore Darbar. His content is largely historical but style is literary.

Maghi Singh Gill views this issue from the Hindu- Sikh angle alone, excluding the Muslims. Whereas, Babu Rajab Ali provides a non-partisan account of the partition. But Maghi Singh Gill is profoundly anguished by the ruination of his 'Rangla Punjab'. Jinnah is the second on his blame list after the British. Comparative analysis of narratives of partition by Maghi Singh Gill and Babu Rajab Ali will give us interesting insights.

The present study is a departure from the dominant tendency of treating the region of Punjab as over-theorised and under-studied – an exclusive, virgin area in recent scholarship. In part, the relatively late focus on Punjab effectively turned it into a testing ground of other conceptual tendencies marked in studying the rest of India. Variations of the colonial construction hypothesis, as seen in Richard G. Fox and Harjot S. Oberoi among others, have been found wanting in providing evidence from Punjab history in order to prove their conceptual categories as well as theoretical claims. Moreover, the close proximity of Punjab Studies with the question of exclusivist identity or separatist politics, although fruitful in opening up the space for social history of modern Punjab, excluded the stellar position and activism of Punjabi peasants during the colonial period.

The narrative of the cultural world of the Punjab peasant rests upon the official records, newspapers, pamphlets, posters, private and institutional papers. However, the extensively use of peasant cultural products leavens the trajectory of the coming into being of 'modern' peasant in mid-1920s and their progressive deepening, expansion and radicalising impact till 1947. Interestingly, this modernity was geographically confined to the central Punjab districts where peasant proprietors provided the essential armature in striking contrast with western Punjab where the Muslim landlords held thorough sway over the social dynamics. The south-eastern districts also reflected almost similar social formations. The latter areas were strongholds of loyalist Unionists. The tenants lacked resources to resist this formidable cultural bloc. Seen in this manner, this study weaves the peasant cultural dimension into the workings of Punjab politics in early 20th century. One would also like to add that this narrative is potentially fertile to opening up the social history of Punjab with an emphasis refreshingly different from the present Punjab Studies and Sikh Studies approach in vogue.

We have tried to construct our case in light of the historiographical polemic around identity question in Sikh Studies and its 'organic and dialectical' relations with the peasant cultural universe. A foregrounding of the specificity of Punjabi radical tradition for the purposes of peasant protest in twentieth century analysis has been achieved

howsoever tenuous it may appear. For instance, the impact of the Akali movement is treated in essentially cultural terms alongside relevant questions that arose about the manner of being a Sikh; the emerging relations between anti-imperial political consciousness and egalitarian Sikh values, as championed by radical Akali faction which later on moved towards the left wing ideology; the popular discourse about anti-imperialist nationalism right from 1907-08 agitation to Ghadarites to Akalis to Communists is saturated with references to and the contest over the thrust of Sikh history; the particular agitational methods worked out during the Akali movement e.g. *dewans*, *langar*, and sending *jathas* through the countryside, were adopted by the later peasant movements in a seamless manner.

The sites chosen for demonstrative action by peasants reflect the inspiration of the preceding generation of Akali activists. Even the testimonies employed by the author have substantive details of the Akali experience in the Punjab countryside. Nevertheless the exploration of these linkages though pivotal in etching the peasant consciousness in Punjab, is in this work a relatively under-studied dimension. However, to be fair to author, she is primarily interested in the politically organised dimension of their becoming modern. Mukherjee authoritatively deals with the working-out of Congress-Communist strategies on the peasant question. Since the subjects of the study turn out to be Sikh peasant proprietors of central Punjab, the Akalis are also key players. In this way, these three political formations are contesting the value and legacy of the Akali movement. The ignominious retreat of the *dhadhi jatha*; Ruldu Khan's inspiration from Akali movement and Sikh religious tradition; Communists claiming to be authentic Akalis in Patiala state among others aspects are mentioned by the author. The Akali movement is turned into a reference point to determine the veracity of the claims to being 'better Akalis', thereby reconstituting and desectarianising Sikh ideology through their praxis.

The social history of colonial Punjab is slowly gaining ascendancy through new studies on gender, religious identity, caste question, and so on. Crucially, the Punjabi peasants are shown to occupy considerable social space for these phenomena to inscribe themselves. Thus Punjabi experience of a complex plural society, with many levels of belief, sophistication and skepticism is significant in locating new problems, in seeing old problems in new-ways, in an emphasis upon norms or value – systems and upon rituals, upon symbolic expressions of authority, control and hegemony. Plebeian consciousness and forms of protest seems to have merged in Akali movement. Moving from social structures to collective attitude and representations raised the whole

problem of the complex mediations between the real life of men and the image, even the fantastic representations that they make of it.

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