SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE PUNJAB:

A STUDY OF THE SIKH UNDER BRITISH RULE, 1849-1919

A THESIS

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Illustration 1

Guru Granth Sahib followed in procession by

Maharaja Narinder Singh of Patiala (r. 1845-1862)

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PREFACE

According to the British historian G.R. Elton (*The Practice of History, 1976),* the primary concern of historical studies today is with 'transformation of things (people, institutions, ideas and so on) form one state to another'. In the sense of 'thorough change in form or character' (*The New Oxford Dictionary,* 1998) transformation can be both induced and spontaneous and is to be studied in relation to continuities. The term 'social' for this study comprehends social structure, cultural norms, ideological differentiation, communitarian cohesion, self-image, and social and political consciousness of all those who called themselves 'Sikhs'*, or were designated as such in the contemporary sources.

As evident from the researcher's M.Phil dissertation ('Social Change in the Early Nineteenth Century Punjab'), a greater interaction could be effected between the state and society under Ranjit Singh which provided impetus for social mobility among Sikhs through participation in the ruling class, the army and religious life. The Sikh peasantry also benefited from the state's preference for the actual tillers of the soil. Even the artisans gained materially from the agrarian policies of the state, its military requirements and the demands of an expanding ruling class. The structure of opportunities had altered during the early nineteenth century in a manner that despite their small numbers, Sikhs emerged as the relatively privileged sections of society as a community.

The momentum gained in the state of Ranjit Singh was lost only temporarily after annexation in 1849. Within a decade, the response of the Sikhs to the happenings of 1857 changed the British perceptions about them, and the Sikh aristocracy and the peasantry came to be viewed as the 'natural allies' of the empire. Barring the Namdharis, the leaders of the religious opinion also enjoyed the rulers' confidence and patronage. However, with the emergence of the first generation of the educated middle class among the Sikhs in the 1870s, their responses to

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* The title page uses the term 'Sikh' in the singular because of the technical requirement of retaining the title as it somehow figures in the University records.

the Raj - both as professional persons and as the leaders of the Sikh opinion - became more varied and complex. The Singh Sabhas, Khalsa Diwans and printing presses, among others, became the institutional expressions of a new ferment, with implications for the social, cultural and political existence of the community, for intra-community and inter-community relations, and for attitudes towards colonial rule.

While some of these developments were generated by the British policies, measures and institutions, in some other respects the Sikh community underwent spontaneous transformations in response to the new ideas, situations and priorities. Some of the developments maturing in the second half of the nineteenth century can be traced to the earlier period. Similarly, some processes beginning after 1849 continued until the end of colonial rule, but the broad pattern of socio-economic and socio-cultural transformation was set by 1919, the year in which the Central Sikh League was founded by the emergent middle class to articulate a different idiom of politics in association with the Indian National Congress. By this time the attitudes of the Sikhs towards the Raj had also been affected by the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the Martial Law as well as the indifference of the administration to the issue of the control of Gurdwaras. The year 1919 may thus be regarded as the beginning of a different form of politico-cultural articulation by the Sikhs in both urban and rural areas.

The broad area of this study is the plains of the British province of the Punjab, minus the five districts covered by the North West Frontier Province, the Delhi territory and the Princely states by and large. It is assumed that the historical experience of this region both before and after the establishment of British rule had a close bearing on the social transformation among the Sikhs.

II

The Sikhs have received considerable scholarly attention. During the period of study itself several British administrators took interest in their past and present for political military and economic reasons. After 1947 a far more substantial volume of work has been produced on the pre-independence period, adding new areas of interest. Even when dwelling on social and economic aspects,

much of this work is underpinned by politics: 'nationalist' and 'communitarian', and above all, the politics of the Punjabi collaborators of the Raj. Another important area of interest is socio-religious reform. By now, the volume of publications specifically on the Sikhs is large and important enough to be treated in a separate chapter. The intense debate in recent decades on several key issues has imparted an almost autonomous character to Sikh Studies. The present study, however, is consciously located in the discipline of history, remaining within its methodological boundaries. A large variety of contemporary and near contemporary sources in Punjabi and English have been tapped, and the received wisdom has been reviewed in the first chapter.

To stay close to the ground realities, and as a starting point, the empirical evidence available on the Sikhs in the early census reports has been analysed among others, in terms of numbers, distribution, occupations, sects, and gender. The first half a century of colonial rule had a bearing on change in the early decades of the twentieth century which has been taken up in a separate chapter. The fourth chapter studies the beliefs and practices of what may be termed as the mainstream Sikhism and demarcates it from the sectarian groups.

The issue of identity perplexed the contemporary observers as well as modern scholars. One chapter has therefore been devoted to this complex problem which takes into account objective realities and subjective self-image in relation to the 'others' in a changing historical situation. As a product of these variables identity cannot be static or 'fixed' nor can there be 'homogeneity' among all members of the community sharing a consciousness of distinction from others. During the period of study the question of 'Sikh' identity also got enmeshed with that of 'Hindu" identity. An attempt has been made to address these problems in the discussion of identity.

It would be unrealistic to assume that the Sikh aristocracy, peasantry, religious leaders and the emergent middle classes would have remained unaffected by the policies and measures of the government. Their evolving consciousness and the changing political attitudes and expressions are the subject matter of the sixth chapter. The last chapter ties up the various facets of social transformation among the Sikhs during the first three quarters of colonial rule. This is followed by a Glossary of non-English words, and a

Bibliography of primary and secondary sourced consulted for the present study. The illustrations appearing in this study have been borrowed from Bhai Kahn Singh's *Mahakosh,* and Professor B.N. Goswamy's *Piety and Splendour.*

III

This study is based on a set of assumptions. First, even when the Sikhs constituted a distinct religious community during the period of study, they did not constitute a monolithic or undifferentiated segment of the society in the region. Second, to account for transformation in different aspects of their life. It would be necessary to evaluate the important role played by the colonial state, its policies, measures and institutions. At least two other factors have to be taken into account. There was a dialectical relationship between the new attitudes of the non-Sikhs towards the Sikhs and the attitudes of the Sikhs towards them. Most importantly, the Sikhs under British rule were not writing on a clean slate; their historical experience, particularly the legacies of the past century were as important as their experience in the colonial situation. Therefore, an approach with this three-pronged view of causation may explain the phenomenon on social transformation among the Sikhs in the Punjab more adequately than what we find in the existing literature on the subject.

IV

This study could not be completed without institutional, academic, financial and moral support from various quarters. I thankfully acknowledge the cooperation extended to me by the staff of various repositories and libraries: the National Archives of India, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, and the National Institute of Punjab Studies — all at New Delhi; the Punjab State Archives at Patiala and Chandigarh; Sikh History Research Department, Khalsa College and Guru Nanak Dev University Library at Amritsar; Dwarka Das Library at Chandigarh; A.C. Joshi Library, Panjab University, and the Library of the Department of History at Chandigarh.

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Chapter 1

AN OVERVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

Before 1947, there were only a few books and articles on the history of the Sikhs from 1849 to 1919. Writing a general history of the Sikhs in the 1960s, Khushwant Singh could list no more than a dozen. By now, however, there is a wide range of historical literature on this period. It would be useful to turn to this 'received wisdom' before launching on a study of social transformation among the Sikhs from 1849 to 1919. The first section of this chapter relates to N.G. Barrier's *The Sikhs and Their Literature* as the most appropriate starting point. The next four sections relates each to one or another aspect of social transformation. The last section is a brief comment on this literature and the present study.

I

The Sikhs and Their Literature, published in 1970 as a guide to tracts, books and periodicals from 1849 to 1919 provides the most useful information on source materials.[1] Barrier has listed various kinds of sources which can be used for a study of the Sikhs during this period. The first section provides information on Sikh publications, listing 724 books. This section includes works written by some of the important writers of the period like Ditt Singh, Mohan Singh Vaid and Kahn Singh. The second section lists anonymous publications. The third section has Sikh institutional publications – books published by the Chief Khalsa Diwan, the Educational Conference and the like. The fourth section lists Sikh periodicals published in the Punjab and the annual reports on the Punjab press compiled by the special branch of the Punjab Police Department. Barrier has added a detailed note on the proscribed literature.

Apart from providing a comprehensive bibliography, Barrier comments on the state of the Sikhs in this period. According to him the Sikhs faced a crisis of identity in the 1860's when their population had begun to dwindle. Sikh intellectual activity in the nineteenth century focused on understanding what constituted tradition and orthodoxy. It was during this period that Trumpp published his translation of the *Adi Granth* in 1873, expressing the opinion that it contained nothing new and that the Sikhs were a sect of the Hindus. His book evoked strong reactions from the Sikhs. They responded with *Ham Hindu Nahin*, a polemic by Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha. Support came also from M.A. Macauliffe's work on the Sikh religion. The Sikhs were at this time exhibiting fresh interest in their past and in their historical literature in general. By the end of the century at least two societies sponsored historical research.

The Nirankaris and the Namdharis were the earliest protagonists of reform in Sikhism. Barrier underlines that a new chapter in the evolution of the Sikhism opened with the founding of the Amritsar Singh Sabha in 1873 and the Lahore Singh Sabha in 1879. These two Sabhas adopted similar programmes. The Amritsar Singh Sabha, led by the likes of Baba Khem Singh Bedi, belonged to the conservative element, while the Lahore Singh Sabha was more radical. Among its leaders were Bhai Ditt Singh, Professor Gurmukh Singh, Bhai Takht Singh and Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid. Even a more radical *sabha* was founded by Babu Teja Singh Overseer called the Bhasaur Singh Sabha.[2] These Sikhs, and others like them, provided motivation and continuity for the Sabhas and served as links in an informal communication chain binding the dispersed organizations.

The inability of the Amritsar and Lahore Singh Sabha to see eye to eye with each other and the need for a central organization led to the formation of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902. It was headed by a new generation of reformers, like Sunder Singh Majithia, who prepared

its draft constitution. The Diwan provided a meeting place and a centre of communication for educated Sikhs, collected funds, administered central institutions such as the Amritsar Khalsa Orphanage and Khalsa Tract Society. The Chief Khalsa Diwan also took positions on theological and social issues and mobilized Sikh opinion in support of issues like the Anand Marriage Bill.

A variety of Sikh institutions specialized in the publication and distribution of tract material in the form of proclamations and requests (*aian* or *benati*) and in the form of polemics, short pieces attacking enemies or defending a cause. Barrier looks upon Kahn Singh's *Ham Hindu Nahin* as a form of popular polemic. The growth of Sikh journalism, thus, offered an important means of communication. Sikh newspapers and periodical were started, like the *Vidya Pracharak* and the *Gurmukhi Akhbar*. The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed a great upsurge of Sikh journalism.

Ideological movements in the late nineteenth century furnished much of the impetus for the development of Sikh political consciousness. The relationship between Hinduism and Sikhism became an absorbing issue for Sikh leaders. A decade after the introduction of the Arya Samaj in the Punjab in 1877, Sikh cooperation turned to hostility as the Aryas insisted that the Sikhs were Hindu. Equally important was the issue of Hindi versus Panjabi, which greatly agitated the Hindus and the Sikhs. Sikh relations with the Muslims also worsened in the 1890s. The Sikh fascination with martyrdom obviously showed the Muslims as the culprits. The Morley-Minto reforms, that would transfer power in the hands of a Muslim majority, made things worse.

Many of these developments were influenced by the introduction of British rule. The work of Christian missionaries, techniques of organization, journalism, and Western concepts accentuated divisions and spread communal consciousness. The institutions of bureaucracy

and municipal committees became arenas of power and competition in which Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims vied for dominance.

British policies and tactics reflected 'a basic British ambiguity towards the Sikhs' like the maintenance of Sikh aristocracy and *gurdwaras* for indirect control over the Sikhs, and continuation of *dharmarth* grants and Sikh baptismal rites for Sikh army recruits, and at the same time not really trusting the Sikhs. 'Loyalty' typified the tone of Sikh politics until 1919 when a renewed sense of separate political identity based on religion eventually brought the Sikhs into conflict with the British. Initial signs of unrest involved a central Sikh institution, the Khalsa College at Amritsar, where a revised constitution was forced on the Managing committee in 1908. The College was brought entirely under official supervision. Other issues of contention were the Anand Marriage Bill which saw the largest Sikh political mobilization prior to 1919, the principle of communal representation in Morley-Minto reforms due to which the Sikhs made greater efforts to safeguard themselves, and the Rakabganj affair when Sikh militancy reached new heights. All these issues sorely tested British-Sikh relations.

Though unable to sort out the various elements, the British realized that the neo-Sikh movements posed a threat to the loyalty of the Sikhs. A C.I.D. note on the Sikh politics states among other things: 'There need be no hesitation in predicting that those Sikhs who affect the new faith will inevitably tend to degenerate as regards their loyalty to the Crown'.

II

Much of recent research on the Sikhs during the period of colonial rule can be considered in relation to the beginning made by N. Gerald Barrier. Dolores Domin in her *India in 1857-59: A Study in the Role of the Sikhs in the People's Uprising*, has studied the background and the peculiar conditions which affected the attitudes of the Sikhs towards

the uprising of 1857-58.[3] She has used the records of the Government of India from 1849 to 1859, the secret mutiny papers in Urdu, the mutiny files at the Patiala State Archives, publications of Punjab Government like the Gazetteers, Revenue Reports, Reports of Revised Settlements and the like. Besides the unconventional sources like the Annals of the Indian Rebellion, containing narratives of the outbreak and eventful occurrences, and stories of personal adventures during the uprising of 1857-58, Domin has used the Khalsa Darbar records and private correspondences. With the help of these sources, she has studied in detail the background of the annexation, the administrative set up, property relations in agriculture, utilization of landed property, British policy towards 'feudal' forces and the disbandment of the Khalsa army.

According to Domin the passive attitude of the Sikh peasantry, and in fact the rural masses of the Punjab, played a decisive role in enabling the British to keep their hold on North India. One of the major reasons was the British readiness to sanction the existing status of ownership in agriculture by law and to reassess a relatively moderate land tax due to the peoples 'clamorous' protests. Consequently, the Punjab peasantry was in a better condition than in the older provinces in 1857. The Sikh community had the highest number of agriculturalists and among them the percentage of proprietors was again the highest, as was probably of those who had a large share in occupancy tenant rights.

The Sikhs had fought two wars with the British and lost. They had no leader in 1857. Those who were in British service were greatly influenced by the Punjab authorities who used their power to stir up ill-feeling and to fan hatred for the 'Purbiahs' and the Mughal Emperor alike. Thus, Domin explored an important area virtually untouched by Barrier.

In a later article entitled 'Sikh Politics in British Punjab Prior to the Gurdwara Reform Movement', Barrier has explored Sikh politics further in terms of British policies and institutions which had a bearing on the way in which the Sikhs saw themselves, and individuals and groups assessed political alternatives.[5] He has also examined how the Sikhs reacted to the potential dangers associated with the West and British rule. He has paid special attention to the Chief Khalsa Diwan and the politics of resolving conflict within the community in order to present a united Sikh response to changes within the political system.

According to Barrier, a new political system was evolved by the British by borrowing ideas and structures from the earlier regime and transferring new doctrines and institutions which gave Punjab politics a particular cast; a balance was struck between personal rule of the officers involved in local affairs and a separate judiciary. Support groups, in the shape of those associated with the former rule, were developed within the Punjab. Their numbers slowly increased. By 1900, education and training gained importance. Some key assumptions were part and parcel of colonial rule. Among these were, warlike trait, concern with image, being seen as judicious and fair, official regard for custom and existing institutions, allocation of resources depending on whose help was thought to be valuable, notion of a content 'yeomanry', the 'natural leaders', the nomination of local magnates to new committees and a 'contamination' view of politics. The British took the Sikhs very seriously and yet tried to avoid their being seen as either favoured or distrusted. Three categories of Sikhs were of importance to the British; the cultivators of land, the soldiers and the aristocrats. The new rulers remained keen to keep track of those who controlled Sikh shrines which they were keen on handling themselves, the Kukas, and the supporters of Maharaja Dalip Singh.

Punjab politics reflected both the traditional and modern elements. There was a tendency among Punjabis to divide along

religious lines based on their historical experiences prior to 1849. An increasing number of activities tended to centre around the work of the relatively small range of Western-educated or middle-class groups residing primarily in urban areas. Their concerns tended to be limited and local involving matters of economic or religious significance. Factionalism and belligerence were common in Punjab public life.

Politics and religious revitalization were frequently inseparable in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The Sikhs, according to Barrier, tried to define and then promulgate a sense of identity and separate consciousness at a time when most Sikhs felt comfortable with little if any distinction between the beliefs and practices of Hindus and Sikhs. The Singh Sabhas carried on three related types of politics: first, the struggle among the Sikhs over legitimacy and doctrine; second, the defense of Sikh interests against that of other Punjabis; and third, representation on the municipal committees.

Till the end of the nineteenth century the Sikhs had continuously looked for support from the British to meet their aspirations. As a minority, they did not have the numbers to make it alone and could not relate to any other community in the Punjab, as they were competing with them for the same favours. Therefore, professions of loyalty were regularly aired. However, by this time the structure and policies of the British affected the community's interests more directly. The issue of Dyal Singh Majithia's will brought home to them that traditional tactics could not suffice as access to resources came to depend more on competition and elections.

The Chief Khalsa Diwan was created as a central body to co-ordinate and lead the Singh Sabhas. In time, it was accepted as a major spokesman for the Sikhs. It made three key contributions to Sikh politics. The first was institutionalizing the Singh Sabha view of Sikhism as a separate religion with distinct rituals and a tradition devoid of Hindu influence; the second was the linking together of

disparate Sikh organizations in an effective communication system; and the third was the development of a strategy for dealing with internal division and survival as a minority community.

Ian J. Kerr has explored Anglo-Sikh relations from 1849 to 1919.[5] Soon after the annexation of the Punjab the British began to seek the consent of the governed. British rule in the Punjab, 'not based upon the broad foundation of national sympathy or prescription', had to be made as popular as it could be. The right to govern based on power (military conquest, military garrisons and police forces), which was never abandoned, was to be made stronger by the tacit and then the active consent and collaboration of many of the governed. Collaborators were needed to mediate between the colonial regime and the population of the Punjab.

In this context the British came to appeal to the Sikhs in various ways and at different levels of interest and identity. Direct self-interest was met by giving employment, pensions in the army, land in canal colonies to the Sikhs and *dharmarth* grants to religious men. Religious identity was fostered by way of baptismal requirements for army recruits and support of Sikh shrines; the interest and identity of the notables was kept up by involving them in the process of government by deputing them as honorary magistrates, *zail* and extra-assistant commissioners. Symbolic honouring like that of the time of Ranjit Singh was also carried out. The Sikhs were respected and feared and there remained an ever present ambivalence of the British towards the Sikhs and the fear of the other sources of authority who could challenge the legitimacy of the British rule in the Punjab.

Based on a detailed study of the Ghadar Movement, H.K. Puri has made a brief and lucid statement rather recently.[6]

III

Already before 1947, Ganda Singh had published *Kukian Di Vithiya*, containing 52 letters of Baba Ram Singh written from the jail in Rangoon after 1872, with a short history of the Namdharis.[7] The author regrets that great disservice was done by the Baba's followers by adding prophecies to the *Sau Sakhis* and showing Baba Ram Singh as the eleventh Guru of the Sikhs. He denies this claim in his letters. According to Ganda Singh, such claims jeopardized the contribution made by Baba Ram Singh to the Sikh reform movement.

The Namdhari movement was started by Baba Balak Singh before 1849 in the upper Sindh Sagar Doab. His followers were known as 'jagiasu' or 'abhiasi'. He advocated a return to the simple religious message of the Gurus. Baba Balak Singh was succeeded by Baba Ram Singh who established his headquarters at Bhaini in Ludhiana district where the movement gained wide popularity. He advocated abolition of all caste distinctions among the Sikhs. The *Adi Granth* for him was the *Guru Granth*. He was opposed to the worship of pirs, tombs, Gugga and Sultan. Ganda Singh was of the view that the Kuka Movement was 'a purely religious movement' and that 'at no stage had the great Kuka leader said or done anything to encourage or connive at any crime. He had no political aims and preached no rebellion ideas'.[8]

As a complement to the letters of Baba Ram Singh, Nahar Singh published documents as *Gooroo Ram Singh* and *the Kuka Sikhs*.[9] The officials records relating to the Namdhari Movement from 1863 to 1880 were published as *Rebels Against The British Rule,* edited by Nahar Singh and Kirpal Singh.[10] This volume also contains extracts from four English newspapers from April to November 1872. Altogether, it provides ample material for reconstructing an important phase of the movement and an important phase in the life of Baba Ram Singh.

In 1965, M.M. Ahluwalia had used a considerable volume of

official records, besides the existing Namdhari literature and interviews with 'Guru Jagjit Singh ji Maharaja', for his *Kukas: The Freedom Fighters of the Panjab.*[11] It is largely a biography of Baba Ram Singh. At the same time, Fauja Singh Bajwa published his *Kuka Movement: An Important Phase in Punjab's Role in India's Struggle for Freedom,* bringing out the political significance of the activities of Baba Ram Singh and his followers as a people's struggle for freedom, distinguishing it from the uprising of 1857-58.[12] In Bajwa's view, the Kukas made a significant contribution not only in the political sphere but also in the social and religious spheres. The Kuka Movement represented 'a progressive force' which might rightly be said to have paved the way for the Singh Sabha Movement which simply carried forward the work begun by the Namdharis, giving in this process a new interpretation to the Sikh doctrines in the light of Western influences. The author looked upon his work as a dispassionate and objective study of the Kuka Movement. Both these books were written with the background of the centenary celebration of the Great Uprising of 1857-58.

Making use of all the published materials, W.H. McLeod wrote an article Kukas as a millenarian sect.[13] He refers to theories which have been advanced on the Kuka outbreak of 1871 leading to the collapse of the movement. The early British theory had treated the outbreak as an isolated, insignificant, and somewhat sordid failure, but the modern interpretation regards it as a setback on the road to ultimate triumph. McLeod interprets the Kuka movement as a distinctively Indian example of the millenarian pattern.

According to McLeod all the four stages of a millenarian movement, suggested by Norman Cohn, were more or less present in the Kuka movement. The 'disturbed social environment' in which it developed was present in the Punjab. An increasing population pressure could be seen in middle and later nineteenth century. The

year 1858 saw failure in harvests and the year 1860-1 a famine, which presumably led to discontent among the Jats, particularly because army recruitment was not yet open to them. The second stage was that of the appearance of a holy man, Baba Ram Singh of Bhaini, who according to McLeod was the only holy man around. The third phase was the junction of the leader and the group, with a social myth adapted to their needs. This myth was met by the so-called 'Sakhi of Guru Govind Singh' acquired by the police in 1863 which names Ram Singh, the carpenter, as a reincarnation of the Guru. The fourth stage involved 'a frantic urge to smite the ungodly' which was carried out by the Kukas by first attacking Muslim butchers in Amritsar and Raikot. The Muslims, according to McLeod, were the traditional enemies of Sikhs. The British represented the second enemy. The Kuka sect was best understood as a distinctively Sikh version of a common millenarian pattern. Seeing the Kukas as rebels or nationalists, pursuing deliberate and coherent political objectives, does not make any historical sense for McLeod.

The Nirankaris have received less attention from the historians. John C.B. Webster is the only writer to have applied modern critical methods to the study of Nirankari history, paying more attention to the 'cult' than to the leaders, and paying more attention to the nineteenth-century developments than to the later history of the movement.[13] For the nineteenth century his sources are largely non-Nirankari. He has given due importance to the Nirankari Hukamnama issued before 1870. The traditions that the Nirankaris began to collect and record in the late 1920s and 1930s are used by Webster for their self-image and not as sources for the early history of the Nirankaris.

Webster is of the view that the Nirankaris have been a small, non-aggressive, basically a religious body which was not oriented towards political or even social change. Unlike the Namdharis they never got into trouble with the government and unlike the Singh

Sabhas they developed neither an active publication programme nor institutions. In addition, they seem not to have become numerous enough or 'heretical' enough to have caused alarm or stimulated much controversy within the Sikh community. Webster is not in agreement with the label movement for the Nirankaris as it did not involve collective effort, nor were the Nirankaris assertive or aggressive enough to bring about change. They did not have any impact or even influence on any part of the social order. He prefers the label 'cult' for the Nirankaris.

The beginning of the Nirankaris can be placed between 1843 and 1845. Baba Dayal, the founder, did not seem to have departed from the teachings of Guru Nanak, and the *Adi Granth* played a central role in Nirankari ritual and teaching. Opposition to the Nirankaris came not from the Sikhs but from the Hindus due to the denial of the gods of the Hindu pantheon. Therefore, the Nirankaris appear to have stood firmly within Sikh tradition from the outset. However, in the eyes of his contemporaries Baba Dayal was an innovator in the area of religious ceremonies. For Webster, Baba Dayal was a radical, if not an innovator, and his aim seems to have been to bring Sikh ritual into conformity with the teaching found in the *Adi Granth*. The *rahit* promulgated by Baba Dayal was made obligatory through a Hukamnama issued by Baba Darbara (1855-1870. According to the Hukamnama, the Sikhs were straying from the path laid down by the Sikh Gurus by following Brahmanical rites. Webster is of the view that since no rite of initiation was followed, Baba Darbara Singh did not see his followers as a separate group or sect from the Sikhs or Hindus but a collection of people who had decided to reorder their ceremonial life along the lines laid down by Guru Nanak and Baba Dayal. The Hukamnama is addressed to all Sikhs as coming from both Guru Nanak and Baba Dayal.

The Anand Marriage Bill was supported by the Nirankaris who wrote two letters to the government in its favour. Though the Nirankari marriage ceremony bore a strong resemblance to the Anand marriage ceremony, it is difficult to say that the Nirankari's were its originators. It is important to note, however, that the leaders of the Tat Khalsa cited the example of the Nirankaris in support of their view that the Anand marriage was prevalent even among the Sahajdhari Sikhs.

The Nirankaris contributed to the religious ferment within Sikhism in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, however, they were on the fringes of the Sikh religious reform. Influenced by the Singh Sabha Movement, they began to record their tradition and to define their position. The theological position taken earlier was somewhat elaborated and an attempt was made to distinguish the Nirankaris from the other theological positions among the Sikhs which they had to contend with. They continued to claim to be Sikhs and saw themselves as a reform group within Sikhism rather than a sect or religion.

The Nirankaris disagreed with the Singh Sabha and Akali Sikhs on three points. A living Guru was for them of utmost importance. The invocation of God as 'Bhagauti' was rejected by the Nirankaris. They made no distinction between Keshdhari and Sahajdhari Sikhs. The message of Guru Nanak according to them was universal and all those who followed it were Sikhs.

Dr Man Singh Nirankari, the present head of the movement, has written extensively on Sikhism and the Nirankaris from the Nirankari viewpoint. He has also encouraged Sikh and non-Sikh scholars to write about the Nirankari heritage. Two collections of articles have been published on the basis papers presented at seminars, one edited by J.S. Grewal[15] and the other by Navtej Singh.[16] Attempt has been made by a number of contributors to study the movement in some depth and to make an advance over John Webster's *The Nirankari*

Sikhs. As pointed out by J.S. Grewal, the Nirankari studies are still in their infancy. An important reason for this unsatisfactory state is the dearth of source materials, which makes it all the more necessary to study the movement in close relation to the precolonial, the colonial and the contemporary contexts, rather than in terms of personalities. The most important aspect of the Nirankari Movement appears to be its relationship with the earlier Sikh tradition. Remaining faithful to *Guru Granth Sahib,* paradoxically, the movement ignores the Khalsa tradition together.

IV

Much more attention has been given to the Singh Sabha Movement than to the Nirankari and Namdhari movements put together. After the publication of N.G. Barrier's *The Sikhs and Their Literature*, G.S. Dhillion wrote a doctoral thesis on the Singh Sabha Movement. It remains unpublished but Dhillon has published articles on the colonial period with a direct bearing on the Sikhs.[17] According to him the Singh Sabhas were founded for an all round Panthic development, with the objective of taking up social, religious and educational programmes.[13] The leaders of the Amritsar Singh Sabha were drawn from the rich, the upper, the privileged classes and the British supported strata of Sikh society. They approved of anti-Sikh practices like discrimination on the basis of caste, idol worship and worship of personal gurus.

The Lahore Singh Sabha developed a broad and comprehensive outlook, making no distinction between the high and low caste Sikhs and extending their work to both the urban and rural masses of the Punjab. The religious revival under the Singh Sabha was a protest against forms and ceremonies and class distinctions based on birth and was the work of the people, of the masses and not of the classes. The author is of the opinion that the Lahore Singh Sabha's appeal to the masses lay in the Sikh doctrines and not in any material factor in the colonial environment.

The British were extraordinarily cautious in dealing with the Sikhs. An observation of Sir Richard Temple about Sikhism make two things clear; one, that Sikhism was not an amorphous, ambiguous or confused entity and two, that the British objective was to see that its enormous potential was not exploited against them. Therefore, the British were placating the Sikhs on minor issues, but they would not tolerate any sufferance of their political interests.

According to Dhillon the last quarter of the nineteenth century was primarily devoted to reviving the strength of the community by educating them in their religion and tradition and, having slowly reconstructed these aspects of Sikh society, political work was taken up by the Singh Sabha leaders. With the formation of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902, they began 'to safeguard the rights of the Sikhs'. The Sikh Educational Conference was founded in 1908 and was seen by the government as politically motivated. It was declared to be non-political by the Sikhs. However, it did provide the Singh Sabha leaders with a forum to express their views on day-to-day affairs whether religious, social, educational and even political.

Sikh political activity was the result of their response to the problem of the management of the Khalsa College, the political agitation in connection with the Colonisation Bill of 1907, the Minto-Morley reforms of 1909, and the restriction on the carrying of kirpan. The colonisation bill was withdrawn but in the case of the Khalsa College, the government handed over its management to a nominated body with the commissioner as chairman. On June 10, 1908, a new constitution was forced upon the governing body. The Sikhs did not get any special concessions under the Minto-Morley Reforms. After a prolonged agitation the Sikhs were exempted from the Arms Act of 1878 and were allowed to carry kirpan. These developments clearly showed that the British did not promote political identity to add to the

strength of the Sikhs. A lack of in-depth analysis was the reason for the conclusion drawn by some Western historians that the British were interested in promoting Sikh ideological identity.

Dhillon suggests that 'religious consciousness, socio-political consciousness and consequent responsibility and reaction go hand in hand' in Sikh ideology. The Sikh religious and socio-political consciousness reached a distinctly higher level of commitment and activity than among the people in other parts of the country by 1919. The preachers of the Chief Khalsa Diwan consciously mingled politics with religion in their speeches. Dhillon goes on to add that Sikh militancy assumed alarming proportions after the Rakabganj Gurdawara affair in 1913. The Ghadar party was virtually a Sikh organization which operated in the rural Punjab. Nothing of this kind happened anywhere else in India. The Ghadar party got support of the Singh Sabhas in the Punjab but not from the Indian National Congress.

In his *Lions of the Punjab*, Richard Fox has analysed the objective conditions created by British rule in the Punjab, including its linkage with the capitalist world economy, to explain cultural changes in the Sikh community.[18] He is of the view that 'a single religious community, in the sense of a shared set of traditions, cultural meanings, and social practices, was absent among those who called themselves Sikh in late nineteenth century'. In the late nineteenth century there were several populations that called themselves 'Sikh' and had separate images of what religious identity meant and who was included in it. All Keshdharis, according to him, were not baptized and the Sahajdharis did not consider themselves as less devout Sikhs. Another reason for the non-existence of a uniform body of 'Sikhs' was that Mazhabis and other Untouchables were provided 'inferior access' to Sikh shrines and that too in the community of the Khalsa Singhs which was supposed to be based on egalitarian principles. Another

important caste division, according to Fox, was the one between the Jats and the Khatris and Aroras, both of whom held the other as uncouth and devious. Fox has cited figures from the Census of 1891 to argue that over a third of the people who referred to themselves as Sikhs claimed to belong to the Hindu religion as a sect. However, two-thirds of the Sikhs believed they constituted a separate religion and among these were not only the Singhs but also 40 per cent of the Sahajdharis.

The Singh identity according to Fox was the creation of the British and grew out of their racial beliefs that the Sikhs had been biologically provided with superior martial skills, while the requirement of the British was to have loyal brave soldiers to fight for them. The symbols of Guru Gobind Singh's Sikhism were appropriated by them to field a large but inexpensive indigenous army. The proportion of the Sikh troops in the army was over three times larger than the proportion of Sikhs in the Punjab's population. Though the Sikh reformers came to oppose the British, they imposed the same definition on the Sikh religious community that the colonial authorities espoused: the only true Sikh was a Singh.

The evidence of the contemporary British writers underlines that the 'Singh' identity was by far the most important identity of the Sikhs during the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. Fox has ignored even this easily available evidence. He rightly underlines the relevance of the changes brought about by the British but an explanation entirely in terms of 'Western impact and Sikh response' is bound to remain inadequate. This framework can provide only a partial answer to the study of social change under British rule.

The collapse of Sikh political power, in Fox's view, had resulted in decrease in the number of Sikhs. In the first Census of the Punjab their number was remarkably low. The new administration of the Punjab brought peace and security, and British appreciation for the

Sikh support in 1857 resulted in Sikh recruitment to the army. Since the British defined Sikh as Keshdhari for purposes of recruitment to the Army, the Census of 1868 showed an increase in the numbers of the Sikhs(in five districts) amounting to almost three times the figures for 1855. However, the army could provide jobs to only a small number of Sikhs. As a result, in 1881 the figures for the Sikhs again showed a decrease of four per cent on the previous figure.

Criticism of the prevailing Sikh social and religious practices by the Christian missionaries had begun before the advent of the British rule in the Punjab and further problems had been created by missionary activity. The Nirankari influence was mainly confined to the urban population and the Namdharis too had limited impact. The Singh Sabha was set up at Amritsar in 1873 at the instigation of the prominent members of Sikh gentry. The adoption of Christianity by families of note came as a great shock to the aristocracy and Sikh gentry, whose world was defined by their religious identity.

In his *Sikh Separatism*, Rajiv A. Kapur is concerned with the social, political and economic developments which led to the process of reformulation of Sikh identity and the emergence of Sikh consciousness and communal separatism.[19] He also examines the process of politicization among the Sikhs, the establishment of Sikh political organization and the emergence of an essentially communal, Khalsa nationalism.

Kapur's understanding of the Singh Sabha Movement and the evolution of Sikh identity has been detailed in the Introduction to the book and its first chapter. The rest of the book relates mainly to the period after 1919. The writer is of the view that for four hundred years, Sikh and Hindu identities had remained interlinked and overlapping. The nineteenth century saw the emergence of a number of social and religious reform movements in Indian society. Among the Sikhs, the reform movement was led by a group of militant Tat (true) Khalsa

reformers, who reformulated Sikh identity and drew communal boundaries between the Sikhs and the Hindus. The Tat Khalsa reformers were also enormously successful in building a spirit of internal solidarity and consciousness.

Impetus to the Singh Sabha movement was provided by the publication of Trumpp's translation of the *Guru Granth Sahib* in 1877. The question of separate Sikh identity came to the fore in 1898 on the issue whether Dyal Singh Majithia was a Sikh or a Hindu. The decision of the court, that Dyal Singh Majithia was a Hindu started a debate in the newspapers, journals and series of pamphlets and responses. Two pamphlets, *Sikh Hindu Hain* and *Ham Hindu Nahin,* were widely circulated. This activity received a push with the emergence of a militant Hindu ideology in the Punjab, represented by the Arya Samaj. This led to an upsurge in Sikh journalistic activity as the Singh Sabha reformers realized the potential of the press to spread their message of a separate Sikh identity.

With the impact of the Sikh propaganda hundreds of Sahajdhari Hindus and Sikhs took baptism and, encouraged by the return to the original egalitarian Sikhism, low caste and outcaste Hindus also took baptism. Khalsa Sikhs increased due to the rise in the number of Sikhs in the British army. In 1909, the monumental work of M.A. Macauliffe gave further impetus to the reform movement. In 1911, the Sikhs were recorded in the Census according to what they said they were. The increase between 1901 and 1921, was due to considerable conversion of Hindus and not the change in the British definition alone. The motivation was jobs in the army, and the agrarian policies of the British which favoured the Sikh agriculturist. Therefore by 1921, being a Sikh was regarded as being a member of the Khalsa. A movement away from the sects among the Sikhs led to the development of one common Sikh identity.

W.H. McLeod put forth the view that Singh identity was the

dominant Sikh identity before 1849.[20] In the late nineteenth century of the Singh Sabha reformers perceived that every thing was not right with the Sikhs and their beliefs and practices. Hinduized ritual was being practised in contemporary Gurdwaras. The presence of Hindu idols disfigured the Golden Temple. Caste was being observed. There was discrimination against the untouchables. Many Sikhs smoked and cut their hair. In the villages it was often impossible to distinguish between a Hindu and a Sikh. The solution of the Singh reformers was to purge the Panth of false beliefs and superstitions, whether Hindu or Muslim. 'Sikhs must be summoned to a genuine reaffirmation of their Khalsa loyalty'.

The Amritsar Sabha was an elite organization concerned with issues affecting the Sikh Panth, while the Lahore Sabha attracted intellectuals who were much more aggressive than the elites of the Amritsar Sabha. They insisted on Khalsa exclusivenss which was eventually accepted as orthodox. The Khalsa tradition came to be regarded as the 'standard' and Sahajdharis were accepted as 'slow adopters'. The reformist section of the Singh Sabha movement came to be known as Tat Khalsa (True or Pure).

McLeod points out that the debate on Sikh identity was conducted in terms of whether or not the Khalsa were Hindu, leaving out the possibility of Sahajdhari identity being treated as 'Sikh'. On both sides historical past was manipulated to defend contemporary perceptions. McLeod is of the view that differences of degree were looked upon as differences of kind when it came to the Khalsa Sikh and the Sahajdhari Sikh. A critical and historical analysis must recognize 'the continuity which extends from the earliest days of the Nanak-Panth to the end of the nineteenth century and beyond'. However, this in itself would be insufficient and 'the force of intervening circumstances must also be recognized'.

McLeod does not agree with Fox's contention that 'Singh identity'

was selected by the British and then appropriated by a particular caste for its own class purposes. McLeod sees the military and economic policy of the British as having a bearing on Sikh identity from 1875 to 1925, as also sees the role of a new pattern of administration, a new technology, a fresh approach to education, and entry of Christian missionaries. All these elements meshed together to produce a great impact.

The emergence of the Singh Sabha was an example of the meshing together of such elements and imparting 'new cultural dimension and magnitude to the movement'. McLeod is of the view that 'It was Sikh tradition, and specifically a Khalsa tradition, which they developed and glossed. To suggest that they developed a new tradition is false. Equally it is false to claim that their treatment of it can be described as a simple purging of alien excrescence or the restoration of a corrupted original. The Khalsa of the Singh Sabha reformers was both old and new'.

Writing on the contribution of the Singh Sabha Movement to the interpretation of Sikh history and religion, McLeod underlines that the Singh Sabha provided the dominant interpretation which has remained 'orthodox' for almost a century. All other interpretations were seen as wayward, sectarian, or heretical.[21] McLeod examines the influence of three Singh Sabha scholars on our understanding of Sikhism: Bhai Vir Singh, the most influential biographer of the Sikh Gurus, Bhai Kahn Singh and M.A. Macauliffe. McLeod points out that Ratan Singh Bhangu's *Prachin Panth Parkash*, which was edited by Bhai Vir Singh, was altered by him to convey an acceptable version according to the understanding developed in the Singh Sabha movement.

In a more recent work, McLeod has expressed the view that there were several varieties of Sikhs in the middle of the nineteenth century.[22] There were the Khalsa Sikhs who were the most prominent but the Sahajdharis too adopted a range of different identities. There

were the Udasis, and the Nirmalas, among other. All this changed due to a fundamental cleavage within the Singh Sabha Movement . The original founders of the movement were 'Sanatan' or 'traditional' Sikhs and the much more radical opinion was centered at Lahore in the form of 'Tat Khalsa'. The Tat Khalsa consisted of those who were able to benefit from the Western system of education. Its primary membership consisted of intellectuals like Bhai Kahn Singh and Bhai Vir Singh. A third variety of Singh Sabha was that of Teja Singh Overseer. He considered even the Tat Khalsa rather conservative. He led the Bhasaur Singh Sabha and the Panch Khalsa Diwan for several years as an advocate of radical reform. Eventually in 1929 he was formally banished from the Panth and the controversies he had raised died down.

The main exponent of the Sanatan Sikhs was Avtar Singh Vahiria. According to McLeod, the Sikhism preached by people such as Avtar Singh Vahiria and Khem Singh Bedi is difficult to envisage today - so comprehensive has been their defeat by the Tat Khalsa. Nevertheless, problems had arisen for the Tat Khalsa because there was no agreement on the Sikh method of conducting religious ceremonies. After heated debates with the Sanatan Sikhs and with the support of the Sikh public, the Anand Marriage Act was passed in 1909. Images had been removed from the precincts of the Harmandir Sahib in 1905. An issue that was particularly acute was the Tat Khalsa belief that the only proper identity for a loyal Sikh to adopt was that of the Khalsa. Others who called themselves Sikhs could be accepted as members of the Panth only on the understanding that they were working towards being full members of the Khalsa. By contrast, the Sanatan Sikhs accepted a variety of identities.

Some of the observations made by W.H. McLeod reflect his reading of Harjot Oberoi's *Construction of Religious Boundaries* in which the author discusses among other things the question of 'Sikh'

identity during the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[23] According to Oberoi, the early Sikh tradition did not show much concern for establishing distinct religious boundaries. The rise of the Khalsa in the eighteenth century brought about this 'dramatic change'. Nevertheless, 'most of the Sikhs moved in and out of multiple identities grounded in local, regional, religious and secular loyalties'. Oberoi focuses on the heterogeneity in religious beliefs, rituals and lifestyles of the Sikhs to suggest that religious identities were highly blurred and several competing definitions of who constituted a Sikh were possible. In his understanding Sikhism was not in a 'state of decline' after the British annexation of the Punjab. The decline that was referred to was actually the prevalence of Sanatan Sikhism. The numbers of the Sikhs did not decline either; all this was a myth created by the British and perpetuated by the Tat Khalsa.

According to Oberoi, the British wanted to bring about reform but, as they did not want to be seen as interfering in the indigenous affairs, they encouraged the Punjabis themselves to undertake reform. This led to the formation of the Anjuman-i Punjab in 1865 which had a great impact on Sikh society. In this general atmosphere of reform, the Singh Sabha at Amritsar was founded on the declared intention of a few Sikh students to convert to Christianity. Oberoi looks upon the leaders of the Singh Sabha established at Amritsar as representatives of the Sanatan Sikh tradition.

'Sanatan' Sikhism according to him was primarily a 'priestly' religion and although Sikh tradition did not give primacy to 'religious specialists' but the religious establishment made up of guru lineages came into existence since a formal initiation was required and the role of *guru* was important. The Sanatanists 'recognized the existence of several traditions within the Sikh Panth and accepted multiple sources of authority'. All this was brought to an end by the Singh Sabha founded at Lahore in 1879. With this Singh Sabha emerged a new kind

of leadership, referred to by Oberoi as the new elites. These elites were new not in their social origin but in their functions and in using new instruments of transmission. They exercised domination through anglo-vernacular education and print culture. The Tat Khalsa saw ample signs of 'decline' in the 'carnivalesque Sanatan Tradition' which for Oberoi was an example of the strength and richness as well as the actual state of the nineteenth century Sikh religious tradition. In the Tat Khalsa view precedence was given the *Granth Sahib* as the rightful heir to the ten Gurus, replacing all other sacred texts – 'the Vedas, the Gita, the Puranas and even the Dasam Granth'. In the 1880s the Tat Khalsa began to 'reconstitute sacred space' by three measures: campaigns against the seasonal fairs held in the precincts of Sikh shrines; the removal of non-Sikh icons from the Sikh sacred centres; and a strident call for the reform of temple management. The Tat Khalsa also changed the equilibrium between Khalsa and non-Khalsa appearance by rigidly enforcing external symbols and codifying life-cycle rituals, consolidating the Rahitnama tradition. Oberoi argues that the Tat Khalsa created a rupture with the earlier 'Sanatan' tradition to 'recast Sikh tradition and purge it of diversity'.

The 'sudden and striking' growth in the number of Singh Sabhas in the 1880's happened due to the 'revolution in communications, the commercialization of the rural economy, the rise of new market towns and trading networks, the decline of traditional cultural mediators, the rise of new elites, the creation of print culture, and a radically changed system of education'. The Sabhas initially gave expression to the cultural aspirations of the evolving class. The 'Tat Khalsa' succeeded in 'formulating new doctrines' of what Sikhism ought to represent because they were aided both by fundamental changes in Punjabi society under colonial rule and by their own initiative, organization and appropriation of resources.

Oberoi's work is impressive but not free from limitations, both conceptual and methodological. He ignores the historical development of Sikhism and the relevance of the Sikh past for their self-identification under the British. He also ignores the bearing of the political and cultural context of British rule on the Sikhs.

The early decades of the twentieth century are covered by Joginder Singh in *The Sikh Resurgence* in terms of the demography and socio-cultural and political responses of the Sikhs to the framework of the British government and nationalist politics.[24] He gives figures which support a phenomenal increase in the number of the Sikhs. In 1911 the Sikhs were given the opportunity to record their identity as they desired, resulting in an increase of 37 per cent against a general decrease of 2.3 per cent in the total population. Further details are given on the occupations of the Sikhs with the agriculturists forming a large part of the Sikh population. Joginder Singh concludes that the social history of the Sikhs under colonial rule was marked by the emergence of the middle class with a well marked cultural identity which was accompanied by a new ideology, and this ideology increasingly became the basis of political orientation.

The foundation of a distinct Sikh entity was laid down by the Singh Sabhas, Diwans and Central Diwans. The formation of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902 marked the second phase in the development of a communitarian consciousness among the Sikhs. For carrying forward the movement, the Chief Khalsa Diwan depended largely on the writings of Bhai Kahn Singh, Khazan Singh, Bhagat Lakshman Singh, Bhai Jodh Singh and Bhai Vir Singh. In the early twentieth century the Tat Khalsa efforts to build a 'cohesive community' were based on their claim to have their distinct religion, history and language, historical shrines and a large number of educational institutions and the press. Further steps to establish their independent political existence were taken by the Sikh intellectuals. This stage was

likely to arise due to the colonial official's policy of institutionalizing communal politics by encouraging and patronizing the communal deputations, memorials and petitions.

Joginder Singh has identified and examined the social background of nearly three hundred prominent Sikh leaders and activists in his *Sikh Leadership*.[25] A study of the background and socio-political perceptions of the leader suggests no single paradigm for their joining either the Singh Sabha, the Diwans or the Akali movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The biographies of the prominent founders of the Singh Sabhas throw some light on the movement. Sardar Thakur Singh Sandhanwalia, Baba Khem Singh Bedi, Gyani Gyan Singh and Bhai Gurmukh Singh were the original leaders of the Amritsar Singh Sabha. However, within a decade of its inception, the functioning of the Singh Sabha was arrested by the divergent views of its representatives. Two groups came up. One of these was that of the landed aristocrats, *mahants* and *pujaris,* represented by Kanwar Bikram Singh of Kapurthala. They were interested in maintaining their position and possession of the Sikh shrines intact. The other comprised those Sikhs who were 'enlightened' by Western education and belonged to the middle class. Prominent among them were Bhai Gurmukh Singh and Bhai Jawahar Singh. They were keen to introduce reforms according to the teachings of the Gurus. They brought into existence the Lahore Singh Sabha in 1879.

These two organizations continued to clash with each other over the existing socio-religious practices. They clashed on the rights of the untouchables to worship in the *gurdwaras*. The leaders of the Amritsar Sabha sided with the priests of the Golden Temple who allowed the untouchables to enter only at specific hours while the Lahore Sabha was opposed to this. The leaders of the Lahore Singh Sabha were

excommunicated for their radical views. Despite the efforts made by the leaders of the two Singh Sabhas to resolve their differences, especially in view of Arya hostility, nothing concrete was achieved due to their fundamental differences.

By the turn of the twentieth century a new leadership came into existence: Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia, Bhai Arjun Singh Bagrian, Sodhi Sujan Singh, Sardar Dharam Singh, Bhai Jodh Singh and Sardar Tirlochan Singh. They felt that no results could be achieved due to the divisions among the Sikhs and the Chief Khalsa Diwan came into existence in 1902. The importance of Western education was realized and the help of the colonial officials was sought. In 1908 the Sikh Educational Conference was formed, and held its session every year. The Chief Khalsa Diwan encouraged the founding of educational institutions, orphanages and boarding houses. To espouse communitarian and nationalist concerns, a large number of newspapers and periodicals were started. The Chief Khalsa Diwan remained the major representative body of the Sikhs till 1919.

V

Social transformation among the Sikhs was not on the agenda of N.G. Barrier. It was taken up by Tom G. Kessinger in his *Vilyatpur 1848-1968*, for studying social and economic change in a North Indian Sikh village.[26] He was one of the first few scholars to study the Sikhs under colonial rule. He approached the study from the point of view of a social scientist, with his focus on the ordinary people of a village in Jalandhar. He made use of source materials like diaries, revenue records and personal papers to reconstruct change among the people of 'Vilayatpur'. His work has insights for social change in the rural Punjab, especially the Sikhs.

Ethne K. Marenco published a monograph on transformation of Sikh society in 1976, treating castes and classes as her key concepts.[27] She has studied the emergence of classes among the

Sikhs through occupational change. It is important to point out that some of her basic assumptions appear to reduce the value of her study. She looks upon the Sikhs as 'a sect of Hinduism' and assumes that castes were normatively a part of the Sikh social order. This is a gross oversimplification. The caste background among the Sikhs was relevant for their social attitudes but there was no caste 'system'. Marenco's understanding of the corporate caste mobility among the Ramgarhias is faulty due to her erroneous understanding of the rise of the Sikh Misls during the late eighteenth century. In fact, depending mostly on the census data, Marenco has paid little attention to the evidence available in Punjabi and Persian sources for the Sikh social order during the early nineteenth century.

Marenco sees a tendency among the Sikhs in the period between 1891 and 1901 to abandon the sects and join religious associations. The Singh Sabha and the Khalsa Sodhi-Bans are seen by her as two important associations. The Singh Sabha taught the Sikh faith along with the idea that the Sikhs must be a separate religious and political group. The Khalsa Sodhi-Bans was a reforming society which had a special appeal for the lower castes of Hinduism, since it permitted converts to leave their previous caste and join the Sodhi (Khatri) family of Guru Gobind Singh. She also mentions the Kukas as a movement for religious revival. According to Marenco , this was a familiar caste mechanism by which the lower Hindu castes(the Sikhs are included in the Hindus for her purpose here) elevated themselves in the hierarchy.

Marenco states that 'the various Sikh religious movements were often directed at changing the lot of the Sikh untouchables'. Cited as example are the 'Tat Khalsa or Khalsa Sodhi-Bans' who tried to disregard the restrictions of caste and interdining, and aimed at establishing brotherhood amongst the Sikhs. The title used by them was that of the 'Khalsa' and in the Census of 1911, many Sikhs were

listed 'as though they belonged to the Khalsa caste'. This according to Marenco was a way of adopting a new caste and, by inference, a higher status in society.

According to Marenco, the Keshdhari Sikhs had become hypergamous. They would marry the daughter of a Sahajdhari of the same original caste but would not give him their daughters in marriage. Among these new converts were the Khatri and Arora traders, the Mahtam and Saini agriculturists, the Chhimba artisans, and the Jhiwar and Labana menials. These Sikh castes, after becoming Keshdhari Sikhs, considered themselves above their Hindu caste brothers.

Marenco's work does not address the developments that were taking place in the period of our study as her focus is entirely on the social stratification among the Sikhs with special reference to the coexistence of caste and class. She is of the opinion that the major reason for conversion to Sikhism, which she holds responsible for the increase in the numbers of the Sikhs in the late nineteenth century, was the aim of the converts to move higher in the caste hierarchy and to get jobs in the British army and the various branches of government service for which the Sikhs were preferred.

The Sikhs of the Punjab by J.S. Grewal published as a volume of the *New Cambridge History of India* contains a statement on social transformation within the Sikh community which, though brief, is quite comprehensive in terms of its scope.[28] In the chapter entitled 'Recession and Resurgence 1849-1919', he refers to the changing numbers and composition of the Sikhs, with implications for horizontal stratification through occupational mobility and vertical differentiation due to the rise of new movements as well as the legacy of the Sikh past.

From the viewpoint of Sikh resurgence, this period saw a tremendous increase in the number of the Sikhs from less than 2

million in 1881 to over 4 million in 1931, raising the percentage in the total population of the province from about 8 to over 13. This increase was also visible in the proportion of Keshdhari Sikhs in the Sikh population, while a fall was witnessed in the Sahajdhari population. The rise in the number of the Sikhs during this period could not be attributed to conversions, preference in Government Departments and the propagation of reform alone. Many more were affected by the growing consciousness of a distinct identity.

To make the point clear, Grewal move on to religious ferment already in evidence at the time of the annexation of the Punjab by the British. The work of the Nirankaris and the Namdharis, broadly outlined in the chapter, was carried forward by the Singh Sabha movement. 'A new conciousness of common identity was imparted by common concerns and a kindred outlook on the world in spite of rivalries due to differences in the social background of the leaders, their image of the past or their vision of the future.' This socio-religious ferment became the basis of politics.

J.S. Grewal talks of socio-cultural change for an adequate understanding of politics in an article entitled 'Cultural Reorientation in Modern India.' [29] The contact with modern Europe brought about a change not only in politics and economy but also in the sphere of social structure and intellectual and emotional culture. Grewal seeks to illustrate this with reference to literature and religion, generally looked upon as the most important indices of socio-cultural change.

The Nirankari and Namdhari movements, both of which had a close bearing on Sikh identity, originated before the advent of the British in the Punjab but acquired a new importance and significance in the context of colonial rule. The Nirankaris represented the Sahajdhari position at its best. Emphasis was laid on the *Adi Granth* as the source of religious and social life of the Sikhs. Peculiarly Sikh ceremonies for birth, marriage and death were adopted, and

Brahmans were made dispensable. They began to regard the Nirankari founder and his successors as gurus, which made it 'unorthodox' from the Khalsa point of view.

The Namdhari movement under Baba Ram Singh began to give importance to Singh identity though it had begun as a Sahajdhari reform movement. When he took up the cause of cow protection, the movement acquired an anti-British character due to the action of his followers against the butchers. The Baba expected the expulsion of the British and the establishment of Sikh rule as a millenarian hope. With the belief of his followers that he was the successor of Guru Gobind Singh and the narrowing down of his following to a particular caste group, their position became that of a sect within Sikhism.

These movements were overshadowed by the Singh Sabha movement. The leaders of the Singh Sabhas were the ideological successors of the Singhs of the eighteenth century but they accepted Western science, technology and secular knowledge that the West had to offer. At the same time they were not ready to discard their cultural heritage, especially their religion in the face of secular values. Their consciousness of a distinct identity was also sharpened by the emergence of socio-religious reform among Hindus and Muslims of the Punjab. The debate whether or not the Sikhs were Hindu was a phenomenon of the colonial period when 'Hinduism' came to have a new connotation. The middle class that had come into existence due to the policies and institutions of the British aspired for jobs, wealth and power with its growing importance. The British thought in terms of religious communities and professed to be impartial towards all. This encouraged these communities to think in communitarian terms. At the same time the presence and success of Christian missionaries provoked a strong reaction which expressed itself, among other things, in movements for socio-religious reform within these religious communities, imparting a new dimension to communitarian

consciousness and an almost new cultural orientation.

J.S. Grewal has analysed the views of four scholars – Daljeet Singh, W.H. McLeod, Harjot Oberoi and Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon – on the question of Sikh identity.[30] He points out that the issue is complex and requires taking into account objective realities and subjective self-image in relation to the 'others' in a given historical situation. As a product of these variables identity cannot be static or 'fixed' nor can there be 'homogeneity' among all members of the community sharing a consciousness of distinction from others. The debate about Sikh Identity is a part of the larger debate in Sikh studies which has been discussed by the author in another volume.[31]

More recently, J.S. Grewal has written on the themes of martyrdom, caste and gender in the early Sikh tradition.[32] Louis Fenech has published a book entitled *Martyrdom In The Sikh Tradition: Playing the 'Game of Love'*, exploring the theme of martyrdom and the role of martyrs in Sikh religious and political history from the earliest times till 1925.[33] For our purpose, his analysis of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Sikh literature is more relevant as also of the tracts and newspapers produced under the auspices of the late nineteenth-century Singh Sabha 'reform' movement in order to understand the reasons why the themes of sacrifice and martyrdom came to dominate Sikh imagination in the early twentieth century and how they continue to play such a vital role in the Sikh community today. According to Fenech, martyrdom became an integral feature of the Tat Khalsa interpretation of Sikh tradition because this theme emphasized those elements which the Singh Sabha admired most in the Khalsa Sikhs of the past. The Singh Sabha succedded in generating a rhetoric of martyrdom.

Anshu Malhotra has paid some attention to the gender relations among the middle class composed of high caste Hindus and Sikhs in the colonial context of the 1870s to the 1920s in the Punjab.[34] She

tries to show how the 'high castes' themselves regrouped as a caste and a class, and how such social processes translated themselves into women's lives. An analysis of the writings of the Singh Sabha on the desired reforms for women, and on the roles they were expected to fulfil, shows how control over women's sexuality and reproductivity was central to maintaining social privilege. Like the Arya Samaj, the Singh Sabhas echoed the ideal of a *pativrata* wife for women. This is illustrated with reference to the three early novels of Bhai Vir Singh, namely *Sundari*, *Bijai Singh* and *Satwant Kaur*.

Doris R. Jakobsh has examined gender construction in two phases of Sikh history which were 'important moments in terms of Sikh identity formation, both political and religious'.[35] The first is the Guru period and the second extends from the annexation of the Punjab to the time of the Singh Sabha movement. This study is based on the gender constructs developed in the Victorian era in Britain, which informed and moulded the British administration in the Punjab. Also taken into account is the process of active gender construction through Singh Sabha educational and religious initiatives that were shaped by Victorian gender ideals, as well as the 'purified' adaptation of Sikh ideology.

Looking at the women who were most active during the time of the Singh Sabha reform movement, Jakobsh asks why these women vigorously promoted the male ideology which in actual fact constrained them and even diminished many choices which could otherwise have been viewed as normative. Jakobsh comes to the conclusion that they did so in order to be accepted within the existing system which professed women's reform as its objective. With the reforms initiated by their male counterparts, and due to attempts to displace un-Sikh elements during ritual or other ceremonial occasions, highly significant and novel roles came the way of Sikh women. They could undergo the rite of initiation and the Sikh educational conference provided them with an opportunity to be a part of the Sikh social and political arena.

VI

The foregoing review of existing literature indicates its wide range and the aspects of Sikh history it covers. This review is generally descriptive so that the main content is made clear. Comments have been offered only where it appeared to be necessary. The major aspects e covered by this literature are the movements for socio-religious reform, political activities of the Sikhs from 1849 to 1919, social change that came about among the Sikhs during this period, the issues of caste and gender and the tradition of martyrdom. All these aspects relate in one way or another to the subject of social transformation among the Sikhs. However, no single volume deals with all these aspects. The most comprehensive statement is found in *The Sikhs of the Punjab.* But even in this volume there is no discussion of politics, caste, gender and martyrdom. Thus, there is no article or monograph with a focus on the subject of the present thesis.

The present work covers all the aspects of transformation among the Sikhs. The census reports upto 1901 are thoroughly analysed for a general picture of Sikh community during the late nineteenth century. The reports of 1911, 1921 and 1931 are analysed to focus on demographic change in the early decades of the twentieth century. The beliefs and practices of the Sikhs during the period are discussed in relation to their position in the early nineteenth century. The issue of Sikh identity and the reasons for its sudden prominence in the colonial period, as also the changes in the Sikh society of the period due to the work of the Singh Sabha movement and the resulting social and communitarian awareness in the Sikh community, are discussed in detail in a separate chapter. The political articulation of the Sikhs is also the subject of a whole chapter. On the whole, thus, social transformation among the Sikhs from 1849 to 1919 has been presented in a most comprehensive manner in this thesis.

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Chapter 2

SIKHS IN THE EARLY CENSUS REPORTS

The main focus of this chapter is on the presentation of the Sikhs in the census reports during the first five or six decades of colonial rule in the Punjab and its princely states. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is concerned with the numbers of the Sikhs and their distribution; demographic characteristics like gender, age and literacy; castes and occupations. The second section addresses the same concerns in the princely states and the third section deals with the definition of the Sikhs in the census reports and the issue of religious identity. Put together, the census reports provide a dynamic image of the Sikhs, with some glimpses of sociocultural change among them. The limitations of the data embodied in the census reports also get revealed in the process.

The area of British Punjab did not remain uniform during the period of British rule. The total area in 1855 was 81,625 square miles. It increased to 101,829 square miles in 1868 mainly due to the addition of the Delhi and Hissar Divisions. In 1881, the area was 106,632 square miles. There was no appreciable change in area in 1891. In 1901, however, the North West Frontier Province was created, largely with the territories of the Punjab beyond the Indus.[1] These territorial changes did affect the percentage of the Sikhs in the total population, but not to any significant extent.

The total number of Sikhs in the Punjab in 1868 was 1,144,090 in a total population of 17,611,498, constituting 6.5 per cent of the population. In 1881, the Sikhs numbered 1,716,114 in a total population of 22,712,120, amounting to 7.5 per cent of the population in the province. The percentage was 7.44 in 1891 when the Sikhs numbered 1,870,481 in a total population of 25,130,127. In 1901, the

total population of the Punjab was 26,880,217 and the number of Sikhs was 2,130,987, accounting for 13.9 per cent of the total population.

Table 1

PERCENTAGE OF SIKH POPULATION (1868-1901)

Year	Total Population	Sikh Population	Percentage
1868	17,611,498	1,144,090	6.50
1881	22,712,120	1,716,114	7.50
1891	25,130,127	1,870,481	7.44
1901	26,880,217	2,130,987	13.90

It was observed that Sikhism seemed to have made a marked advance since 1891 possibly at the expense of the Hindus who showed an increase of only 2.4 per cent. In 1911, when there was a decline in the total population of the province, the Sikh population shot up to 2,883,729, registering an extraordinary increase of 37 per cent.[2] This sudden spurt was due largely to the change introduced for the identification of Sikhs. Consequently, the figures of 1911 are more comparable with the figures of the later census reports and, therefore, taken up in the next chapter.

The territory of the British Punjab was divided into districts for administrative purposes, with a certain number of districts constituting a division. The data in 1868 and 1881 were arranged according to districts and divisions. In 1891, however, no statistics were compiled for divisions because they were not required in actual official work. The districts and states of the province were classified into five tracts: the hill tract, the sub-montane and. central tract, the eastern plains, the western plains, and the Salt Range tract. In 1901, a scheme of

natural divisions was formulated and the province was divided into four such divisions: the Himalayan, the Sub-Himalayan, the Indo-Gangetic plain east, and the north-west dry area. The district remained the primary unit for the compilation of statistics. In 1881, the British territory was covered by 32 districts grouped into 10 divisions. After the creation of the North West Frontier Province in 1901, there were 27 districts.[3]

The largest numbers of Sikhs in 1868 were living in four divisions.[4]

Table 2

SIKHS IN FOUR DIVISIONS IN 1868

Division	Percentage	Number
Amritsar	12.80	352,885
Lahore	22.00	318,666
Jalandhar	8.00	197,894
Ambala	9.21	152,263

The highest percentage of Sikhs at this time was in the five central districts. [5]

Table 3

SIKHS IN CENTRAL DISTRICTS IN 1868

District	Percentage	Number
Ferozepur	29	1,60,484
Amritsar	24	2,62,369
Ludhiana	16	95,413
Lahore	15	1,19,268
Jalandhar	14	1,20,167

On the frontier, the percentage of Sikhs was less than 1, The Delhi and Hissar Divisions also had a low percentage, with the exception of the, Sirsa district which had 10.2 per cent Sikhs.[6]

In 1881, the districts of Amritsar, Ferozepur and Ludhiana had Sikhs ranging from 23 to 27 per cent of the total population, followed by the district of Lahore with 17 per cent. In Jalandhar and Sirsa, the percentage of Sikhs was 12 to 13; in Ambala, Gurdaspur, Hoshiarpur and Gujranwala, it was 6 to 7. The district of Sialkot had 4 per cent Sikhs in its population. In all other districts, the Sikhs formed less than 3 per cent of the rural population. The Lahore and Amritsar Divisions accounted for 38 per cent of the Sikhs in the Punjab and for 58 per cent of the Sikhs in the British districts. Another 31 per cent of the Sikhs were in the Ambala and Jalandhar Divisions. [7]

In 1891, two districts had more than 200,000 Sikhs: Amritsar (261,452) and Ferozepur (226,361). Three districts had more than 100,000 Sikhs: Lahore (152,023), Ludhiana (141,603), and Jalandhar (110,790). Three districts had more than 50,000 Sikhs: Ambala (93,670), Gurdaspur (85,837), and Hoshiarpur (70,709), while Sialkot had only a little less than 50,000 and Gujranwala more than 45,000. In the districts of Rawalpindi, Hissar, Gujrat, Montgomery and Jhelum the number of Sikhs was between 30,000 and 15,000. Their smallest number was in the districts of Rohtak, Gurgaon and Delhi.[8]

By 1901, the Sikh population was increasing in all those districts which had a large number of Sikhs, with the exception of Ambala.[9]

Table 4

VARIATION IN PERCENTAGE OF SIKHS 1891–1901

District or State	Number	Percentage of Variation (+ or –)
Amritsar	264,325	+1.1
Ferozepur	228,355	+9.0
Ludhiana	164,919	+16.5
Lahore	159,701	+5.1
Jalandhar	125,817	+14.5
Gurdaspur	91,750	+6.9
Hoshiarpur	71,126	+0.6
Ambala	58,073	–33.8
Faridkot	52,721	+11.8
Sialkot	50,942	+2.2
Kapurthala	42,101	+6.6

Significantly, the district of Jhang came to have a Sikh population of 67,719, witnessing an increase of over 1626 per cent. This was due to colonization in the lower Rachna Doab. Even in Gujranwala, the Sikh population increased by nearly 59 per cent due mainly to the same reason.[10] Thus, in all the central districts of the province Sikh population was on the increase and it was spilling over into the new canal colonies. Incidentally, there is no information in the census reports on Sikh migration as such.

Only a small proportion of Sikhs lived in towns and cities. In 1881, the Sikhs were seen as 'almost wholly rustic'. In a number of districts the percentage of urban Sikhs ranged from 10 to 5: as in Amritsar, Sialkot, Jalandhar, Gujranwala, Lahore, Hoshiarpur, Gurdaspur, Ambala and Ferozepur. In Ludhiana, the percentage of urban Sikhs was less than 3. In some other districts, which had only a small Sikh population, the percentage of urban Sikhs was the highest, ranging between 75 and 50: Bannu, Kohat, Peshawar, Dera Ghazi Khan and Dera Ismail Khan. Even in Hazara, the urban Sikhs accounted for 24.5 per cent of the Sikh population. In 1891, only 6.9 per cent of the Sikhs lived in the towns and cities of the British Punjab.[11] It may be added that the growth of urban population in the province as a whole was rather slow in the late nineteenth century due to a simultaneous process of de-urbanization.[12]

In 1868, the number of males above 12 years in the Sikh population was 431,819 and of females 322,278, giving the ratio of 57.26 per cent males to 42.74 per cent females. This disproportion was peculiar to the Sikhs who had the largest excess of males as also the greatest paucity of females. Female infanticide was thought to be the main reason for this disproportion between the sexes among the Sikhs. In 1881, the number of females per 1,000 males among the Sikhs was 765, while for the province as a whole, the number of females per thousand males was 843. Ibbetson suggested in 1881 that the exceptionally high disproportion between the sexes among the Sikhs was not only because of female infanticide but also due to early marriages. Female infanticide was not 'practised generally'; it was not habitual with any class, except some sections of the community, like the Bedis; an intentional neglect of the girl child, rather than actual murder, was the cause of deaths. In 1891, the number of females among the Sikhs was still much less than for any other community, the Sikh males being 783,682 and the Sikh females being 606,252. The districts in which the proportion of female children was the smallest

among the Sikhs were the districts in which the Sikhs had the largest numbers: Amritsar, Lahore, Ferozepur, Ludhiana, Jalandhar and Gujranwala. In the 1850s it was thought that the chief offenders of female infanticide were the Khatri Sikhs, especially the Bedis. In the early 1860s, when an enquiry was made in Jalandhar, the Jat Sikhs were also suspected of this offence. It seemed most probable in 1891 that 'the Sikhs as a whole are more careless of their female children than persons of other faiths'.[13]

In 1901, the number of Sikh females for 1,000 Sikh males was 766. One cause for the low proportion of females given by E.D. Maclagan in 1891 was that unlike the male infant, the female infant was returned as Hindu. However, H.A. Rose found in 1901 that the number of such cases was very small and this factor could not account for the disproportion. The number of females among the Sikhs was appreciably smaller than that of the males in almost all age-groups, and in all the four natural divisions.[14]

According to Rose, female infanticide was condemned in the Sikh scripture as the greatest of the four deadly sins. Sikhism had undoubtedly raised and not lowered the position of women. 'It would in truth be safer to say that female infanticide, if it exists, is practised by the Sikhs in direct contravention of their religion, for everything in Sikhism leads, or ought to lead, to its absolute avoidance.' The Sikhs, therefore, remained an 'unsolved puzzle' for Rose. The small proportion of females among them was not due to their 'religious dogmas'. 'Several causes, both social and economic, combined to render female life more precarious than the male, and these causes operated with greater force in some sections of the community than in others'.[15]

Among the various 'caste' categories of the Sikhs the number of females per 1.000 males in 1901 ranged from 703 to 879.[16] Figures for the same category are not available in previous census.

Table 5

FEMALES PER 1,000 MALES AMONG SIKH CASTES IN 1901

Caste	Females per 1,000 males
Mazhabi	703
Rajput	712
Jat	751
Khatri	766
Arora	790
Bhatia	807
Chuhra	815
Mahtam	824
Labana	879

In 1868, figures were given for only three age groups among the Sikhs, for both males and females: adults (above 18), youths (12 to 18), and children (below 12).

Table 6

SIKH MALES AND FEMALES IN THREE AGE GROUPS IN 1868

Age Group	Males	Females
Adults	432,667	293,024
Youth	219,180	170,813
Children	49,152	29,254

It was pointed out, however, that these figures were not exact, especially for the youth. Many marriageable females were returned as adults or children.[17]

In 1901, figures were given for both males and females in four age groups: below 10,10 and under 15,15 and under 20, and 20 and above. [18]

Table 7

SIKH MALES AND FEMALES IN FOUR AGE GROUPS IN 1901

Age group	Total number	Males	Females
0 and under 10	499,937	284,482	215,455
10 and under 15	239,941	144,144	95,797
15 and under 20	197,501	117,988	79,513
20 and above	1,165,517	635,682	529,835

The details for the age distribution of the mates and females among the Sikhs, and for the total population for the Punjab per 10,000 of both the sexes, were also given. [19]

No information was provided on literacy among the Sikhs in 1868. It was observed in 1881 that where the Sikhs were small in numbers, many of them were 'educated Khatris'. Only about 5.82 per cent of the Sikh males were educated. The percentage of the literates in the total male population in the province was only slightly higher, being 6.10 per cent. The largest proportion of educated Sikhs, 82 per cent in fact, were in schools run by the government. In female education, however, the Sikhs had the second highest figure for both the rural and the total population. [20]

In 1891, each person was recorded as (a) learning, that is, under instruction, (b) literate, able to read and write, and (c) illiterate. The figures showed a considerable increase in the proportion of Sikh learners and Sikh literates, from 111 to 471 in the first category and from 135 to 784 in the second for every 10,000 Sikhs. However, the proportion of literates in various ages indicated a falling-off in the rate of education. The proportion or literate Sikhs to the total literate population was 10.4 per cent, while the percentage of Sikh learners was 8.2. Possibly, the Sikh boys learning Gurmukhi were not enumerated. The Sikh element was the best educated in the classes which contained a large proportion of Sikhs, like the Jats, Tarkhans and Kalals. [21]

In 1901, literacy for English was separately tabulated. The number of Sikh literates in English was 5,141, out of whom only 23 were females. The total number of literate Sikhs was 91,313, out of which. 7,252 were females. The number of literates appeared to be underestimated, especially in the case of popular scripts, which included Gurmukhi, and school-going ages. Women too were not correctly estimated in terms of literacy. Among the Sikh adults (over 20), 1 in 10 were literate, but for all ages together 1 in 15 were literate. Literacy on the whole was on the increase among the Sikhs by the end of the nineteenth century. [22]

In 1868, occupations were classified as professional, domestic, commercial, agricultural, industrial, and independent or nonproductive. Figures in terms of religious communities were given only for agriculturists. Over 71 per cent of the Sikh population was agriculturist. Out of a total of 454,649 agriculturist Sikhs, 371,439 were proprietors and 83,210 were tenants. For every 100 proprietors, thus, there were 23 tenants. A large number of Sikhs were among the jagirdars of the province, numbering 56,000 in all. Apart from these three categories, there were labourers, shepherds, graziers, and herdsmen among the Sikhs. However, their total number was only

8,000. The largest number of Sikh proprietors were in the districts of Amritsar, Ferozepur, Jatandhar, Lahore, Ludhiana, Hoshiarpur, Ambala, Sialkot, Gurdaspur and Gujranwala ranging between 91,000 and 13,000, and amounting in all to 357,039. According to the census, the Sikhs did not follow industrial or commercial pursuit to the same extent as Hindus and Muslims. They were to be found in large numbers in the army, the police, and the priestly profession. [23]

The figures for occupations in 1881, according to Ibbetson, were the least satisfactory. The following categories of occupations were mentioned: administration and defence; agriculture (including land owners, tenants, joint cultivators, agricultural labourers, graziers); village menials (water carriers, workers in leather), scavengers, carpenters, blacksmiths and potters; workers in fabrics (wool workers, *pashm* workers, cotton cleaners, cotton weavers, dyers and drapers); workers in food (oilmen, milk sellers, grocers and confectioners); industrial class (bricklayers, goldsmiths, workers in brass, and others); distributing class (grooms, domestic servants, priests, barbers, musicians and performers, beggars and faqirs). In 1891, occupations were divided into seven classes with further divisions: government services; pasture and agriculture; personal services; preparation and supply of material substance; commerce and transport and storage; professional, and indefinite and independent. [24] Separate figures for the Sikhs were not given for any category in 1881 and 1891.

In 1901, the census commissioner, H.A. Rose, expressed the opinion that the data on occupations was difficult to obtain in all countries and even more so in India. The enumeration was conducted by 'a half-educated agency' and the difficulty of obtaining accurate information was "well-nigh insuperable'. Rose held the view that the great occupational castes were not abandoning their hereditary functions. Generally speaking, the Jats had advanced in wealth and education. Among the artisans, the Tarkhans were rising to the status almost of a professional caste, as they acquired qualifications as engineers. The occupations were classified into eight groups, each

divided into sub-orders: government; pasture and agriculture; personal service; preparation and supply of material substance by hand; commerce and transport and storage; profession; unskilled labour; and independent. Subsidiary occupations were also recorded. The occupations recorded for women were mostly menial, personal, and household services. Preparation of food and drink, light and firing, dress and general labour, including earthwork, were the other occupations followed by women. How the Sikhs fared in all these occupations was nowhere indicated. [25]

Information on castes appeared to be more reliable, and more useful. In 1881, the castes were divided into three groups: land-owning and agricultural; religious, professional, mercantile and miscellaneous; and artisan castes. The first of these groups, which included the Baloches, Pathans, Jats and Raiputs, constituted half the population of the province and was considered to be more important than the others not only numerically hut also socially, administratively, and politically. [26] Figures for the Sikh 'castes' were given. [27]

Table 8

CASTEWISE SIKH POPULATION IN 1881

Caste	Number
Jats	1,126,861
Tarkhans	113,869
Chamars	100,310
Chuhras	45,834
Aroras	37,917
Khatris	37,521
Kambohs	29,910
Nais	21,500
Rajputs	17,761
Labanas	13,366
Kalals	8,931
Mahtams	8,366
Banias	3,334

Detailed figures for the Sikhs were given for each district of the Punjab. The Jats of the Sikh tract, who occupied the central districts,' were essentially husbandsmen, and were largely agriculturists. Among the major 'castes' of the Sikh Jats were Dhillon, Virk, Sandhu, Bhullar, Mann and Her. After the Jats the most common 'caste' among the Sikh cultivators was that of the Kambohs. They were found chiefly in the Sikh districts of the Punjab, Amritsar having the largest number of Kambohs, followed closely by Jalandhar. Sikh Khatris were the strongest in the central districts where Sikhism was most prevalent, though the percentage of Khatris who joined Sikhism was less than 10. They belonged to the mercantile 'castes'. Like the Khatris, the Aroras belonged to the mercantile 'castes' and were strongest in the districts of Lahore, Gujranwala and Ferozepur. The Tarkhans in the artisan 'castes' were in the largest proportion among the Sikhs in the districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Sialkot. A considerable proportion of the Sikh population on the Indus was composed of the Labanas who made ropes and worked in grass, and they were exclusively Sikh. Out of every 1,000 Sikhs 702 followed agriculture of whom 663 were Jats; 137 Sikhs belonged to the artisan castes as Tarkhans, Jhiwars, Nais, Lohars and Chhimbas; 96 of the Sikhs were menials and outcastes; 47 were Aroras and Khatris who belonged to the mercantile castes. Then there were others in smaller numbers. This was only a rough classification. [28]

Nevertheless, it was assumed for the census of 1891 that the list of castes in 1881 was nearly complete. All the large Sikh 'castes' showed increase in population. [29]

Table 9

CASTEWISE INCREASE IN 1891

Caste	Increase since 1881
Khatris	17,700
Aroras	22,185
Chamars	25,719
Tarkhans	29,203
Chuhras	65,366
Jats	56,632

The most remarkable increase was in the number of Chuhras, indicating 'a certain amount of real conversion'. The castes were divided into classes and further divided into groups, and the percentage of each 'caste' in Sikhs to the total males of all 'castes' in Sikhs was worked out.[30] More than 64 per cent of the Sikhs were agriculturists, more than 25 per cent were artisans and village menials, and less than 8 per cent carried out commercial pursuits. [31]

In 1901 it was made clear that the main object of the enquiries made on the subject of caste was to pave the way for the Ethnographic Survey which was in progress at that time. Rose expressed the view that caste was not a social unit and attempts to classify castes in order of their social precedence had failed. He suggested that all information on castes should be regarded as 'mere notes or queries, or rough material for investigations still to be made'.[32] Sikh 'castes' were identified and figures in each were given for males and females.[33] Among the Sikh Jats, figures were given for Sidhus, Sandhus, Gills, Dhillons, Dhariwals, Aulakhs and Bajwas. They belonged to the Majha and the Malwa areas. The Aroras were

strong in the south western Punjab and the Khatris in the central districts and in Rawalpindi, Jhelum, Gujrat, Shahpur and Hazara. Important among the Khatris were Bedis, Kapurs and Malhotras. The Labanas belonged to the south western districts and the Mahtams were in the Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur districts. [34]

II

More than thirty princely states were linked with the Punjab province for political and administrative purposes. A few of them were ruled by Sikh Chiefs and contained a substantial number of Sikhs. The area of the princely states remained the same from 1881 to 1901, covering 35,187 square miles, that is, about one-third of the area of the province. The dominions of the chiefs varied in size. Bahawalpur had an area of 15,000 square miles with a population of 600,000; Patiala had an area of 6,000 square miles with a population of 1,500,000. All the other states were far smaller in size. In 1901 the number of states was 34. [35]

The total population of the states in 1881 was 3,861,683, with the Sikhs numbering 595,110, that is, 15.41 per cent. In 1891 the total population was 4,263,280 persons, constituting one-sixth of the population of the Punjab. The Sikhs numbered 480,547, or 11.27 per cent. In 1901 the states had 4,424,398 persons, that is, less than one-fifth of the population of the Punjab. The Sikhs were 585,877, or 13.24 per cent. [36]

The Sikh element was the strongest in the states of Malerkotla, Faridkot, Patiala and Nabha. In 1881, the Sikhs formed 30 per cent of the population in these states; Malerkotla had 57 per cent Sikhs in its population. [37] In 1891, Patiala had the highest population of Sikhs, that is, 285,348, while Nabha had 63,047 Sikhs. The number of Sikhs in Faridkot was 47,164; Kapurthala had 39,493 Sikhs and Malerkotla had only 7,625 Sikhs. Patiala saw a decrease of 122,793 Sikhs in 1891,

61,390 among the Jats and 14,572 among the Chuhras. The Sikhs in Malerkotla decreased by 21,307, the greater part of this decrease (16,314) being among the Jats. No serious explanation for this change was considered possible; it was attributed to the change in the definition of a Sikh and the unevenness of its application.[38] The number of Sikhs in 1901 was as follows;

Table 10

PERCENTAGE OF VARIATION IN SIKH POPULATION IN THE PRINCELY STATES 1891–1901

State	Total Sikhs 1901	Percentage of Variation (+ or –)
Patiala	355,649	+24.6
Nabha	78,361	+24.3
Jind	29,979	+99.6
Faridkot	52,721	+11.8
Kapurthala	42,101	+6.6
Malerkotla	10,495	+37.6
Bahawalpur	7,985	–40.1
Total	577,291	+21.9

The increase in the number of Sikhs in the Phulkian States, amounted to a fourth in Patiala and Nabha and to 100 per cent in Jind. According to Rose, the reason for the revival of Sikhism was due to the organization of the Imperial Service Troops as the recruits were 'induced' to take the *pahul* on enlistment. [39]

In 1881, only 6.14 per cent of the Sikhs in the princely states lived in towns. The percentage rose slightly in 1891 to 6.5. The percentages for individual states were as follows: [40]

Table 11

PERCENTAGE OF URBAN SIKHS IN THE STATES IN 1891

State	Percentage of Sikhs out of total population living in towns in 1891	Percentage of Sikhs living in towns out of the total population of the Sikhs
Nabha	2.2	9.9
Faridkot	2.6	6.2
Kapurthala	0.8	6.1
Patiala	1.0	5.6

The number of females per 1,000 males among Sikhs for the princely states in 1881 was 765; in the total population of the states their number was 828; in the British Punjab, it was 846; and in the province as a whole, 843. [41] In the census of 1891 the figures for males and females among the Sikhs were as follows: [42]

Table 12

SIKH MALES AND FEMALES IN BRITISH TERRITORY AND PRINCELY STATES IN 1891

Area	Total Sikh Population	Males	Females
British territory	1,389,934	783,682	606,252
Native States	480,547	268,533	212,014
Total	1,870,481	1,052,215	818,266

In all these decades, the figures for males and females among the Sikhs in the princely states differed little from the figures for the

Sikhs in the British territory. The figures for the states, however, showed a marginal increase in the number of Sikh females.

In 1901, only 1 in 44 were literate for all ages in the princely states and 1 in 30 among adults. Comparison with the returns for 1891 shows that literacy among the Sikhs in the states witnessed a small increase. [43]

Table 13

INCREASE OR DECREASE IN LITERACY AMONG THE SIKHS IN THE PRINCELY STATES IN 1891–1901

Area	Learning 1891	Literates 1891	Proportion of literates 1891	Total literates 1901	Increase of Decrease
Princely States	936	12,231	1 in 39	13,452	+1,221
Total	13,779	125,236	1 in 34	119,560	–5,676

For the population as a whole in the British territory, 1 in 10 knew English but the figure for the Sikhs was 1 in 20. The figures for the Sikh literates in English in the states were as follows: [44]

Table 14

LITERACY IN ENGLISH AMONG SIKH MALES AND FEMALES IN THE PRINCELY STATES IN 1901

Territory	Total Persons	Male	Female
States	748	736	12
Total	7,518	7,176	342

On the whole, information on the Sikhs in the states is much less detailed than on the Sikhs in the British Punjab. However, the

broad demographic trends appear to be similar. There is no information about the changing attitudes of the Sikhs in the princely states. This silence could he indicative of the slow pace of social and cultural change among the Sikhs in the states.

III

Writing in 1881, Ibbetson refers to two very different forms of Sikhism: 'the tolerant quietist doctrines of Nanak and the military propaganda of Govind Singh'. The followers of Guru Nanak were called 'Sikhs' and the followers of Guru Gobind Singh were called 'Govindi Sikhs'. But when the word Sikh was used in the late nineteenth century it referred to the latter. The vast majority of those who followed the tenets of Guru Nanak called themselves Hindus and returned themselves as such. However, the more educated among them would explain at tine same time that, though they were not Singhs, they were Sikhs. Ibbetson called them Nanakpanthis or Sahajdharis as distinct from the Singhs who were popularly equated with Sikhs. [45]

The Singhs were easily distinguishable due to 'the five ks' they were bound to carry about their persons: uncut hair (*kesh*) with unshaven beard, short drawers (*kachh*), the iron bangle (*kara*), comb {*kangha*), and steel knife (*khanda*). Another important marker of the Singh was baptism (*pahul*). For the purposes of the census, presumably only the Singhs were treated as Sikhs. Ibbetson explicitly states in fact that 'the Sikh is to be distinguished from the Hindu by little more but the five external signs, his abstinence from tobacco, and the reverence for the Granth'. [46] Almost certainly the Sikhs of the census of 1855 and 1868 were only the Singhs.

In 1891, the enumerators were clearly instructed that only the Sikhs 'who wear long hair and do not smoke' should be entered as Sikhs. Others who called themselves Sikhs should be entered as Hindus. E.D. Maclagan observed that the line between the Hindus and

the Sikhs was 'vague in the extreme'. A 'true Sikh' was a member of the Khalsa, a follower of the ordinances of Guru Gobind Singh. Such men were distinguished as 'Singhs' from the 'secondary class' of Sikhs. The 'practical test' of a Sikh, according to Maclagan, was to ascertain whether or not, calling himself a Sikh, he wore uncut hair and abstained from smoking. Thus, for him, the Singh was clearly a Sikh, the line was vague only between the 'secondary class' of Sikhs and Hindus. In the census of 1901, the rule defining a Sikh as one who wore the hair long and refrained from smoking was retained. [47]

However, even in 1891 the rule was not strictly followed. All the Nanakpanthis who returned their religion as Sikh were not necessarily *kesh*-wearing and non-smoking Sikhs. On the other hand there were persons of the category of Guru Gobind Singhi Sikhs who were returned as Hindus. Maclagan felt convinced that the Sikh figures of 1891 on the whole included a good proportion of non-Singhs. In 1901, H.A. Rose expressed the view that the official definition of the Sikh was 'almost universally ignored'. He suggested in fact that the definition should be abandoned, firstly because it excluded a certain number of the community from the returns of the Sikhs and, secondly, because the Sikhs themselves objected to this rule in nearly all the districts with a considerable number of Sikhs. Many a non-Singh was, thus, anxious to be returned as a Sikh. [48]

In 1911, the instruction given to the enumerators was that: 'A person who says he is a Sikh must not be entered as a Hindu because he does not wear the *kesh*. All persons professing to be followers of Guru Nanak or Guru Gobind Singh and calling themselves Sikhs should be entered as Sikhs.' The distinction between Singhs and Sahajdharis was to be made in a separate column. Thus, the Sikhs were not forcibly relegated to 'a particular faith'. The question of identity was not yet resolved for the administrators: 'whether or not, all persons now returned as Sikhs are other than Hindus, still remains to be solved'. In the eyes of the administrators, the Singhs were

distinguishable from Hindus (as well as Muslims and Christians); the Sahajdharis were not necessarily distinguished from Hindus. [49]

In the census reports of 1855 and 1868, no Sikh sects were mentioned. In 1881, only some 'recent sects' of the Sikhs were noted: the Kukas, the Nirankaris, and the Gulabdasis, All representing some concern for reform, only the Kukas had a considerable number of peasantry under its influence. They tried to revive some of the original doctrines of the Sikh faith. The Nirankaris were 'the purists' of Sikh religion. The Guiabdasis were said to consider pilgrimages and religious observances as a waste of time. [50]

The reports of 1891 and 1901 provide further information on these and some other 'recent sects'. The sect of the Kukas was found by one Balak Singh around 1846 'to break the power which the Brahmans had acquired over the Sikhs'. His successor, Ram Singh, preached that he was an *avtar* of Guru Gobind Singh. He wanted a 'speedy overthrow of the British power'. The Kuka outbreak occurred at Malerkotla in 1872. The Kukas called themselves Namdharis, wore the *sidha pag* and carried a necklace of woolen cords. They looked forward to 'the establishment of the Khalsa as a temporal dominion'. Their watchword was 'Sat Sri Akal'.[51] In 1901, the number of Sikhs who declared themselves openly to be Kukas was 10,331, mainly in the districts of Sialkot, Jalandhar, Gurdaspur, Amritsar and Ludhiana. 'Orthodox Sikhism' found the dispensing of *amrit* in separate vessels and the recognition of Ram Singh as the twelfth Guru 'objectionable'.[52]

The Nirankaris were a remarkable outcome of the doctrines of Guru Nanak in 'modern times'. Their number among the Sikhs in 1891 was 38,907. The founder of their sect was Bhai Dial Das, and Bhai Ratta, his successor in 1891. They held the *Adi Granth* as sacred. Marriages were performed by the circumambulation of the *Adi Granth*. A Granthi conducted the ceremony and the bride sat in public with

here face uncovered. Remarriage of widows was allowed. Hindu Dharmshastras were not followed and the services of Brahmans were dispensed with. The *Adi Granth* was installed at a *darbar* on the Lei stream. The slippers of Bhai Dial Das were also kept there and looked upon with special reverence. [53]

Somewhat similar to the Nirankaris were the Bhagat-panthis who did not observe the usual Hindu ceremonies at marriage or death; the *dharmsala* and the *Adi Granth* played a role in their ceremonies of marriage, betrothal, and funeral. Passages from the *Granth* were read for a few days after the death, and *karha Prasad* was distributed on the occasion of death as well as marriage. No rule of *chhut* (touch) forbade contact among castes. The sect strove after pure Sikhism and freedom from Brahmanical supremacy. The Bhagat-panthis made no pilgrimages, avoided idolatry, and performed no *shradh* for the dead. Daily worship was essential and it consisted of six recitations of the *Granth* at selected hours. The sect was returned from the Bannu district and Dera Ismail Khan tahsil. Aligned with the Bhagat-panthis were members of Sodhi bans who aimed at returning to the pure religion of Guru Nanak. More popular in the northwest, especially in the districts of Sialkot, Shahpur and Rawalpindi, this new movement had 2,000 followers. [54]

The Gulabdasi sect was founded by a Sikh Jat disciple of the Udasi Pritam Das. He compiled a scripture called 'Updes Bilas'. The philosophy of the Gulabdasis was thoroughly pantheistic: 'all that was visible in the Universe was God'. Their aim was gratification of the senses. There was no place for hypocrisy in their tenets. They wore white clothes and dressed like the Udasis or the Nirmalas. They were found mostly hi the Lahore and Jalandhar districts. Only 299 of them returned themselves as Sikhs, and they were despised by the other Sikhs. [55]

Apart from these 'recent sects', a number of sectarian groups

among the Sikhs were associated with the successors of Guru Nanak. In 1891, the number of Sikhs who returned themselves as the Sikhs of Guru Angad was 154. There were 75 others who returned their sect as Khadur Sahib; they were mainly from the Nakodar tahsil of the Jalandhar district.[56]

Associated with Guru Amar Das were the Niranjanis who worshipped God as Niranjan; they were found mostly in the districts of Amritsar and Jalandhar and in the Kapurthala State. They did not follow the ordinary burial customs of the Sikhs or Hindus, and did not immerse the bones of the dead in. the Ganga. They had special rites for marriage and did not revere the Brahmans. They had a Gurdwara of Baba Handal at Jandiala in the Amritsar district. Another disciple of Guru Amar Das was Gangu whose great grandson, Jawahir Singh, founded a shrine at Khatkar Kalan in the Jalandhar district. His followers in Ambala returned themselves as Sikhs but his followers in Hoshiarpur returned themselves as Hindus. Another leader of this sect was Mahi Bhagat or Mahisar. Yet another sect associated with Guru Amar Das was that or Bhai Lalu. [57]

Associated with Guru Ram Das were the sects of Bhai Bhoj Singh and the Ganibakhshi Sikhs, Far more important, however, were the Ramdasi Sikhs. The term Ramdasi applied to the followers of Guru Ram Das, and even to followers of all Gurus. It was also used to denote a *chamar* or *julaha* who had taken the Sikh form of baptism. In 1891, a little over 40,000 Sikhs returned themselves as Ramdasis. In 1901, they were only a little more than 20,000.[58]

The Jhiwars, who looked upon Baba Kalu or Kalu Kahar as the founder of their sect, regarded him as a disciple of Guru Arjan. They looked upon the *Granth* of Guru Gobind Singh with great respect; Kalu Kahar himself was a worshipper of Krishna and a devotee of Shiva. The Jhiwar *mahant* at Panjnangal, the main shrine of the sect, was ninth in line from him. A fairly large grant of revenue-free land was

attached to this shrine. There were three other shrines: one at Kiratpur, another at Panchat, and the third beyond Delhi. Apart from Jhiwars, other low-caste men were followers of this sect. In 1891, over 3,000 Sikhs returned themselves as its followers from Ambala district. Another seer associated with Guru Arjan was that of a carpenter named Lakhu, with 36 Sikhs among its followers. Yet another sect was that of Tilok Singh, a descendant from Bhai Salu who was a Sikh of Guru Arjan; 345 Sikhs returned themselves as its followers. They had a *dharmsala* in the city of Amritsar. The Sat Kartaris, associated with Guru Arjan, were like the Udasis but did not wear the *jattan* or smear themselves with ashes. Their clothes were dyed in madder. In 1891, only 84 Sikhs returned themselves as Sat Kartaris. There were 13 Sikhs who regarded themselves as the Sikhs of Guru Arjan.[59]

Associated with Guru Hargobind were the Bhais of Bagarian. And so were the Dhirmallis, with one of their chief stations at Chak Ramdas in the Shahpur district. A member of the Dhirmal family was Baba Badbhag Singh; his shrine was at Main, near Amb, in the Una *tahsil* of the Hoshiarpur district. The fair held there at the Holi and the Baisakhi was attended by large crowds from the Doaba, Malwa and the Majha tracts. The cult was the most widespread in the Jalandhar district.[60]

Associated with Guru Har Rai were the followers of Bhai Pheru, known also as Sangat Sahib. Counted often as Udasis, they had established a 'peripatetic akhara'. Another category of ascetics associated with Guru Har Rai were the Diwana Sadhs who took an excessive quantity of bhang and charas. They wore their hair uncut and necklaces of shells; on their turbans they wore a large peacock feather. They followed the *Adi Granth*. They were mainly returned from among the Jats and Chamars of the Jalandhar district, though the sect had its headquarters at Pirpind in the Malwa.[61]

Coming from the time of Guru Harkrishan were the followers of

his elder brother Ram Rai, who refused to recognize Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh. They followed a scripture introduced by Ram Rai as well as the *Adi Granth*. They laid stress on being Sikhs but they did not preserve the kes. They were expressly disclaimed by the Khalsa Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh. The Ram Raiyas were mainly agriculturists and labourers of the Malwa and Doaba tracts. In 1891, they numbered 27,122. Their number was reduced to 24,500 in 1901.[62]

Associated with Guru Tegh Bahadur were the Sewapanthis, the followers of Kanhaya Lal. They believed in the Adi Granth and abstained from meat, wine, tobacco, *bhang* and *charas*. They worked with their hands, chiefly twisting ropes and bed-cords. They were mainly Aroras and Khatris, and figured mainly in the Shahpur and Jhang districts. In the Amritsar district they were known as Adan Shahis, after the name of a disciple of Kanhaya. In 1891, only 27 Sikhs returned themselves as Sewapanthis. The number of persons who claimed to be the Sikhs of Guru Tegh Bahadur was 61.[63]

Among the adherents of Guru Gobind Singh, besides the Khalsa, were the followers of the sect of Baba Zorawar Singh in the Ambala district. A woman known as Mai Kangwali was the occupant of the gaddi of a sect founded by a Jat disciple of Guru Gobind Singh at Kang in the Hoshiarpur *tahsil*. The principles of this sect were close to those of Guru Nanak. The followers belonged mainly to Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur districts in 1891. The Akalis, also known as Nihangs, formed another sect associated with Guru Gobind Singh. They wore a dark blue or checked dress, with a peaked turban, surmounted with steel quoits, and retained the five Ks. Sometimes they wore a yellow turban underneath the blue one. They avoided Hindu rites in their wedding ceremonies. They consumed *bhang* rather immoderately. They met at the Akal Bunga in Amritsar, the Pir Sahib at Attock, and the shrines of Guru Gohind Singh at Patna and Abchal Nagar. Their chief home was at Kiratpur and the Gurdwara Anandpur Sahib at

Anandpur, the shrine *par excellence* of the Akalis. They took part in the 'Holi' fair there.

The Nirmalas too professed adherence to Guru Gobind Singh. They believed in the principles of Vedanta and many of the customs of the Shastras. They avoided meat and spirits. They wore the ochre-coloured dress of the Indian ascetics. Their uncut hair distinguished them from the Udasis. They were almost always celibate and lived in monasteries, and on offerings. They enjoyed a high reputation for morality and learning. In 1891, their principal *akhara* was at Hardwar and they had monasteries at Munak, Adamwal, and Alampur Kotia in the Hoshiarpur district. In the Ambala, Ferozepur and Amritsar districts, the Nirmalas returned themselves as Sikhs but in the Gurdaspur district as Hindus. The Akalis were especially bitter against the Nirmalas who, in 1891, were thought to be gradually returning to 'a pure form of orthodox Hinduism'. [64]

Apart from the categories or Sikhs enumerated in terms of their allegiance to a particular Guru, or a sect associated with a particular Guru, the descendants of the Gurus are mentioned as enjoying a respectable status among the Sikhs. The Bedis were held In great reverence by the Sikhs as having descended from Guru Nanak. Their leaders in 1891 were Baba Faqirta, Baba Mahtab Singh, and Baba Khem Singh Bedi, a descendant of Baba Sahib Singh Bedi of Una, who had a large following especially in the Jhelum, Rawalpindi and Peshawar districts. The Bedis lived mostly at Una in the Hoshiarpur district and at Dera Baba Nanak in the Gurdaspur district. The most famous of the Bedis were true Sikhs of the school of Guru Gobind Singh. The descendants of Guru Angad and Guru Amar Das, that is, the Tihun and the Bhalla families, were respected by the Sikhs. Far more influential, however, were the Sodhi descendants of Guru Ram Das. The Sikhs of Kohat and Tirah were largely followers of Sodhl Partap Singh of Lahore. The central stations of the Sodhis were in Kartarpur, Kiratpur, and Anandpur. The Sodhis of Kartarpur were

largely Dhlrmallis. The Sodhis of Anandpur were descended from Suraj Mat (a son of Guru Hargobind). They had nine shrines in Anandpur and made an appearance in their full glory at the time of the Holi festival. The Manji Sahibs at Anandpur and Kiratpur were worshipped. [65]

A number of persons who belonged to sects other than the Sikhs returned themselves as Sikhs. Among the worshippers of Bhairon in 1901, there were 26 Sikhs. The number of Sikhs who returned themselves as Durga Upasak or Devi Dharm was 7,493; the number of Shakat Sikhs was 482, and one belonged to the Koia-panth. The cult of the Devis was sought to be revived in the Kapurthala State around 1899 but the worship died out. Over 1,800 Sikhs returned themselves as the worshippers of Shiva from the Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar and Amhala districts. Only 8 Sikhs returned themselves as Sanyasis, mostly from Shahpur. The number of Sikhs who returned themselves in 1901 as belonging to the sect of Jogi Pir was 571; 86 Sikhs returned themselves as the followers of Gopi Chand, and 18 as the disciples of Gorakhnath. Five Sikhs in the Ambala district returned themselves as belonging to the sect of Jangams who wore matted hair, rejected the Vedas, preached the equality of all men, and were the puritan followers of Shiva. Among the sects broadly known as Vaishnava, there were 1,340 Sikhs. Among the Radhaswamis in 1901 there were 473 Sikhs. There were 62,000 Sultani Sikhs, mostly in the districts of Ferozepur, Ludhiana and Amritsar. [66]

To this great variety of Sikhs were added the Udasis who paid special reverence to the *Adi Granth*, respected Guru Gobind Singh, and attended the same shrines as the Sikhs. In 1891, they were seen as divided into four orders (*dhuans*): Phul Sahib, Balu Hasna, Almast Sahib, and Goind Sahib. There were also sections called Bhagat Bhagwan with a Gurdwara at Patna and Sangat Sahib (with an establishment at Bhai Pheru). Each subdivision had a complete organization for collecting and spending money, and was presided

over by a principal *mahant*, called Sri Mahant, with subordinate *mahants* under him. With the aid of Maharaja Narendra Singh of Patiala, a follower of Sangat Sahib, named Baba Manohar Das, had founded the *Chhota Akhara*. The Udasis were almost always celibate, sometimes lived in monasteries, and were generally found wandering. They were strongest in the districts of Jalandhar, Ferozepur and Rohtak, and numerous in Malwa and Benares. The customs they followed were not uniform. Some wore long hair, some matted locks, and others cut their hair. Some wore *tilak* marks, while others did not. The Udasis in Ludhiana were mostly Jat in origin. They read the *Granths* of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, though they did not attach much importance to the *Granth* of Guru Gobind Singh. They lived in both Sikh and Hindu villages. In the family of Jaspal Bangar it was customary to marry; their endowment was large enough to support the family and the institution. The shrine at Dera Baba Nanak was in the custody of Udasi *sadhs*, their *mahant* was appointed with the consent of the Bedis. The shrine founded at Tahli Sahib by Sri Chand was also looked after by the *mahants* of the Udasi order. Apart from the Gulabdasis noticed earlier, the Suthra Shahis formed a semimonastic and semimendicant Udasi order. Their doubtful origin was attributed to Guru Arjan, Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai, or Guru Tegh Bahadur. They wore black marks on their foreheads and black woolen ropes twisted around their heads and necks. They burnt their dead and threw their bones into the Ganga; they used intoxicants, and smoked tobacco. They proceeded along the bazaars, clashing together a couple of short staves and shouting *dholas* or mystic Punjabi songs indifferently in honour of Guru Nanak and the goddess Devi. Their principal Gurdwara was at Lahore. They were mainly returned from the districts of Gurdaspur and Jalandhar. In 1881, there were only 52 Sikhs among the Suthra Shahis; in 1891, their number was 94. In 1901, the number of Sikhs returned as Udasis by sect was 401, and by religion 4,213. They could be divided into two main

categories: those who wore topknot and refrained from smoking and thus in a sense were Sikhs, and those who did not wear topknot and used water drawn by a rope in a brass vessel and might smoke and thus were Hindus. [67]

The large number of sectarian identities among the Sikhs were seen as falling into two broad categories: the Nanakpanthi and the Khalsa. In 1891, more than 395,000 Sikhs thought of themselves as Nanakpanthis. They were roughly those who did not think it necessary to follow 'the ceremonial and social observances inculcated by Guru Gobind Singh'. The chief external difference was the disposal of hair: the Nanakpanthis did nor keep their *kesh* uncut. They were also known as Sahajdharis. The form of baptism followed by the Nanakpanthis was the Hindu practice of drinking 'foot-nectar of the Guru' and even that was not very common. There was 'very little difference' between n Nanakpanthi and an ordinary lax Hindu. It was difficult to apply the term Nanakparthi to the various categories of Sikhs. The term had several connotations: it could mean 'the followers of Guru Nanak' and hence all Sikhs. In fact, many Sikhs who cut their hair and smoked tobacco returned themselves as Sikhs in spite of instructions to the contrary given to the enumerators. Many others who kept the hair unshorn and abstained from tobacco, who did not worship idols and did not revere Brahmans to any great extent, and followed the teachings of the *Granth*, called themselves Nanakpanthi Sikhs. Still others who revered the *Granth* and also revered Brahmans, worshipped idols now and then, did not abstain from tobacco and shaved their heads, called themselves Nanakpanthi Sikhs. Some of them called themselves Nanakpanthi Hindus. There was no clear line of distinction between them. The Aroras of Kohat kept their hair uncut, did not smoke though they sold tobacco, did not as a rule take the *pahul* or observe the four remaining Ks of Guru Gobind Singh's ordinances, went to the Sikh places of worship and listened to the recitation of the *Adi Granth*, used the Sikh forms of morning and

evening prayers, i.e. *Japji* and *Rahiras*.[68]

Apart from the Nirankaris noticed earlier, there were several sects among the Nanakpanthis. Included among them were the followers of Baba Buddha, a disciple of Guru Hargobind. They worshipped at Ramdas, Amritsar. Teja and Nainakot and belonged mostly to the districts of Hoshiarpur, Gurdaspur and Sialkot. Another sect was that of Baba Mula, patron of the Phulkian houses with a shrine at Sunam. Other Nanakpanthi sects were those of Baba Lakhu, Bhai Gola, Bhai Ranbar, and Baba Nand Singh. The Sanwal Shahis of the frontier believed in the Sikh scriptures and had holy places at Dera Ismail Khan, Sahiwal and Kot Shakir. However, only 11 Sikhs returned themselves as belonging to this sect in 1891. [69]

In 1901, more than 200,000 persons returned themselves as Nanakpanthis, mostly from the districts of Ludhiana, Lahore and Gujranwala. This number, significantly, was half the number of Nanakpanthis a decade earlier. [70] Many of them presumably had joined the Khalsa fold.

In 1891, more than 555,000 Sikhs thought of themselves as Guru Gobind Singhis. In terms of doctrine they were not distinguished from the followers of Guru Nanak, or those of Kabir and other Bhagats. Indeed, if the reforms of Guru Gobind Singh had not been successful the Sikhs would have been akin to the sects of the Dadupanthis or Bishnois. Guru Gobind Singh added five basic points to the Sikh religion: baptism by way of *pahul* instead of *charan pahul*, the five *kakkas*, abstaining from tobacco, eating of animal flesh decapitated by way of *jhatka*, and non-observance of the distinctions of caste or paying special reverence to Brahmans. [71] In 1901, many of the Gobind Singhi Sikhs did not return any sect. In the district of Amritsar, for example, only 20,000 Sikhs out of 264,329 were recorded as the Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh. But the real figures were much higher, Consequently, the figures for the Gobind Singhi Sikhs as a sect fell

from 550,000 in 1891 to 419,793 in 1901. [72] Many among the Khalsa had begun to think that they represented the Sikhs as the central stream.

A new line of demarcation drawn between the followers of Guru Gobind Singh was noticed in the census report of 1891. A party among them tried to combine the teachings of the Sikhs with a 'considerable latitude of thought and adoption of European methods'. The others were anxious to preserve the 'old forms as intact as possible' out of the fear that such developments would have an adverse effect on the 'character of the people and the stability of the religion'. Each school had its leaders and the opposition between them had at times been very acute.[73]

By 1901, the party that stood for change had become more influential. More than 730,000 Sikhs did not return any sect. H.A. Rose observed that this was due to a tendency among the Sikhs 'to abandon the sects and join religious associations, the Sabhas and so on'. The Singh Sabha was not returned as a sect; the omission to return any sect was the most noticeable in Amritsar itself. Instead of new sects being founded, the tendency now was to organize societies. The Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar observed that the Sri Guru Singh Sabha had stirred up the people not only in cities and towns but also in the rural areas, 'inculcating the principles of the Sikh faith and enjoining the necessity of a separate religious and political existence'. The influence of the movement was spreading in Rawalpindi too. There were three categories of Sikhs there: the followers of Sir Khem Singh Bedi, the Nirankaris, and the protagonists of the Singh Sabhas. With the advance of education, the followers of Sir Khem Singh Bedi, and the Nirankaris started going to the Singh Sabhas. Still, nearly 1,400,000 Sikhs indicated their sectarian affiliation in 1901. They represented about 60 per cent of the total Sikh population.[74] They included both the Sahajdharis and the Khalsa.

In the late nineteenth century, there was a wide variety of self-identification among the Sikhs. Externally, however, they appeared to fall into two categories: the Khalsa and the Sahajdhari. The former were larger in number from the very beginning. Among both the categories appeared new ideas and practices. The number of the Khalsa was increasing more than that or the Sahajdharis. In this context, Singh Sabhas began to espouse Singh or Khalsa identity. They did not look upon their identity as sectarian. In other words, Khalsa identity for them was 'the Sikh identity' - an identity distinct from that of the 'Hindus'.

NOTES

1. *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1868, pp. 7, 8; *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, pp. 1, 4.

2. *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1868, pp. 7, 22, General Statement III A; *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1881, pp. 1, 141; *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, Table VI showing the religion of the people; *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, pp. 1, 122, Subsidiary Tables 1A&P; *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1911, pp. 141, 153; *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1911, Part I, pp. 58, 154.

3. *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1868, pp. 7, 8; *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1881, p. 2; *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, p. 60; *Report on Census of the Punjab*, 1901, pp. 1, 3.

4. *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1868, p. 23.

5. Ibid., details on percentages in all divisions and districts in the table on percentages and averages.

6. Ibid., p. 23.

7. *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1881, pp. 106, 138.

8. R*eport on the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, Table VI, showing the religion of the people.

9. *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, Subsidiary Table IB.

10. *Report on the Census of the Punjab,* 1881, p. 106; *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, Abstract 9.

11. *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1868, Appendix to General Statement no. I, showing numbers of adults and children male and female in each sect; Appendix to General Statement no. I, percentage of males and females among adults (i.e. above 12 years of age), p. 52; *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1881, pp. 351, 367, 370, 372, 375; *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, Table VI, showing the religion of the people, pp. 211, 217, 218.

12. Reeta Grewal, Urbanization in the Punjab, 1849-1947, Ph.D. Thesis, Amritsar: Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, 1988, pp. 217, 218.

13. *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1868, Appendix to General Statement no. I, showing numbers of adults and children male and female in each sect; Appendix to General Statement no. I, percentage of males and females among adults (i.e. above 12 years of age), p. 52; *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1881, pp. 351, 367, 370, 372, 375; *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, Table VI, showing the religion of the people, pp. 211, 217, 218.

14. *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, pp. 201, 202, 203, 206.

Table 15

SIKHS IN THE FOUR NATURAL REGIONS IN 12 AGE GROUPS IN 1901

Age Group	Indo-Gangetic Plain		Himalayan		Sub-Himalayan		North-West	
	All Religions	Sikh	All Religions	Sikh	All Religions	Sikh	All Religions	Sikh
0–1	906	787	986	738	934	824	961	780
0–5	905	762	1,011	738	932	831	957	815
5–10	848	735	980	718	864	792	856	722
10–15	755	667	802	728	750	678	734	600
15–20	754	676	891	550	819	700	790	517
20–25	883	841	954	428	977	875	897	498
25–30	871	894	931	362	938	838	847	568
30–35	887	918	928	562	946	876	843	569
35–40	852	876	811	332	869	789	766	555
40–45	897	924	873	551	932	868	856	663
45–60	810	799	748	367	866	754	767	602
60 & >	855	784	875	503	853	678	768	559

15. Ibid., pp. 212, 213, 216.
16. Ibid., p. 205
17. *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1868, Districtwise figures in the General Statement no. 1, statistical return for the area and population in the districts of the Punjab, p. 2.
18. *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, Table VIII, Part II, District Tables.
19. Ibid., Subsidiary Table IIIA.
20. *Report on the Census of the Punjab*, 1881, pp. 401, 405. Table XIII gives the details on all the educated males and females among the Sikhs for the villages, districts, princely states, the British territory and the province of the Punjab.
21. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, pp. 250, 251.
22. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, pp. 263, 264, 269.

23. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1868, pp. 25, 26, 28. General Statement no. IV, population according to occupations.
24. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1881, pp. 346, 376, 380; *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, Abstract No. 88.
25. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, pp. 358, 359, 364, 366, 371.
26. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1881, p. 185.
27. Ibid., Table VII A.
28. Ibid., pp. 107, 108, 138, 230, 231, 295.
29. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, pp. 28, 96.
30. Ibid., p. 96; Abstract no. 86.

Table 16
PERCENTAGE OF SIKHS IN CASTE GROUPS IN 1891

Castes	Percentage of each caste to the total males of all castes among Sikhs
Agricultural	
Jat	51.00
Kamboh	2.00
Rajput, etc.	1.07
Total	64.36
Professional & Commercial	
Arora	3.22
Khatri	2.29
Total	7.58
Artisan & Village Menials	
Chamar	5.75
Chuhra	5.07
Jhiwar	1.18
Lohar	1.30
Nai	11.07
Tarkhan	7.21
Total	25.60
Vagrants, Minor	
Artisans & Performers	1.22

31. Ibid., p. 88; Abstract no. 18.
32. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, pp. xii, 301.
33. Ibid., p. 302; Subsidiary Table VII E.

Table 17

SIKH MALES AND FEMALES IN DIFFERENT CASTES IN 1901

Caste	Males	Females	Total
Jat	798,128	599,510	13,97,638
Arora	39,948	31,576	71,524
Khatri	34,006	26,061	60,067
Nai	13,849	11,559	25,408
Labana	12,334	10,839	23,173
Chuhra	12,520	10,207	22,727
Rajput	11,596	8,259	19,855
Mahtam	10,515	8,668	19,183
Mazhabi	5,875	4,130	10,005
Bhatia	3,707	2,991	6,694
Karral	1,383	1,217	2,600
Gujar	1,052	818	1,870

34. Ibid., 1901, pp. 302–40.

35. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1881, p. 2; *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, pp. 1, 2, 59; *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, pp. 1, 2.

36. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1881, p. 2; *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, Table VI, showing the religion of the people; *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, p. 1.

37. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1881, p. 106.

38. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, p. 95.

39. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, p. 122.

40. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1881, p. 106; *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, Abstract no. 9.

41. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1881, pp. 351, 367.

42. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, Table VI, showing the religion of the people.

43. Ibid., pp. 264, 265.

44. Ibid., p. 269.
45. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1881, pp. 135, 136.
46. Ibid., pp. 136, 137.
47. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, pp. 48, 91; *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, p. 124.
48. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, pp. 20, 92, 93; *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, p. 124.
49. *Census Procedure for the Punjab*, 1911, Part I, pp. 59, 154.
50. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1881, pp. 137, 138; *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, Table F, pp. 833, 834.
51. Ibid., pp. 168–70.
52. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, p. 137.
53. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, p. 157.
54. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, pp. 125, 126.
55. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, p. 153.
56. Ibid., p. 157.
57. Ibid., p. 158.
58. Ibid., pp. 158, 159; *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, pp. 135, 136.
59. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, pp. 159, 160.
60. Ibid., pp. 160, 161.
61. Ibid., p. 161.
62. Ibid., p. 162; *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, pp. 135, 136.
63. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, pp. 151, 162, 163.
64. Ibid., pp. 165, 166, 167, 168.
65. Ibid., pp. 150, 151, 156, 163, 164.
66. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, pp. 126, 127, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133.
67. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, pp. 151, 152, 154.
68. Ibid., pp. 148, 149, 150.
69. Ibid., pp. 155, 156, 157.

70. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, pp. 133, 134.
71. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, pp. 164, 165.
72. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, p. 136.
73. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1891, p. 171.
74. *Report of the Census of the Punjab*, 1901, pp. 124, 125.

Chapter 3

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE 1901-1921

The focus of this chapter is on the several changes in the demography of the Sikhs of the Punjab during the period 1901-1921, and wherever necessary, developments upto 1931 have also been taken note of. The chapter is divided into six sections. The first section details the increase in the number of the Sikhs, and their comparison with Hindus and Muslims. The reasons for the increase as viewed by the census officials are also examined. The second section deals with the distribution of the Sikhs in the Punjab, with an identification of their core areas. Statistical details on literacy, urban and rural population, sex ratio and female infanticide among Sikhs have been taken up in the third section. The fourth deals with the various sects among as recorded by the census enumerators. Section five gives details of the occupations followed by the Sikhs and the status of various 'caste' groups among them. The last section sums up the discussion. This analysis of the census data will help to provide a clearer picture of the Sikhs in the early twentieth century.

The total area of the Punjab Province in 1911 was 136,330 square miles, which was organized into five divisions (Delhi, Lahore, Jalandhar, Rawalpindi and Multan), and 29 districts. This region was also grouped into four natural divisions (Indo-Gangetic Plain West, Himalayan, Sub-Himalayan and North West Dry Area).[1] Statistics were however provided separately for the Punjab along with Delhi and the native states.[2] In 1921, the total area of the Punjab remained approximately the same. Some changes were seen in the province and district boundaries when it was

decided to move the Imperial capital to Delhi in 1911. The Delhi district was then remodelled and placed under a separate local government as a separate 'province' in 1912. The new province of Delhi bore little resemblance to the old Delhi district as only the Delhi *tahsil* and a small portion of the Ballabgarh *tahsil* were given to the new 'province'.[3] The natural divisions remained five in number and the Delhi division was renamed as the Ambala division, and combined statistics were made available for the Punjab and Punjab states, and separately for Delhi.[4] In 1931, the total area of the province was 1,36,964 square miles. The Punjab continued to have 5 divisions, 29 districts and 4 natural divisions.[5] A change was brought about in the relations of the Punjab states to the provincial government.[6] In the next decade, statistics were provided for the Punjab and the Punjab states, and a separate report was compiled for Delhi.[7]

In 1911, the total numbers of Sikhs in the Punjab were 2,883,729 while the total population was 24,187,750. The Sikhs made up for 11.9 per cent of the population in the province at this time.[8] In 1921, the Sikhs numbered 3,110,060 out of the total population of 25,589,248, forming 12.5 per cent of the population in the province.[9] In 1931, the Sikhs numbered 4,071,624 in a population of 28,490,857, constituting 14.2 per cent of the total population.[10]

Table 18
PERCENTAGE OF SIKH POPULATION (1911-1931)

Year	Total Population	Sikh Population	Percentage
1911	24,187,750	2,883,729	11.9
1921	25,101,514	3,110,060	12.3
1931	28,490,857	4,071,624	14.2

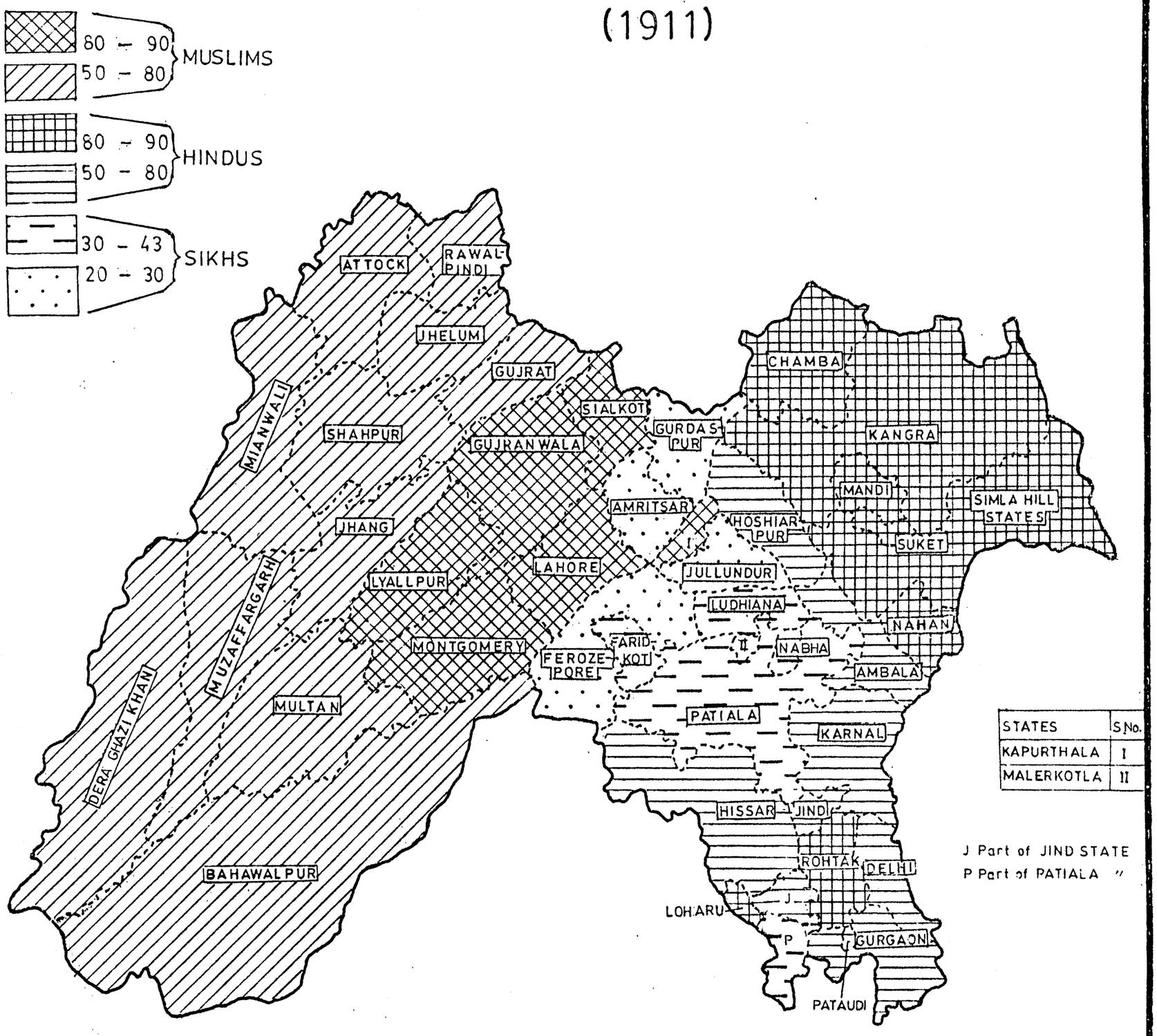
The Census years 1901 to 1911 were considered a 'very unhealthy decade' when the population of the Punjab showed a decrease while that of the Sikhs showed a substantial increase for the first time. The absence of separate vital records for Sikhs was remarked upon as such an increase could not be due to natural development of population. [11] This increase was mainly due to the change in the definition of the term 'Sikh'. Restriction of the term Sikh to only those who were Keshdhari was removed and every person was allowed to return himself as he wished. So much so that in 1911, 43,613 persons returned themselves as belonging to both religions, Hindu and Sikh, and were treated in the census as 'Sikh-Hindus'. Only a distinction between Keshdhari and Sahajdhari was to be made.[12] The increase in the number of Sikhs was thus by 37 per cent over the previous census.[13]

The gain in the number of Sikhs in 1911 seems to have occurred mainly due to 'accretions from the Hindus'. The Singh Sabhas had been very active in the last ten years in enforcing the tenets of Guru Gobind Singh on all followers of Guru Nanak. Another factor was that only the Keshdhari Sikhs were enlisted in the army. According to the census, the separatist movement had also succeeded to a considerable extent in dictating the observance of Guru Gobind Singh's tenets. This led to a rise in the status of Keshdhari Sikhs so much so that they were now noticed as establishing themselves as a hypergamous class.[14]

The general distribution of major religious communities in 1911 can be seen in map 1.[15] The western and south-western Punjab was the stronghold of Muslims while Hindus were in larger numbers in the Himalayan division and the Rohtak district. Hindus were more in the east and south-east, while the central districts and the Phulkian states had a substantial number of Sikhs and Hindus both, though the proportion of Muslims was greater in the western half of the central tract.

Map 1

Major Religious Communities
Percentage of Population
(1911)



Adapted from: Census of the Punjab, 1911, p. 98.

As evident from Table 19, in 1911, the Muslim populations increased by 1 per cent, Hindus decreased by 15 per cent, while the Sikh population increased by 37 per cent.

Table 19

RELATIVE CHANGE BY RELIGION IN 1911

Religion	Proportion per 10,000 1901	Proportion per 10,000 1911	Variation per cent in population 1901-11
Muslims	4,922	5,075	+1
Hindus	4,179	3,628	- 15
Sikhs	849	1,192	+ 37

In 1921, the definition of Sikh remained the same and both the Keshdharis and Sahajdharis were to be noted.[16] The increase in the number of Sikhs was of 2,26,331 people, which constituted an increase of 7.8 per cent over 1911.[17] The census of 1921 records an interesting experience of Mr. Garrett, I.E.S. who had acted as a recruiting officer during world war I. He observed that during 1917 and 1918 while recruiting in Ludhiana and other adjacent territories, where there were a large number of Hindu zamindars, any member who enlisted became a Sikh as a matter of course, while others became Sikhs when intensive recruiting was done in the later stages of the war.[18] In 1921, Sikhs registered the greatest advance (9.8 per cent) in the Indo-Gangetic Plain West where they grew in number from 1808 in 1911 to 1834 per 10,000 of the population. Among others, one reason was the growing realization that as a faith Sikhism was independent of Hinduism, and the other was the conversion of a large number of depressed classes to Sikhism.[19]

In 1931, it was observed that although the population of the Sikhs had been growing at each census except 1881-1891, the last decade had seen an unprecedented increase. See Map 2. Sikhs had increased by 9,64,328 or by 31.1 per cent over 1921.[20] In the census of 1931 Sikhs were enumerated as both Keshdharis and Sahajdharis. In 1931 they made up for 14.29 per cent of the total population of the Punjab. They had increased from 8.2 per cent in 1881 to 14.3 per cent in 1931. In the British territory the Sikhs increased from 6.58 per cent to 12.99 per cent.

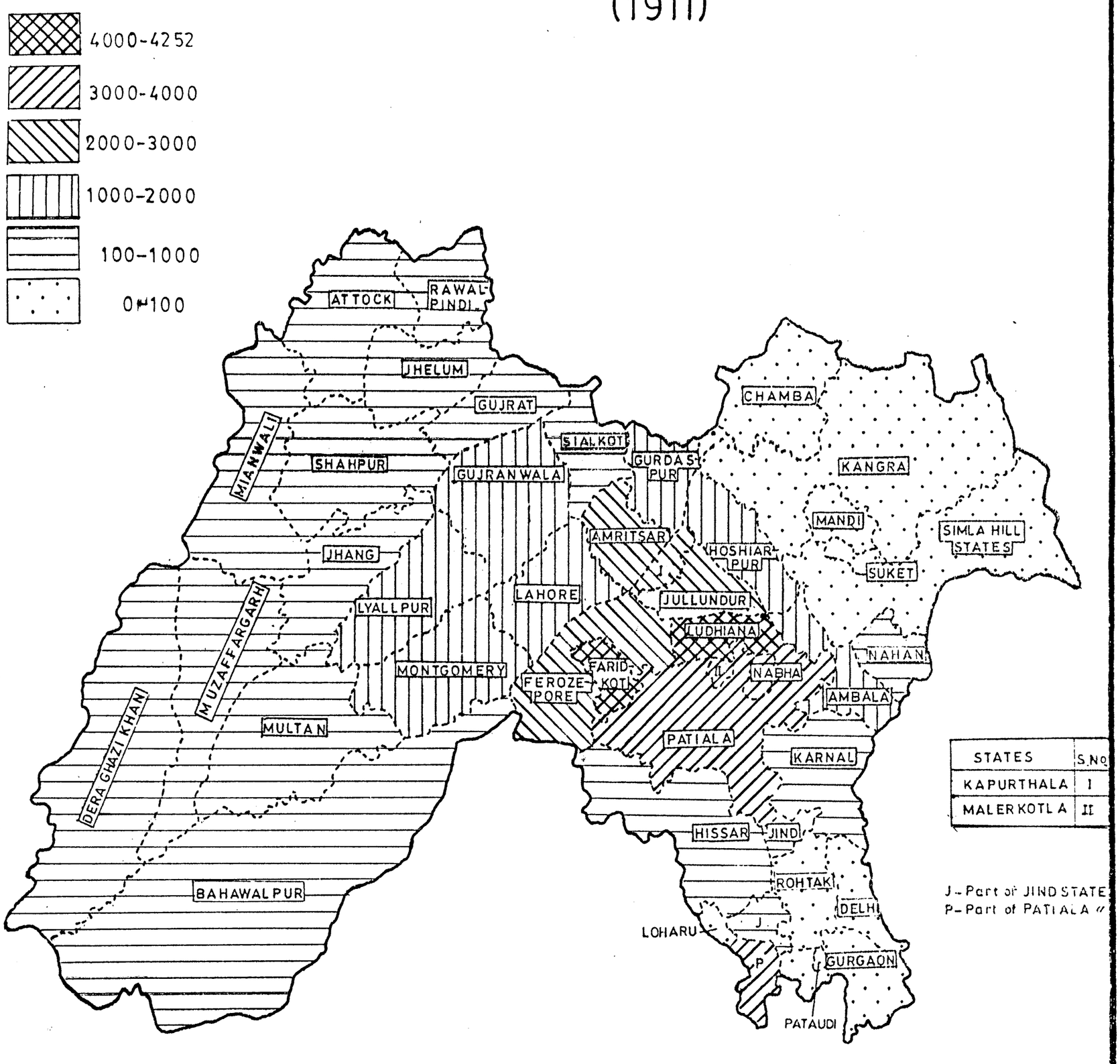
Table 20

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE VARIATION OF SIKHS (1881-1921)

Census	Actual numbers of Sikhs	Variation percentage	
		Sikhs	Total population
1881	1,706,165	-	-
1891	1,849,371	+8.4	+10.1
1901	2,102,896	+13.7	+6.3
1911	2,883,729	+37.1	– 2.2
1921	3,110,060	+7.8	+5.7

Map 2

Sikhs per 10,000 of Population (1911)



Adapted from: Census of the Punjab, 1911, p.152.

Table 21

PERCENTAGE INCREASE OF SIKH POPULATION (1881-1931)

Census	Absolute figures for Sikhs	Percentage increase	Proportion per 10,000
1881	1,706,909*	-	822
1891	1,849,371*	8.4	809
1901	2,102,813	13.7	863
1911	2,881,495	37.0	1,211
1921	3,107,296	7.8	1,238
1931	4,071,624	31.0	1,429

*includes figures for Delhi.

The census of 1931 gives details, including extracts from the past census reports, which describe the rise and fall of the Sikh population at various periods as detailed in the various censuses.[21]

It is concluded that the big rise in the Sikh population was not due to natural increase alone. The number of Sikhs varied greatly on account of the comparatively easy conversion from Hinduism since it was not essential to be born a Sikh : any one could be initiated into the religion by *pahul* or baptism of the double-edged sword. The figures for the Sikhs rose at each census while those of Hindus showed a decrease in 1911 and 1931.[22]

Table 22

RELATIVE NUMBERS OF HINDUS AND SIKHS (1881-1931)

Year	Hindus	Sikhs
1921-31	– 199,931	+ 964,328
1911-21	+ 285,911	+ 225,801
1901-11	– 1,541,462	+ 778,682
1891-01	+ 69,341	+ 219,017
1881-91	+ 890,686	+ 173,631

Figures were made available for the change in the relative numbers of the various castes that were a part of the Sikh community and those which showed a maximum change in numbers. In 1921, the figures of Sikh Chuhras and Mazhabis registered in the districts of Ferozepur and Amritsar suggested that untouchables were being fast absorbed into Sikhism due to the efforts of Sikh *parchar*. In Ferozepur district the number of Chuhras and Mazhabis, who were returned as Sikhs, increased from 3,546 in 1911 to 13,529 in 1921 while in Amritsar they increased from 6,360 to 14,125.[23]

Also returning themselves as Sikhs in 1931 were the occupational castes and certain tribes such as Jat, Saini, Rajput and Arora, particularly in the districts and states of the Central Punjab. Other 'tribes' like Chuhras and Chamars too preferred Sikhism to caste ridden Hinduism where they were treated as untouchables. The agricultural castes of Saini in Central Punjab and Mali in eastern Punjab were studied and their population and religious affiliation figures compared for 3 decades till 1931. The number of Sikhs among them increased over time and, interestingly, the Malis preferred to

be known as Saini, while the Sainis, particularly in the districts and states of central Punjab, considered their social status improved if they returned themselves as Sikh instead of Hindu.[24]

The main cause of discarding Hinduism by some of the agricultural and artisan classes in the central and eastern Punjab was the enhanced social prestige gained by the agricultural tribes in the countryside by becoming Sikh.[25]

As regards the Princely states, in 1911 they had a large Sikh population. The total Sikh population of all the Princely states was 789,925, with the Phulkian states of Patiala, Jind and Nabha making up for 631,056 of it. [26] The relative number and percentage of Sikhs in the 'Sikh states' is given below:[27]

Table 23

PROPORTION OF SIKHS IN THE SIKH STATES IN 1911

Princely states	Number	Percentage
Patiala	5,32,292	37.80
Nabha	76,198	30.60
Faridkot	55397	42.50
Kapurthala	54,275	20.24
Jind	2,2566	8.30

In fact, in 1881, the Sikhs had formed 27.8, 1.7 and 29.7 per cent of the total population in Patiala, Jind and Nabha. In 1931, they rose to 38.9, 10.3 and 33.9 per cent respectively. The average increase was from

29.45 per cent in 1921 to 46.26 per cent in 1931. Here, too Hindus had reduced in numbers. In Faridkot state, the proportion of Sikhs went up from 44.24 per cent in 1921 to 59.51 per cent in1931. However, in Malerkotla, the Sikhs were 40 per cent of the total population in 1881, but during the next ten years a large number of them seemed to have migrated. In 1911, their proportion was 30 per cent; it decreased slightly in 1921 and rose to 35 per cent in 1931. According to the Malerkotla State's Census Superintendent, the change was due to communal tensions which had made the Sikh Jats of Malerkotla more self aware, and lines of demarcation between themselves and Hindus began to sharpen and the Sikhs tended to regard themselves as a distinct religious community.[28]

It seems that the varying strength of the population returned as Hindu or Sikh in the Punjab states was due to social causes. The Akali movement was mainly responsible for numerous persons being returned as Sikhs instead of Hindus in the decade from 1921 to 1931. These persons mostly comprised members of the depressed classes, agriculturalists and artisans in rural areas, who gained status as soon as they ceased to be Hindus and became Sikhs.[29]

II

Along with the information on numbers of the Sikhs, the census reports reflect the distribution of the Sikhs in the Punjab. Map 2 shows a significant increase in the number of Sikhs. Ludhiana district and the Faridkot State had the highest proportion of Sikhs, 400 and 425 per mille of the total population. Ludhiana, along with the Phulkian and Faridkot states, formed the principal Sikh tract. According to the census of 1911, it had been the centre of much activity in the matter of administering *pahul* to the uninitiated believers of the Granth Sahib.

The Patiala and Nabha states were next in importance with the Sikhs numbering 300 to 400 per mille in 1911. Interestingly, Amritsar which was the centre of the Sikh religion had only 233 Sikhs to every 1,000 of the population. The Ferozepur and Jalandhar districts came next while the proportion of Sikhs in Lyallpur was per mille. In the Kalsia state it was 112, but the while Mandi state had the smallest number of Sikhs at 1 per 10,000. The British districts of Rohtak and Gurgaon had only 3 and 5 Sikhs per 10,000 of the population respectively. The Loharu, Dujana and Pataudi states had no Sikhs at all.[30] In terms of administrative divisions in 1911, the largest numbers of Sikhs happened to be in the Jalandhar division, followed by the Lahore division.[31]

Table 24

DIVISIONWISE PERCENTAGE OF SIKHS IN 1911

Division	Percentage
Jalandhar	19.7
Lahore	15.75
Multan	6.84
Rawalpindi	4.95
Delhi	3.6

The Lyallpur district in the Multan division, showed 1,46,670 Sikhs i.e. about 17 per cent of the population, while the Ambala district in Delhi division had 13.6 per cent of Sikhs in its population.[32] Significantly, the highest percentage of Sikhs was in the five central districts.[33]

Table 25

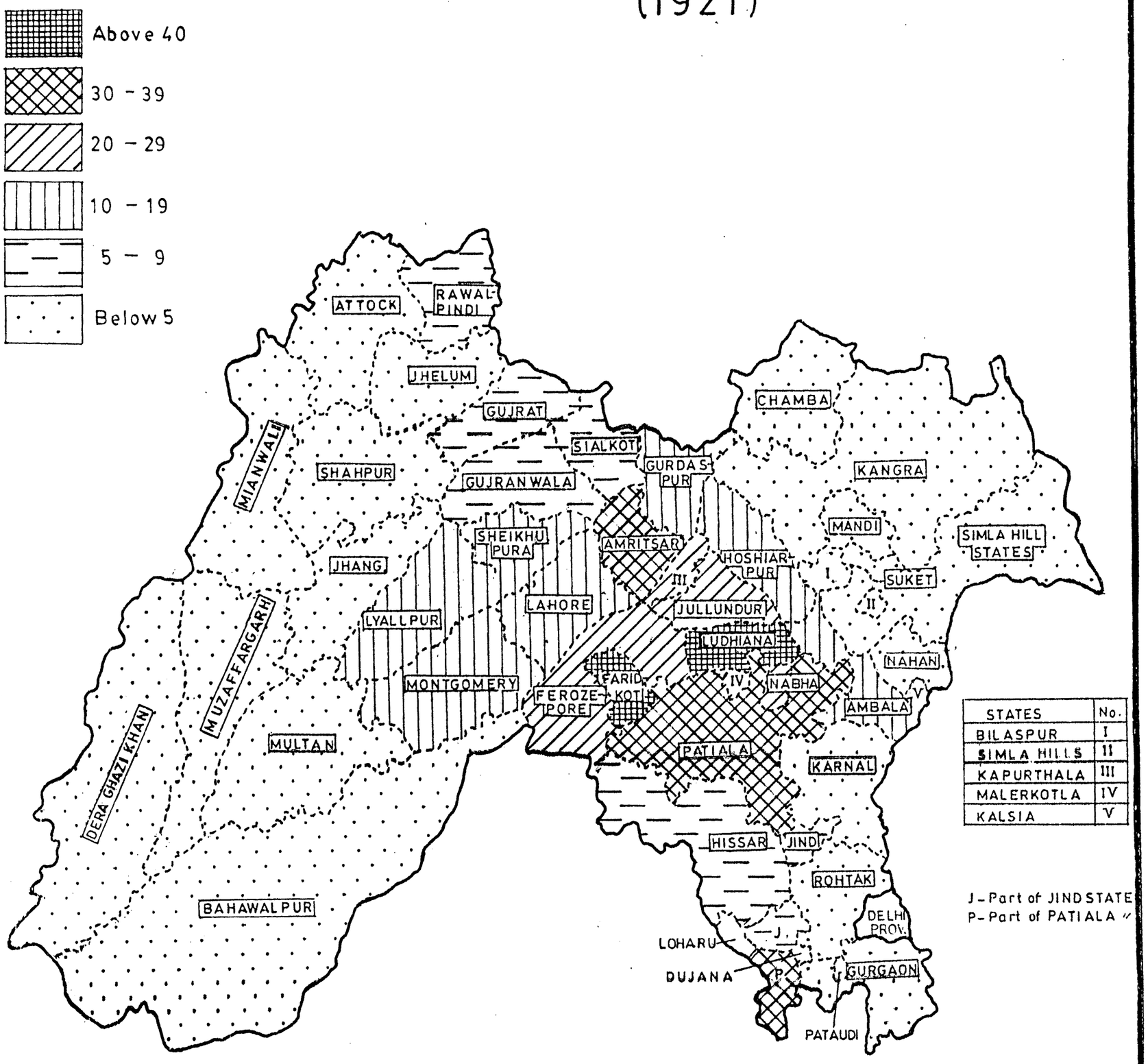
DISTRICTWISE PERCENTAGE OF SIKHS IN 1911

District	Percentage	Number
Ferozepur	27.35	2,62,511
Amritsar	28.80	2,53,941
Ludhiana	40.03	2,07,042
Jalandhar	21.97	1,76,227
Lahore	16.31	1,69,008

Map 3 details the distribution of the Sikh population in 1921, more than half the total population of Sikhs in the Punjab and Delhi provinces lived in the Indo-Gangetic plain west. There they represented 18.3 percent of the population.[34] This was followed by the Sub-Himalayan region, the North West Dry Area and, lastly, the Himalayan region. This can be seen from table 26. This table also shows the proportionate numbers of the Hindus and the Muslims in the four geographical regions. In the Indo-Gangetic Plain West the Hindus outnumbered the Muslims and the Sikhs were less than half the Hindus in proportion. In the Himalayan division the Hindus predominated and the other religions were insignificant in numbers. In the Sub-Himalayan Area Muslims were more numerous than the Hindus and formed 61 per cent of the population while the Hindus constituted 27 per cent and the Sikhs were 10 per cent of the population. The North West Dry Area was mainly populated by the Muslims with the Hindus, Sikhs and Jains together forming 21 per cent of the population.[35]

Map 3

Percentage Distribution of Sikh Population (1921)



Adapted from: Census of the Punjab, 1921, p.183.

Table 26

RELIGIONWISE DISTRIBUTION IN 1921

Region and locality	Actual numbers in 1921	Proportion per 10,000 of population in					Variation percent increase (+) or decrease (-)				
		1921	1911	1901	1891	1881	1911-1921	1901-1911	1891-1901	1881-1891	1881-1921
Indo-Gangetic Plain West	2,189,193	856	824	648	624	670	+9.8	+24.2	+12.6	+2.5	+57.4
Himalayan	7,160	3	3	1	2	1	–3.6	+102.6	–6.5	+55.5	+18.40
Sub-Himalayan	5,70,759	223	234	142	161	137	+0.9	+61.3	–5.0	+29.7	+100.6
North West Dry Area	3,42,498	134	131	58	22	14	+8.2	+121.4	+185.7	+78.6	+1122.3
Sikh Total	3,110,060	1216	1192	849	809	822	+7.9	+37.1	+13.7	+8.4	+82.3
Total Hindu	9,125,202	3,566	3,628	4,179	4,408	4,384	+4.0	-15.2	+2.7	+10.7	+.3
Total Muslim	12,955,141	5,063	5,075	4,922	4,739	4,758	+5.5	+0.8	+12.5	+9.7	+31.2

In 1921, the four chief centres of the Sikh population continued to be Ludhiana and Amritsar in the British territory and Faridkot and Patiala among the Punjab states. In Ludhiana district the Sikhs were 415 per mille of the population while Amritsar had 388 Sikhs to every 1,000 of the population. The highest percentage of the Sikhs to the total population was in Faridkot i.e. 44.2 per cent while Patiala had 34.8 per cent. As a

whole, the proportion of Sikhs in the districts of Ferozepur and Jalandhar, and states of Nabha, Malerkotla, and Kapurthala was high. In Lyallpur, Gurdaspur, Lahore, Sheikhupura, Ambala and Kalsia it was between 164 to 139 per mille. Mandi state still had the smallest proportion of Sikhs (5 per 10,000), and as before, no Sikhs lived in Loharu, Dujana and Pataudi states.[36]

Table 27 gives details of the percentage of variation in 1921 in the Sikh population since 1911 in some districts or states as compared to the proportion of Hindus and the total population.[37] The Sikhs showed an increase of 7.8 per cent over 1911 while Hindus increased by 4 per cent only. Despite an increase in the population of certain districts or states, the number of Hindus there had decreased while Sikhs showed an increase.

Table 27

PERCENTAGE VARIATION IN POPULATION BETWEEN 1911 AND 1921

District or State	Sikhs	Hindus	Total population
Jalandhar	+17.0	-7.7	+2.5
Ludhiana	+13.9	+3.2	+9.7
Ferozepur	+15.3	+11.9	+14.4
Amritsar	+13.9	-3.4	+5.5
Gurdaspur	+13.7	-8.9	+1.8
Kalsia	+28.1	-6.1	+2.6
Faridkot	+20.3	+3.3	+15.6
Kapurthala	+18.1	-4.9	+6.0

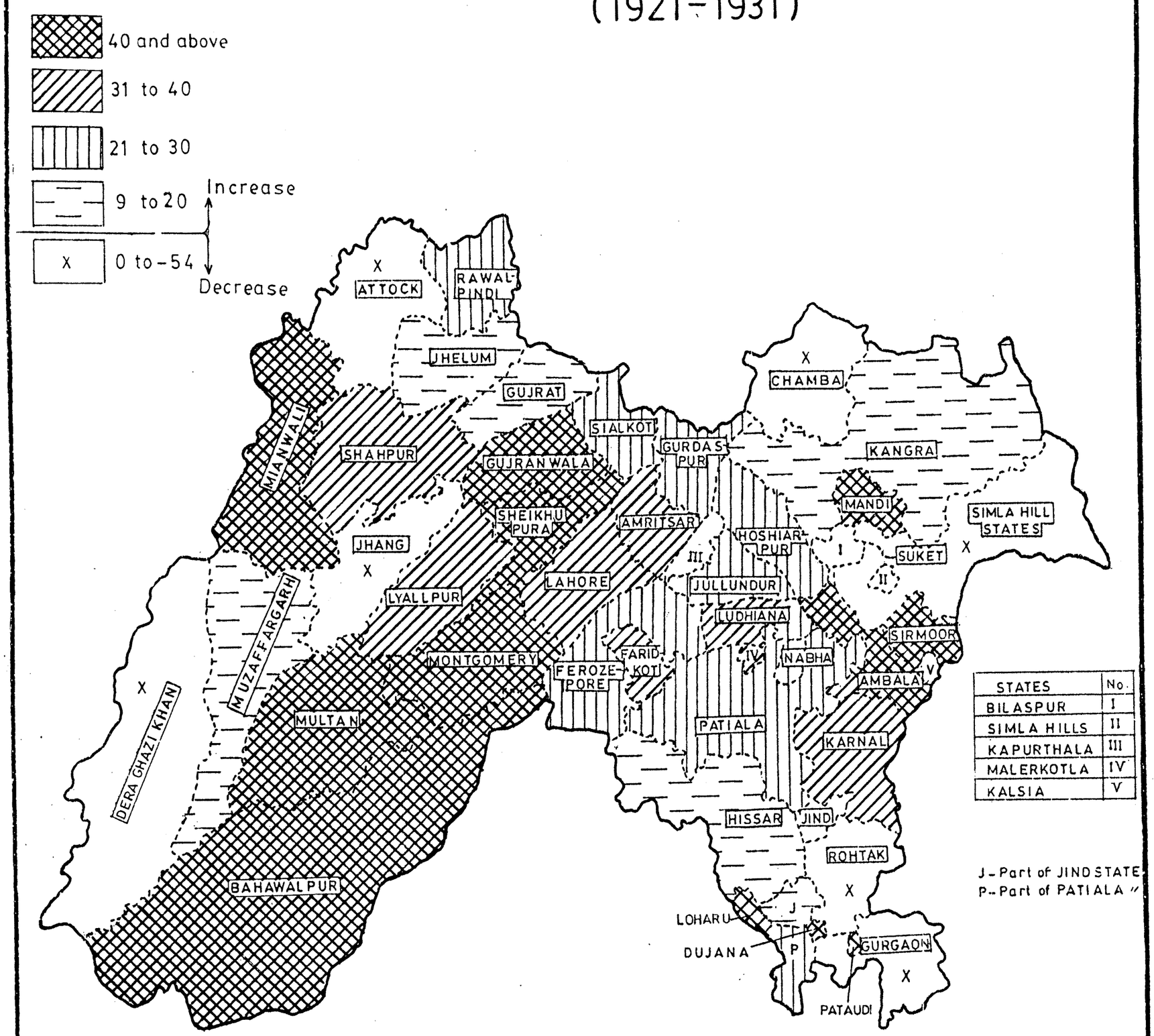
The map 4 shows the percentage of increase in the number of Sikhs in 1931 in each district and state over the figures of the last census.[38]

The high percentage of increase in the canal colonies was due to inter-district migration and absorption of lower castes of Hindus. In places like Mianwali, Karnal, Sirmoor, Pataudi, Dujana and Loharu, Sikh population was very meagre and the increase was not real and was due to absorption. Increase in Ambala, Ludhiana, Amritsar, Lahore and Jalandhar was due to accretion from other castes as well as a natural increase. In some districts, the Sikhs had decreased (Dera Ghazi Khan, Attock, Jhang, Rohtak, Gurgaon and Simla Hill States), where there number was anyway low and reduction might have been due to migration or absorption by Hinduism.

Table 28 compares the increase percent among the Sikhs with that of all religions in British districts. It can be noticed that the Sikhs in many areas increased at a much greater rate than the total population.[39]

Map 4

Change in the Percentage of Sikh Population (1921-1931)



Adapted from: Census of the Punjab, 1931, p.307.

Table 28

COMPARATIVE CHANGE IN PERCENTAGE IN 1921-31

District	Increase (+) or decrease (–) per census during the decade 1921-31 All Religions	Sikhs
Hissar	+ 20.9	+10.1
Rohtak	– 1.0	+4.3
Gurgaon	- 45.9	+8.5
Karnal	+ 37.9	+2.9
Ambala	+ 59.2	+9.0
Simla	- 35.2	-18.8
Kangra	+ 15.0	+4.6
Hoshiarpur	+ 30.2	+11.3
Jalandhar	+ 21.1	+14.7
Ludhiana	+ 32.7	+18.5
Ferozepur	+ 28.2	+5.3
Lahore	+ 35.7	+22.0
Amritsar	+ 39.4	+20.2
Gurdaspur	+ 29.7	+13.9
Sialkot	+ 26.7	+11.6
Gujranwala	+ 40.9	+18.1
Shekhupura	+ 44.0	+19.5
Gujrat	+ 19.7	+11.9
Shahpur	+ 32.0	+14.1
Jhelum	+ 18.3	+13.4
Rawalpindi	+ 30.1	+11.4
Attock	- 1.4	+14.0
Mianwali	+ 41.7	+14.9
Montgomery	+ 55.1	+45.8
Lyallpur	+ 31.4	+14.0
Jhang	- 9.6	+16.5
Multan	+ 112.5	+32.1
Muzzafargarh	+ 8.6	+4.0
Dera Ghazi Khan	- 18.5	+5.0

As shown in Map 5, the largest number of Sikhs in 1931 continued to reside chiefly in the Central Punjab which included the Majha tract; the Kasur and Chunian *tahsil* of the Lahore district and the Tarn Taran and Amritsar *tahsil* of the Amritsar district. The predominantly Sikh *tahsils* of Garshankar and Hoshiarpur in the Hoshiarpur district were also included. Also included in this core area was the Ropar sub-division of Ambala and parts of Kaithal sub-division and Thanesar *tahsil* of Karnal district. The whole of Patiala state and a major portion of the Sirsa *tahsil* of Hissar district were also included in this area. In the heart of this tract was the whole of Ludhiana and Jalandhar districts, the states of Kapurthala, Malerkotla, Faridkot and Nabha, and a considerable portion of the Ferozepur district.

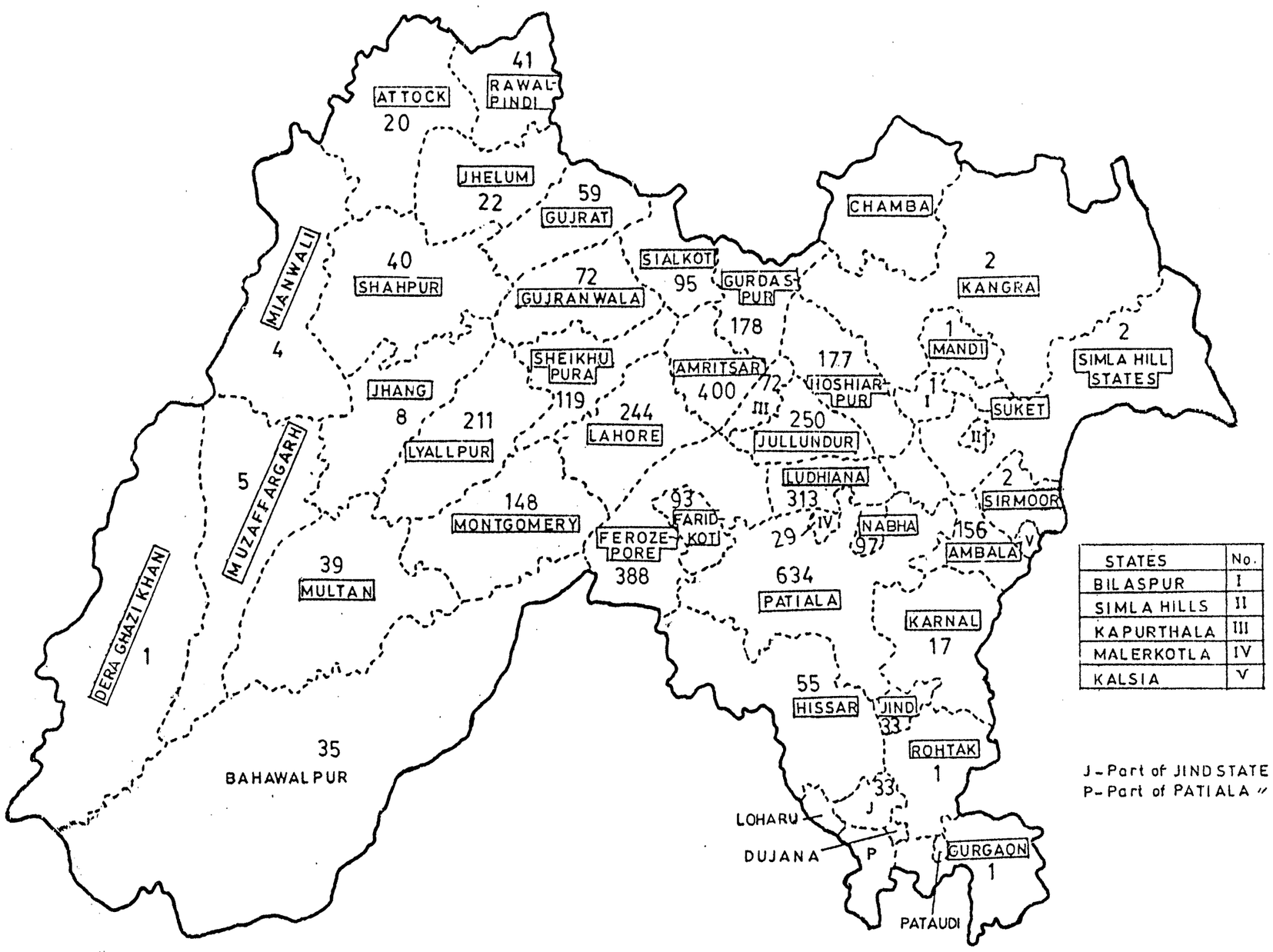
The Sikhs in this tract were approximately 2 ½ million; only 1 ½ million were outside, and their proportion diminished with distance from the core.

The Sikhs in 1931, as before, had no clear majority in any district and in Ludhiana alone were they 47 per cent of the population. In the Punjab States, Sikhs predominated in Faridkot and Patiala with proportion of 57 and 39 percent.[40]

Map5

Number of Sikhs in Thousands

(1931)



STATES	No.
BILASPUR	I
SIMLA HILLS	II
KAPURTHALA	III
MALERKOTLA	IV
KALSIA	V

J - Part of JIND STATE
P - Part of PATIALA "

Adapted from: Census of the Punjab, 1931, p.304.

III

Demographic statistics on urban/rural divide in the Sikh population show that the Sikhs, remained mainly a rural people in 1911 and, therefore, their proportion in the towns was the smallest. For the province as a whole only 6 per cent of the Sikhs lived in towns. The percentage for the British territory was 5.2 per cent while that for the native states 11.4 per cent of the total population.

The urban population of Sikhs in Amritsar was 13.5 per cent. It was the highest of all district. Ferozepur had 4.87 per cent; Rawalpindi, 9.62 per cent, Gujranwala, 8.6 per cent, Ludhiana, 5.03 per cent, and Lahore 2.96 per cent. Dera Ghazi Khan had only 0.24 per cent of Sikhs in towns. In the Princely states Nabha had the highest urban Sikh population of 25.05 per cent, followed by Patiala with 13.07 per cent. Kalsia had 4.42 Sikhs as urban while Loharu showed none.[41] The average town of the province contained 51 Muslims, 40 Hindus, 6 Sikhs and 2 Christians 1 Jain and in every 1000 of the population.[42]

Table 29

DISTRIBUTION OF URBAN SIKH POPULATION
BY NATURAL REGIONS IN 1911

Natural Division	Number of Sikhs per 10,000 of Urban Population
Punjab	609
Indo-Gangetic Plain West	648
Himalayan	219
Sub Himalayan	694
N. W. Dry Area	388

The Sikh population remained mainly rural in 1921 as well.[43] Out of 1000 (number per mille) people only 52 Sikhs in the Punjab lived in towns.[44] Table 30 below gives the proportion of the urban and rural population among the Sikhs in 1921 in the four natural divisions.

Table 30

DISTRIBUTION OF URBAN SIKH POPULATION
BY NATURAL REGIONS IN 1921

Natural Division	No. per 10,000 of urban population who are Sikh	No. per 10,000 of rural population who are Sikhs
Punjab	628	1308
Indo-Gangetic Plain West	709	2100
Himalayan	262	36
Sub Himalayan	633	1012
N. West Dry Area	385	578
Delhi	87	5
Indo Gangetic Plain West	87	5

In 1931, the numerical strength of the urban Sikhs in the province was 6437 or 1.01 per cent of the total population as against 0.57 per cent in 1921. Their proportion rose both in cities, mainly due to immigration, and the rest of the province, as shown below.

Table 31

PROPORTION OF SIKHS IN URBAN AND RURAL POPULATION IN 1921 AND 1931

Locality	No. per 10,000 of the population who were Sikh	
	1931	1921
Delhi Province	101	57
Cities	143	88
Rest of the Punjab	7	4

The urban population of the Sikhs in 1931 as compared to 1921 was as follows. [45]

Table 32

URBAN POPULATION OF SIKHS IN 1921 AND 1931

Province Particulars	Sikhs
Urban	
Actual population of	
1921	2669
1931	6324
Number per 10,000 of urban population of 1931	141

Information on the sex ratio among the Sikh population in the census reports tells us that in 1911 the number of females per 1000 males was about 785, slightly larger than that of 1901, which was 783. This ratio, however, varied in relation to age, caste and even location. In the age group of 0-4 years the ratio was 848 per 1000 boys, an increase from 774 in 1901. In the average of 0-29 years, the number of females per 1000 males at different age periods by religion at each of the last three censuses in the Punjab was as follows:[46]

Table 33

SEX RATIO AMONG THE SIKHS IN DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS IN 1901

Age	Sikhs		
	1901	1911	1921
0-4 inclusive	774	848	893
0-29 inclusive	751	729	764
Total 30 and over	825	777	764

The number of females in 1921 among Sikh Jats was the lowest (726), while the Khatris had the largest number of females per 1000 males (917). The sex ratio ranged between 726 and 917, with a large number of Sikh castes, showing numbers ranging from 813 to 854 in 1921. [47]

Table 34

SEX RATIO AMONG DIFFERENT CASTES OF SIKHS IN 1921

Castes	No. of females per 1000 males
Arora	836
Chamar	819
Chuhra	815
Chhimba	813
Jat	726
Jhinwar	848
Kamboh	854
Khatri	917
Mahtam	894
Nai	769
Saini	826
Tarkhan	795

In 1931, the sex ratio among the Sikhs, in the Punjab was 2270946 males to 1800678 females, i.e., 793 females to 1000 males. In the Punjab province there were 831 females to 1000 males.[48] It can, therefore, be seen that throughout the three decades we have studied in this chapter the female ratio among the Sikhs remained consistently low.

Due to the persistent low female ratio among the Sikhs, suspicions of female infanticide continued to dog the Sikhs. Before 1911, the suspicion of female infanticide mainly came from Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Lahore, Ferozepur and Delhi districts. It could certainly be seen in a group of villages on the border of Phillaur tahsil in Jalandhar district, having mainly Darbari Sikh Jats. The main 'culprits' were thought to be Sikh Bedis and Khatris and later Jats.

At this time the maximum paucity of females could be seen in the districts of Jalandhar (656), Ludhiana (750) and Ferozepur (745). A case

study of these districts was carried out and in the Jalandhar district the main culprits were thought to be the Sahota, Mann, Purewal, Dosanjh, Thakri, Varah and Basi. In Ludhiana district, the lowest female ratio was among the Gills and Garewals. In Ferozepur it was the Sandhus who had the lowest ratio.

The practice of female infanticide was on the decline according to the census superintendent, being more prevalent in the hypergamous Sikh Jats who clung tenaciously to their high status, although changes due to the social revolution and spread of education had an important role to play. Since the Jats were thought to be the main culprits' details were provided of the proportions in 1911 of females to males in the districts and states having a high proportion of Sikh Jats.

Table 35

SEX RATIO AMONG THE SIKHS IN DIFFERENT DISTRICTS IN 1911

Districts of State	Females per 1000 males	percentage of Jats in total population
Jalandhar	783	21
Kapurthala	785	15
Ludhiana	762	35
Malerkotla	752	33
Ferozepur	782	25
Faridkot	765	36
Patiala State	776	29
Lahore	741	16
Amritsar	774	23
Gujranwala	782	24
Ambala	750	14
Lyallpur	761	27

In all these districts the Jats formed a considerable portion of the population. The proportion of females to males in Sikh Jats was 702 to 1000 while that for all Sikhs was 746 to 1000, i.e., the lowest while that for the Punjab as a whole was 817.[49]

Information was also made available for females per 1000 males in 1911 in certain castes.[50] Here too the Jats continued to have the lowest ratio.

Table 36

CHANGING SIKH RATIO AMONG SIKH CASTES IN 1911

Caste	Females per 1000 males	
	1911	1901
Mazhabi	-	703
Rajput	-	712
Jat	702	751
Khatri	861	766
Arora	872	790
Bhatia	-	807
Chuhra	797	815
Mahtam	697	824
Labana	838	879
Chamar	800	-
Lohar	800	-
Kamboh	825	-
Tarkhan	784	-
Jhinwar	831	-
Chhimba	809	-
Saini	793	-
Fakir	205	-

In the census of 1921, the Sikhs in the Punjab had the lowest number of females in the population. The number for the Sikhs was 764 females to 1000 males while that for the Punjab was 828 per 1000 males.

The statistics provide a strong evidence for the prevalence of female infanticide in 1921. The notorious Jalandhar district showed 800 females to 1000 males for the Sikhs. Among the Sikhs, the Khatris alone had a large proportion of females per 1000 males, the Tarkhans (795), Nais (769) and Jats (726) had the lowest proportion of females.[51] In 1931, the number of females was 1,800,678 to 2,270,946 males, that is 793 females to 1000 males. That for the province of the Punjab was 831 females to 1000 males.[52] The number of females per 1000 males continued to be low till 1931, with the Jats persistently showing low numbers.

The level of literacy among the Sikhs also sheds some light on the community as a whole. In 1911, instructions to enumerators were changed. It was stated that only those be entered as literate, who could write a letter to a friend and read the answer to it. In the census of 1901, figures for the literate were rather inflated. [53] In 1911, in the Punjab province 169,154 Sikhs were literate, with 154,975 males and 14,179 females. A total of 8793 Sikhs were literate in English. 8671 of them were males and 122 females.

In the Princely states a total of 24,196 Sikhs were literate. Of these 94 per cent or 22,808 were males and 1388 were females, i.e., 3 per cent of the Sikhs. A total of 982 Sikhs were literate in English with 968 males and 14 females. The age group of 20 and over had the maximum literate Sikhs (20,512).[54]

In 1911, among the Sikhs 94 males and 12 females per mille were educated. They stood at par with the Hindus (95 and 7). Literacy in all age groups was as follows.[55]

Table 37

LITERATES AMONG SIKH MALES AND FEMALES

OF DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS IN 1911

Sikhs	All		0-10		10-15		15-20		20 and over	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	95	12	4	3	63	18	103	23	141	13

Separate details were provided in 1911 for education in vernaculars.[56]

Table 38

SIKH LITERATES IN VERNACULARS IN 1911

Sikhs	Per Mille					
	Urdu		Hindi		Punjabi	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
	24	-	2	-	67	11

The Sikhs lagged behind the Hindus who were themselves not doing very well. Jains, Zorastrians, Christians and Jews seem to be the most educated perhaps due to being smaller in numbers.

Information on the education of some castes has been provided for 1911.[57] These castes were the ones that contributed more than 2 mille to the total population of the province in 1901.

Table 39

LITERACY IN DIFFERENT SIKH CASTES IN 1911

Sikh Caste	Total population	Total literate population	Percentage	Literate population		Literacy in English		
				Males	Females	Total	Males	Females
Arora	176961	39945	22.5	36092	3853	1504	1493	11
Chhimba	35890	2073	5.7	1958	115	45	45	-
Chuhra	51527	391	0.75	383	8	9	9	-
Jat	1619272	52161	3.2	49442	2719	2572	2554	18
Jhinwar	44805	1410	3.14	1342	68	62	61	1
Kamboh	71753	1736	2.4	1641	95	95	84	11
Khatri	87586	23743	27.1	20304	3439	2405	2381	24
Labana	45086	1267	2.8	1234	33	28	28	-
Lohar	35360	1569	4.4	1480	89	90	90	-
Mahtam	50056	707	1.4	701	6	3	3	-
Nai	34342	1162	3.38	1117	45	29	29	-
Saini	47035	1754	3.7	1697	57	103	101	2
Sunar	27567	3220	11.6	2934	286	65	65	-
Tarkhan	181034	9609	5.3	8982	627	509	507	2

In 1921, instructions for the enumeration of literacy remained the same as in 1911.[58] Both 1911 and 1921 represented the same general features. A high standard of literacy (more than 50 per mille) could be seen in a great part of the North West of the Punjab and its eastern and central regions and between these two regions was an unexpected strip with a low proportion (less than 50 per mille) of literates covering parts of Sialkot, Amritsar, Lahore, Sheikhupura, Ferozepur and Montgomery districts. Another region, with low literacy comprised districts of Hissar,

Rohtak and Karnal.[59] The Sikhs in 1921 remained almost exactly in the same state of literacy as they were in 1911.

Table 40

CHANGE IN LITERACY AMONG SIKH MALES AND FEMALES (1911-1921)

Sikhs	Literacy			
	1911		1921	
	M	F	M	F
	94	12	93	13

The educational stagnation of the Sikhs was possibly due to a real increase in literacy combined with a diminution arising from the conversion of the comparatively illiterate Mazhabi to the ranks of Sikhism. The Sikh who till 1911 had remained equal to the Hindus in literacy had in 1921 fallen behind them. Another factor at play could be that Gurmukhi was not required for any government job and therefore, might have been neglected.[60]

Table 41

LITERACY AMONG SIKHS BY AGE, SEX AND RELIGION IN 1921 (NUMBERS PER MILLE)[61]

Religion	All ages 5 and over			5-9 inclusive		10-14		15-19		20 and over		5 and over who are literate in English	
Sikhs	T	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	T	M
	59	93	13	5	2	69	19	116	27	117	13	7	11

Some of the educated castes among the Sikhs in 1921 were as follows[62]:-

Table 42

LITERACY AMONG SIKH CASTES IN 1921

Sikh Caste	Total population	Total literate population	Percentage	Literate population		Literacy in English		
				Males	Females	Total	Males	Females
Arora	116175	22281	19.1	19853	2428	1544	1503	41
Chamar	161862	2418	1.4	2345	73	40	40	-
Chhimba	34129	1809	5.3	1716	93	72	71	1
Chuhra	40345	305	0.75	296	9	2	2	0
Jat	182281	61773	3.3	57474	4299	6068	5988	80
Jhinwar	48456	1289	2.6	1205	84	77	77	-
Kamboh	64194	1505	2.3	1412	93	144	139	5
Khatri	61234	13223	21.5	11329	1904	2092	2041	5
Mahtam	63307	229	0.36	216	13	4	4	-
Nai	32579	1119	3.43	1069	50	60	54	6
Saini	52888	2547	2385	162	245	243	2	-
Tarkhan	139327	6250	5824	426	423	415	8	-
Tarkhan	181034	9609	5.3	8982	627	509	507	2

The criterion for literacy in 1931 was the same as that in 1911 and 1921. The figures for the Sikhs were available for all ages.

Table 43

LITERACY AMONG DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS OF SIKHS IN 1931

Religion	All ages 5 and over			5-10		10-15		15-20		20 and over		Number per mille aged 5 and over who are literate		
Sikhs	T	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	T	M	F
	82	126	26	35	14	83	27	164	45	151	25	13	22	2

In comparison with other religions, the Sikhs in the Punjab were at par with the Hindus while the proportion of literacy in Sikh females was higher than among the Hindus. [63]

The Sikhs and Hindus according to the census enumerators acquired literacy without going to school as their occupations were such that they learnt to read and write. The Sikh artisans picked up reading and writing in their every day business.

In 1931, in the Punjab as a whole had 2,46,203 males (10.84 per cent) and 39,603 females 2.16 percent were literate while 249,003 males (10.96 percent) and 20,095 (1.11 per cent) female were literate in English. A total of 285266 (7 per cent) of the Sikh population was literate and 249607 (6.13 per cent) were literate in English. While numerous Sikh women were literate in Gurumukhi, literacy in the four vernaculars was also recorded in 1931. Among the Sikhs 207,257 males and 39,118 females were literate in all vernaculars while 107,017 males and 34,154 females were literate in Gurmukhi.[64]

To conclude, we can say that in 1931, 126 males and 26 females were in the Punjab literate per every 1000. Out of 1000 total literates 906 males and 993 females were literate in certain vernaculars, although only

406 males and 118 females per 1000 were primary passed. On the whole literacy among the Sikh was increasing.[65]

IV

Sects of the Sikhs were detailed in the census 1911. They were divided into two categories, Keshdhari and Sahajdhari. Among the Keshdhari were Gobind Singhi who were the followers of Guru Gobind Singh. Their number in 1891 was 839,138, in 1901 it fell to 39,605,6 and in 1911 further to 107,827. This decrease was due to the large number of unspecified Keshdhari Sikhs and the Tat Khalsa or Khalsa.[66]

Another sect was that of the Hazuris, again followers of Guru Gobind Singh who had paid a visit to Hazur Sahib and were initiated there. Among them were 287,548 Keshdharis and 6044 Sahajdharis.[67]

Tat Khalsa was also returned as a sect. Their numbers were 3,44,058 and they disregarded caste and other restriction and aimed at universal brotherhood. The movement was more or less reactionary.

Also enumerated were the Kukas who seemed to be declining as they were looked upon with disfavour in political circles and also due to the rise of the Tat Khalsa movement for religious zeal. In 1901, they were 137,88 in number and by 1911 their number was reduced to 4706.[68]

The Nihangs were 4270 in 1911 though in the 1891 they were 1595 and in 1901 only 567. The perception, however, was that they were declining; probably, in the previous census they returned themselves as Gobind Singhi. The table below lists the sects amongst the Sikhs and their numbers in 1911.[69]

Illustration 2

A Nihang Singh

Table 44

NUMBERS IN DIFFERENT SECTS OF KESHDHARI AND SAHAJDHARI SIKHS IN 1911

Sects	Keshdharis	Sahajdharis
Gobind Singhi	1,07,827	-
Hazuri	2,87,548	6,044
Kuka Namdhari	4,706	-
Mazhabi	726	-
Nihang	4270	-
Nanakpanthi	99601	176036
Panj Piria	10372	539
Ram Dasi	8106	2206
Ram Rai or Ram Raia	20686	5890
Sarwaria	53205	25880
Tat Khalsa (included Khalsa)	344058	-
Udasi	879	591
Unspecified	1466030	233752
Radha Swami	-	424

There were still other sects in 1911 which were regarded as less important:[70]

Table 45

NUMBERS IN MINOR SECTS OF KESHDHARI AND SAHAJDHARI SIKHS IN 1911

Sects	Keshdharis	Sahajdharis
Baba Gurditta	1741	206
Baba Jawahir Singh	1437	-
Nirmala	378	-
Baba Kalu	966	-
Basant Singh	655	-
Niranjani	778	-
Nirankari	574	995
Mahadev	251	-
Barbhag Singh Jogi	-	6383
Kalandhari	-	187
Namdev	-	434

These sects in 1921 were grouped under 2 main divisions – Keshdharis and Sahajdharis.[71]

Table 46

NUMBER OF DIFFERENT SECTS OF KESHDHARI AND SAHAJDHARI SIKHS IN 1921

Sects	Keshdharis	Sahajdharis
Gobind Singh	42,578	
Hazuri	2,46,384	1613
Kuka Namdhari	4037	
Mazhabi	2305	
Nihang	3954	
Nanak Panthi	22486	14179
Panj Piria	4592	
Ram Dasia	10568	209
Radhaswami		378
Ram Rai	695	-
Sarwaria	14259	2383
Tat Khalsa	531290	-
Udasi	776	66
Unspecified	1992386	209770
	2,876,320	22598

92 percent of the Sikh population was Keshdhari; the Sahajdhari formed 7 per cent of the Sikh population. The largest number of Sahajdharis was in Montgomery (36,845), Jalandhar (29,282) and Hoshiarpur (23,492). Sects analogous to other religions and miscellaneous sects made up the remaining 1 per cent. These were

Sadhu, Nirmala, Nirankari, Gulab Dasi, Baba Kalu, Bedi Sodhi, Garib Dasi, Baba Gurditta, Namdev, Kabir Panth and Amraoti. In the Keshdhari sects, the most important were the Tat Khalsa, Hazuri and Nanak Panthis. The largest percentage of Tat Khalsas was in the Patiala state.[72]

As compared with the figures of 1911 Keshdharis in 1921 showed an increase of 19.4 per cent while the Sahajdharis showed a loss of 49.3 per cent.[73] The table below shows the comparison between the sects in the two census years of 1911 and 1921.

Table 47

CHANGE IN THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE AMONG SIKH SECTS (1911-1921)

Sects	Strengths of Sects		Variations percentage
	1911	1921	
All sects	2,883,729	3,110,060	7.8
Keshdharis	8,408,014	2,876,320	- 19.4
Govind Singh	10,7,827	42,678	- 60.4
Hazuri	2,87,548	2,46,384	- 14.3
Mazhabi	726	2305	217.5
Nihang	4270	3954	-7.4
Nanak Panthi	99601	22480	-77.4
Panipiria	10372	4592	-55.7
Ram Dasia	8106	10568	30.4
Ram Rai	20686	605	-97.1

Sects	Strengths of Sects		Variations percentage
	1911	1921	
Sarwaria	53205	14259	-73.2
Tat Khalsa	344,058	531,296	54.4
Udasi	879	776	-11.7
Unspecified	1,466030	1,992,300	35.9
Sahajdharis	450,823	228,598	-49.3
Hazuri	6,044	1,613	-73.3
Nanak Panthi	176,036	14,179	-91.9
Radhaswami	424	378	-10.8
Ram Rai	5890	-	-100.0
Ram Dasia	2206	209	-90.5
Sarwaria	25,880	2383	-90.8
Udasi	591	66	-88.8
Unspecified	233752	209770	-10.3
Miscellaneous	1559	1812	-89.7
Sects analogous to other religions	7333	3330	-54.5

The abnormal increase in the number of Keshdharis resulted from accretions from the ranks of Sahajdharis and Hindus. Comparison of the figures of Keshdharis and Sahajdharis for districts and states which show the largest decrease in the strength of Sahajdharis brings us to the above conclusion.[74]

Table 48

NUMBERS OF KESHDHARI AND SAHAJDHARI SIKHS IN DIFFERENT DISTRICTS IN 1911 AND 1921

District or City	Sahajdhari		Keshdhari	
	1911	1921	1911	1921
Ambala	12052	6009	82333	91429
Hoshiarpur	48499	23494	85354	109375
Jalandhar	42177	29282	133718	176838
Ludhiana	17020	5597	189520	230124
Ferozepur	15247	5113	246325	297647
Amritsar	6140	1568	246757	285436
Gurdaspur	9674	5460	111383	132092
Sialkot	16690	6046	65061	68498
Lyallpur	24875	7986	121276	152827
Kapurthala	12516	7148	41759	56926
Malerkotla	3729	349	17287	21479
Patiala	67163	7532	465119	514774
Jind	1152	85	21414	29932

The separatist movement which was largely held responsible in 1911 for the increase in the number of Sikhs and decrease in the number of Hindus seemed to have done its work in the decade since 1911. The Singh Sabha movement started at the end of the nineteenth century followed by a new movement by the Tat Khalsa between the years 1905 and 1912 (established Chief Khalsa Diwan), led to an increase in the Tat Khalsa by 54.4 per cent while other minor sects lost their existence. The third association formed in the previous decade was the "Sharomani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee". It had received considerable support and success by 1921.[75]

The two main divisions of the Sikhs in 1931 were Keshdharis and Sahajdharis. 88.1 per cent of the Sikh population of the Punjab was Keshdhari and 6.91 were Sahajdhari, mostly in the districts of Hoshiarpur (35,916), Montgomery (31,530) and Jalandhar (27,805). The remaining 5 percent of the Sikh population was made up of, "sects analogous to other religious" such as Guru Bhag Singh (724), Nirmala (268), Namdev (267), Nirankari (282), Baba Budhi (231), Kabir Panthi (114), Bedi Sodi (76), Baba Kalu (52), Sadu (44), Baba Bindu (41) and Gulab Devi (2). The strength of the minor sects was decreasing in 1931, owing to a general tendency of modern times to do away with sub sects in the interest of the community as a whole.[76]

The sect table for 1931 shows as follows:[77]

Table 49

VARIATION IN NUMBERS OF KESHDHARI, SAHAJDHARI AND OTHER SIKHS (1921-1931)

Particulars	Keshdharis	Sahajdharis	Unspecified
1921	2,873,788	228,366	5142
1931	3,588,829	281,903	200,892
Variation	715,041	53,537	197,750
Variation per cent	24.9	23.4	38069

In 1931, a tendency was noticeable in the Sikh population to return no sects. Only, 6437 persons returned sects as their religion (14269 males and 2168 females).[78]

Table 50

VARIATION IN NUMBERS OF SIKHS RETURNING SECTARIAN IDENTITY (1921-1931)

Religion or Sect	1921	1931	Percentage variation
Sikh	2764	6437	+132.9
a. Keshdhari	2532	2469	- 2.7
Gobind Singhi	-	15	-
Hazuri	17	-	-
Kuka Namdhari	-	26	-
Mazhabi	14	19	+35.7
Miscellaneous	-	76	-
Nihang	41	57	+39.0
Nanakpanthi	-	-	-
Panj Piria	-	-	-
Ram Dasi	-	-	-
Ram Rai	-	-	-
Sarwaria	3	-	-
Tat Khalsa	11	-	-
Udasi	-	-	-
Unspecified	2446	2276	-6.9
b. Sahajdhari	232	119	-48.7
Hazuri	-	-	-
Mazhabi	-	-	-
Nanak Panthi	218	45	-79.4
Radha Swami	-	-	-
Ram Dasi	-	-	-
Ram Rai	-	-	-
Sawaria	1	-	-
Udasi	-	-	-
Unspecified	13	74	+469.2
c. Unspecified (Sikh)	-	3832	-
d. Sects analogous to other religions (Sanatan Dharmi)	-	17	-

76 persons shown under miscellaneous include Akali (7), Amritdhari (3), Khalsa (22) and Ramgarhia (44) the last two being the names of classes and not sects.[79]

Variations in the sects with the largest number of followers since 1921 was as follows:

Keshdharis increased from 2,873,788 to 3,588,829 i.e. by 24.8 per cent and Sahajdharis increased from 228,306 to 281,903 or by 23.4 per cent. The orthodox sects like "Gobind Singh" and "Hazuri" were decreasing but sects like Nanak Panthi and Mazhabis (largely returned by Chuhras, Chamars, Sainis and Bawarias) showed a large increase. The increase in the unspecified was due to lack of return of sect on the part of the persons who were formerly recorded as belonging to a particular sect. Sects like Udasi, Panj Piria and Sarwaria were also losing popularity.[80]

V

In the census for 1911 the various categories of groups of occupations were classified according to a scheme that made that the statistics comparable with those of the Western countries. [81] These categories were: production of raw materials (including agriculture); preparation and supply of material substances; cotton textile, ginning, tanning, metal forging, ceramic making etc; public administration and liberal arts (Army, Navy, Police, Law, Religion, etc.), and miscellaneous (domestic service etc.).

A total of 2,123,495 (73.6 per cent) Sikhs were included in the production of raw materials. The ordinary cultivators were 2,101,987, i.e. 72.89 per cent; 346,877 Sikhs (12 per cent) were in the textile industry, and 85,481 (2.96 per cent) worked with wood. 34437 (1.19 per cent) were involved in the shoe-boot industry; 57,904 (2 per cent) Sikhs worked in

the transport industry while 179103 (6.2 per cent) were in trade; 26120 (0.9 percent) were associated with banks and 32,713 (1.1 percent) Sikhs were in the army; 81,476 (2.8 percent) Sikhs worked in various professions and liberal arts.[82]

In 1921, the system of enumeration of occupation was the same as in 1911. Along with the principal occupations, any information on subsidiary occupation was also to be provided. The classes remained the same as in 1911.[83]

The census of 1921 among other statistics gave details of the Sikh castes that were following traditional occupations.[84] In addition to the traditional occupations some of the members of the castes began to follow other occupations also, albeit in very small numbers. Arora Sikhs received income from land, did cultivation of all kinds, were artisans etc. 20 Aroras were gazetted officers and 341 were lawyers, doctors and teachers. Among the chamars, 6 were gazetted officers, while 19 were lawyers, doctors and teachers. Around 10,000 of them were artisans. Chhimbas (3387) were carrying out agriculture and were mere artisans. 241 Chhimbas were associated with industries, 4 were gazetted officers and 20 were lawyers, doctors or teachers. Chuhras (1140) belonged to the artisan category. One was a gazetted officer and one a commissioned officer, 3 were in the category of professionals (lawyers, doctors and teachers). 192 jats were gazetted or commissioned officers and 86 were gazetted officers in public administration, 829 jats were lawyers, doctors or teachers. Among the Khatris, 28 were commissioned and gazetted officers, while another 79 were gazetted officers in the public administrations. 442 were lawyers, doctors and teachers.

The table 48 lists the numbers of persons belonging to various castes along with their traditional occupation. It can be seen that these castes continued to follow their traditional occupation in large numbers in 1921.

Table 51

OCCUPATIONS AMONG SIKH CASTES IN 1921

Castes, Tribe or Race (Sikh)	Traditional Occupation	Adult workers	Principal means of livelihood of worker
Aroras	Trade	36,120	22789
Chamars	Shoe making	59681	16418
Chhimbas	Dyeing	11965	3157
Chuhras	Sweeping	14934	3418
Jat	Agriculture	661905	621744
Jhiwar	Water carrier	21614	16518
Kamboh	Agriculture	21243	19160
Khatri	Trade	18813	8640
Mahatam	Hunting	18546	797
Nai	Barber	12131	7943
Saini	Agriculture	18133	16527
Tarkhan	Artisan	48601	29647

The system of classification adopted in 1931 was practically the same in 1911. It had four classes, 12 subclasses, 55 orders and 195 groups. On the whole, these was little occupational change.[85]

The discussion of 'castes' among the Sikhs was appended to the section on the occupations of the Sikhs. The information on Sikh castes was not long enough to warrant a section of its own. The Sikhs had no pure castes, i.e., those in which the members of only a single religious groups are comprised. This was due to the fact that Sikhism was a religion adopted by Hindus who therefore retained their original caste. In1921, enumerators were also instructed not to press the Sikhs to name

a caste if they did not want to and instead be entered as Sikh alone. Despite the above issues and injunctions in Sikh religion against the caste system, the castes did show their presence in the Sikh community. The numbers in the table given below show the castes returned by the Sikhs during census enumeration in 1921. The discussion that follows details the problematic position castes held in the Sikh community and its status according to the different census reports.

Table 52

NUMBERS IN SIKH CASTES AND THEIR PERCENTAGE IN THE CASTE AS A WHOLE IN 1921

Sikh caste	Total strength (000's omitted)	Percentage to the total strength of caste
Jat	1823	33.4
Chamar	163	14.3
Tarkhan	140	22.7
Arora	118	16.5
Kamboh	84	42.2
Ramgarhia	68	87.2
Unspecified	67	68.4
Mazhabi	64	98.5
Khatri	63	13.8
Mahatam	63	67.0
Saini	54	42.2
Jhiwar	52	13.9

The caste which included the fewest of other religions in 1921 were the Mazhabis (98.5 per cent of Sikhs), Ramgarhia (87.2 per cent of Sikhs) and Mahatam (67 per cent of Sikhs).[86]

In 1931, the variation in the population figures for certain castes which claimed both Hindus and Sikhs among their members was as follows:[87]

Table 53

NUMBERS OF SIKHS AND HINDUS IN

DIFFERENT CASTES (1881-1931)

Caste	Religion	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931
Jat	Hindu	1445374	1697177	1539574	1000085	1046396	992309
	Sikhs	1122673	1116417	1388877	1617532	1822881	2133152
Tarkhan	Hindu	213070	215561	233934	162305	161855	146727
	Sikhs	113067	134110	146904	180447	139327	158446
Lohar	Hindu	101190	110338	110816	82204	83385	74463
	Sikhs	24361	23287	30455	34812	20025	16460
Chuhra	Hindu	613434	859571	934553	777821	693393	368224
	Sikhs	40501	90321	21673	49937	40345	157341
Darzi	Hindu	9674	10218	9680	7657	8178	9823
	Sikhs	186	660	716	1406	1587	3630
Chamar	Hindu	931915	1029335	1089003	909499	968298	684963
	Sikhs	100014	106328	75753	164110	161862	155717

The table shows that among Jats, the number of Hindus went on decreasing from 1901 while the Sikh jats increased. Occupational castes such as Tarkhan and Lohar in Hindus saw a decrease since 1901; this number first grew for the Sikhs and then in the last few years of the decade ending in the 1920's, showed a downward trend among the Sikhs

too. This was due to the failure on the part of Sikh artisans to return any caste at all or claim Ramgarhia as their caste. The number of Chuhras was also on the increase among the Sikhs except in 1901 and 1921.

Information on additional castes includes the number of Aroras and Chamars whose number fell from 1921 to 1931 but this was due to the newly converted not returning any caste at all, the preference being to return themselves as Sikhs rather than being of a low caste and a corresponding fall in status. The Rajputs and Sainis, however, increased in 1931.[88]

Table 54

PERCENTAGE VARIATION IN CERTAIN SIKH CASTES (1921-1931)

Caste	1931	1921	Percentage variation
Arora	114329	121096	-5.6
Chamar	158753	163290	-2.8
Rajput	52829	30508	+73.2
Saini	86688	53777	+61.2

Though the number of Sikhs was rising in 1931, the proportion of various castes in Sikhism had not risen to such a large extent. The main reason was the many of the converted castes, did not return their caste at the time of the census returning them as 'Sikh' alone.

The Jat community in the Punjab was undergoing many changes. The period from 1881 to 1931 saw almost the complete disappearance of Hindu Jats in Ludhiana and Gurdaspur and dramatic fall in numbers in Lahore, Amritsar and Ferozepur. In Malerkotla and Farikdot, the figures of Hindu and Sikh Jats fluctuated violently between 1881 and 1901, and during the last thirty years Hindu Jats had almost entirely disappeared

owing to conversion to Sikhism. Several reasons could be assigned to the conversion of Hindu Jats to Sikhs, especially in the central Punjab districts of Hoshiarpur and Jalandhar. The main reason was the preaching *(parchar)* carried on by the Akalis, not only from 1920 onwards but also at the time of the census. Conversion to Sikhism opened the doors of army service to many Hindu Jats who were in the army only in small numbers. Khalsa schools had also been established and they too played an important role. With the Akali movement, the Sikh jats developed a prejudice against giving their daughters in marriage to Hindu jats.[89]

Table 55

NUMBERS OF JAT SIKHS IN DIFFERENT DISTRICTS (1881-1931)

District or state	Jat Sikhs					
	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931
Hissar	2067		24171	26125	31501	33623
Karnal	6212		7553	6994	7052	8082
Jind	4174		23394	18205	20665	22197
Nabha	54656		60553	56427	58947	66897
Kalsia	3895		4280	3965	4994	4992
Shahpur	646		86	3005	6900	6867
Lyallpur	-		-	77554	89642	98852
Montgomery	934		3904	4182	13151	19819
Multan	447		2272	2706	6542	16463
Bahawalpur	575		3258	4831	9322	13476

The chamars as a 'caste' were also converting to Sikhism in appreciable numbers. They too did not return chamar as their 'caste',

returning themselves only as Sikhs.[90]

Table 56

NUMBER OF SIKH CHAMARS (1881-1931)

Religion	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931
Chamars (Sikhs)	100014	106328	75753	164110	161862	222797

The Chuhras too showed an increased presence in the Sikhs in 1931 though there was a great struggle in Ludhiana, Ferozepur and Lyallpur between Sikhism and Ad-Dharm to appropriate the Chuhras.[91]

Table 57

VARIATION PERCENTAGE IN SIKH CHUHRAS (1921-1931)

LOCALITY	PERCENTAGE
Karnal	+2100.0
Ferozepur	+1385.0
Lahore	+4996.7
Amritsar	+66.1
Ambala	+943.9

The Sikh Chhimbas and Dhobis among the Sikhs showed a decrease in 1931. They perhaps in order to improve their status or for some other reasons were successful in returning themselves as Khatris or had become Sikhs and omitted to return any caste.

The percentage variation in selected castes by religion is given below.[92] Thus it can be seen that the reform movement by the Singh Sabha had its effect on all aspects of Sikh society including the castes

among the Sikhs.

Table 58

PERCENTAGE VARIATION IN SIKH CASTES (1921-1931)

CASTE	SIKHS
Aggarwal	+14.1
Arora	-5.6
Bawaria	+75.7
Brahmin	+23.1
Chamar (including Ramdasi)	+38.3
Chhimba	-50.1
Chuhra	+298.5
Darzi	+128.7
Jat	+17.1
Jhiwar	+29.7
Kamboh	+21.9
Khatri	-12.1
Kumhar	+30.6
Mahatam	-42.6
Nai	+21.7
Rajput	+64.9
Saini	+61.2
Sansi	+1507.8
Tarkhan	+13.8

VI

The three decades from 1901 to 1931 saw an unprecedented rise in the number of the Sikhs in the Punjab. An increase that was due to the change in the instructions to census enumerators about defining a Sikh and also the effect of the reform work of the Singh Sabha movement. This movement reclaimed the Sikhs that were lost to Sikhism in the late nineteenth century and made new converts, especially among the so called lower sections of society. Not only that, this period also saw a decrease in the numbers of Sikhs who returned themselves by either caste or sect or both. A large rise was seen in the numbers of Keshdharis and a corresponding fall in the numbers of Sahajdharis. The Sikhs however remained in largest numbers in the central districts of the Punjab which included the areas of the Princely states.

As for other demographic characteristics, this period saw an increase in the numbers of Sikhs in urban areas, although they remained predominantly rural and were following their traditional occupations, with agriculture and other agriculture related occupations the mainstay of the Sikh population. We can however see a rise in the numbers of Sikhs who were pursuing occupations other than agriculture, though service in the army continued to be the most popular. Literacy among the Sikhs can be said to have been increasing in 1931, though the Sikhs who till 1911 had been at par with the Hindus had fallen behind due to the influx of the comparatively uneducated Mazhabis into the ranks of Sikhism. The problem of low female sex ratio persisted in this period too as the Sikhs continued to have one of the lowest female sex ratio among the communities in the Punjab. The census enumerators were of the view that female infanticide was on the wane among the Sikh community due to the rise of education, modern ideas and awareness of the Sikh population.

The changes that can be said to define the first three decades of the twentieth century were the phenomenal rise in the numbers of the Sikhs, a drastic reduction in the numbers of Sikhs who returned castes and sects previously and a steep rise in the number of Keshdharis.

NOTES

1. *Census of India*, 1911, Report, Vol. XIV, Part I, pp. 1-5.
2. *Census of India,* 1931, Punjab, Report, Vol. XVII, p. I-14.
3. Addition to the province of Delhi was made from the Meerut district of the United Province. For small changes at local level see *Census of India* 1921, Punjab and Delhi, Report, Vol. XV, Part I, pp. 2 and 3.
4. Ibid., pp. I-4.
5. *Census of India,* 1931, Punjab Report, Vol. XVII, pp. 1- 14.
6. In the Census of 1921, mention of the changes had been made. The Punjab states had been divided into two categories. Those having political relations with the Punjab government and those having relations with the Government of India, depending upon their relations with the province and also on their geographical position. Except for Dujana, Pataudi, Kalsia and Simla hill states, the rest of the states had political relations with the Government of India, *Census of India*, 1921, Punjab and Delhi, Report, Vol. XV, pp. 1-4.
7. *Census of India,* 1931, Punjab, Report, Vol. XVII, pp.1-4.
8. *Census of India,* 1911, p. 97.
9. *Census of India,* 1921, p. 172.
10. *Census of India,* 1931, p. 12.
11. *Census of India,* 1911, p. 153. Information on births and deaths was not available for the Sikhs separately as they had been

included among the Hindus so far.

12. 'Census Procedure for the Punjab', 1911, ibid., pp. I-59.
13. Ibid., p. 99.
14. Ibid., Table VI p. 28.
15. Ibid., p. 98.
16. 'Census Procedure for the Punjab Code', *Census of India,* 1921, pp. I-3.
17. Ibid., 1921, p.184.
18. Ibid., pp. 305, 306.
19. Ibid., p.184.
20. *Census of India,* 1931, pp. 290, 291,303, 304.
21. Ibid., pp.305, 306.
22. Ibid., p.306.
23. *Census of India,* 1921, p.184.
24. *Census of India,* 1931, pp. 293-94.
25. Ibid., p. 294.
26. *Census of India,* 1911, Table VI, Religion.
27. Ibid., Table VI, Religion, p.28.
28. *Census of India,* 1931, pp. 290-93.
29. Ibid., p. 293.
30. *Census of India,* 1911, p.152.
31. Ibid., Table VI, Religion, pp. 27, 28.
32. Ibid., p.28.
33. Loc.cit
34. *Census of India,* 1921, p. 15.
35. Ibid., pp. 5, 172, 184.
36. Ibid., 1921, Subsidiary Table I, General distribution of population by religion, p. 191.
37. Ibid., p. 184.
38. *Census of India,* 1931, p. 304.

39. Ibid.,304.

40. Ibid., 307 (Map).

41. *Census of India,* 1911, Vol. XIV, Punjab, Part II, Tables, Table V, pp.20-25.

42. *Census of India,* 1911, Punjab, XIV, Part I, Report, p. 15.

43. *Census of India,* 1921, Subsidiary Table IV, Religion of Urban and Rural Population.

44. C*ensus of India,* 1921, Subsidiary Table II, Total Population of each religion who live in towns, p. 121.

45. *Census of India,* 1931, pp. 119-120.

46. *Census of India,* 1921, Subsidiary Table II, p. 236.

47. *Census of India, 1921*, Subsidiary Table IV, p. 239.

48. *Census of India,* 1931, pp. 69, 303.

49. *Census of India,* 1911, pp. 220,250,251,252, 255, 258.

50. Ibid., p. 221. Plague was cited as one of the reasons for the reduction in the number of females in 1911, p.229.

51. *Census of India,* 1921, pp. 224, 227.

52. *Census of India,* 1931, pp. 69, 303.

53. *Census of India,* 1911, p. 320.

54. Ibid., Table VIII, Education by Religion and Age, pp. 112-30.

55. Ibid., Subsidiary Table I, p. 336.

56. Ibid., Subsidiary Table IA, p. 336.

57. *Census of India,* 1911, Vol. XIV, Part II, Tables, pp. 136-43.

58. Comparison between Census of 1911 and 1921 is possible but that with the previous census is not possible due to a different definition of literacy. *Census of India,* 1921, p. 288.

59. *Census of India,* 1921, For details see diagram on pp. 46, 47, 289, 29 of the census.

60. Ibid., p. 292.

61. Ibid., Subsidiary Table I, Literacy by age, sex and religion, p. 297.

62. Ibid., Only castes with a population of more than 2 per mille were tabulated. Table IX, Education by Selected Tribes or Races, pp. 131-33.

63. *Census of India,* 1931, p. 252.

64. Ibid., pp. 256-60.

65. Ibid.,Subsidiary Table III, Literacy by Religions, Sex and Locality, pp. 263, 264.

66. *Census of India,* 1911, Table VI-A, Sects of Main Religions, pp. 58, 156.

67. Ibid., Table VA, Sects of Main Religions, pp. 38, 156.

68. Ibid.,Table VIA, Sects of Main Religions, pp. 38, 158.

69. Ibid., p. 156.

70. Ibid., pp. 158-59.

71. *Census of India,* 1921, p. 185.

72. Ibid., pp. 185-86.

73. Ibid., p. 186.

74. Loc.cit.

75. *Census of India,* 1921, p. 187.

76. *Census of India,* 1931, p. 309.

77. To prove the point that the increase was largely due to conversion from Hindus, the test of survivorship was applied to the Sikh population of 1931 that was over 10 years (both total population and enumerated populated of all religious and that of the Sikhs). An excess of 542,596 was found in the Sikh population over 10 years and these according to the enumerators was due to absorption from other communities. *Census of India*, 1931, Sect Table XVI-A, p. 306.

78. *Census of India,* 1931, Table XVI, Religions, p. 5.

79. Ibid.,For actual figures see Table XVIA, Sects of Main Religions, pp. 98-101.

80. *Census of India,* 1931, p. 309.

81. *Census of India,* 1911, pp. 91, 486, 487.

82. Ibid., Table XV, Occupation or means of livelihood, pp. 388-93.

83. Due to the difference in the classes and groups only the Census of 1911 and 1921 are comparable, *Census of India,* 1921, p. 351.

A. Production of Raw Materials:

I – Exploitation of animals and vegetables.

II – Exploitation of minerals.

B. Preparation and Supply of Material Substances.

III – Industry

IV – Transport

V – Trade

C. Public Administration and Liberal Arts

VI – Public Force

VII – Public Administration

VIII – Professions and Liberal Arts

D. Miscellaneous

IX – Persons living on their income

X – Domestic Service.

XI – Insufficiently described occupations.

XII – Unproductive.

84. *Census of India,* 1921, Table XXI, Occupation of Selected, Castes, Tribes or Races, pp. 379-391. Actual numbers have been reduced to comparable numbers. For actual numbers see the relevant census.

85. *Census of India,* 1931, for details see Subsidiary Table V, Occupation of Selected Castes, pp. 244-46.

86. *Census of India,* 1921, pp. 342-45. Classification for Castes adopted in 1891 was based on the consideration of ethnology, history, and function and was discarded in 1901 in favour of a new

classification by social precedence which was met with resentment.

87. *Census of India,* 1931, p. 308.

88. Ibid., pp. 308-09.

89. Ibid., pp. 340-41.

90. Ibid., p. 333.

91. Ibid., p. 335.

92. Ibid., p.328. Based on Imperial Tables XVII of 1931 and XIII of 1921.

Chapter 4

BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The present chapter deals with the multiplicity of beliefs and practices within the Sikh community.The British writings of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as well as the census reports depict the Sikhs as having several sects of varying numbers. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* defines a sect as a group of people with somewhat different religious beliefs – typically regarded as heretical from those of a larger group to which they belong. The usage according to the dictionary is often derogatory, a group that has separated from an established church; a non-conformist Church. Sect is also used for philosophical or political group, especially one regarded as extreme or dangerous.[1] In the census reports of 1855 and 1868, no Sikh sects were mentioned. According to the census of 1881, 'The Sikhs like the Hindus, number among their ranks the representatives of numerous orders of ascetics or devotees. They have but small influence on the lives and beliefs of the people.'[2] Therefrom arises the need to identify these sects and understand their perceptions of the Sikh religion and the Sikh community. This is only possible if we look at the writings of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century on the Sikhs to know the basic principles of Sikhism as understood by the people and how these sects differed from the mainstream in belief and practice in addition to what constituted Sikhism in the period immediately before the advent of the British in the Punjab.

I

The writers on the Sikhs of the eighteenth century wrote for the people. The Gurbilas literature of this time, written in praise of the Gurus, insists on the end of personal Guruship after Guru Gobind Singh and the vesting of Guruship in the Khalsa and the Granth. Written in the mid-eighteenth century,

Koer Singh's *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* says, the true Sikh regards the Granth as the Guru and has faith in Granth as the Guru.[3] Kesar Singh Chhibber states that Guru Gobind Singh gave Guruship to Granth Sahib. Therefore, 'the Granth Sahib is our Guru now'.[4] The same position is taken by Sarup Das Bhalla, Sukha Singh and Ratan Singh Bhangu.[5] All of these contemporary writers equate the Granth with the Adi Granth, believe in the ten Gurus and uphold the doctrines of Guru Granth and Guru Panth. By implication, a personal Guru is ruled out.[6] These writers uphold the belief in Akal Purkh as the only God. However, they subscribe also to the view that Guru Gobind Singh invoked the mother goddess for instituting the Khalsa to destroy the Turks.[7] Evidently, the goddess is not the supreme deity; she is closely linked with an event and invoked for a specific purpose: to sanctify the use of arms by the Khalsa.[8]

The Var composed by Bhai Gurdas towards the end of the eighteenth century underlines the unity of God and the unity of Guruship, equates the Sikh with the Khalsa, and celebrates the establishment of Sikh rule. Not to belong to the Khalsa Panth is to be a non-Sikh. The author prays for the boon of the *Nam*, association with the *sangat*, eradication of *haumai*, capacity to accept God's will (*hukam*), and attainment of liberation.[9]

The Rahitnamas of the early eighteenth century relate primarily to the Sikh way of life and their emphasis, therefore, is on Sikh beliefs and practices. The doctrines of Guru Granth and Guru Panth are underlined by the Rahitnamas of the period, upholding the belief in ten Gurus and rejecting a personal Guru. Importance is given to the religious life of the Khalsa: the daily discipline of meditation, recitation of the *Gurbani*, visit to the Gurdwara where *kirtan* and *katha* are held, and participation in congregational prayer. Most of the Rahitnamas tend to equate the Sikh with the Khalsa or the Singh. The term Sahajdhari is used only in the Chaupa Singh Rahitnama, which puts emphasis nonetheless on *kes*, *kirpan*, *kachh*, *kangha*, and *kara* at different places.[10]

A Rahitnama compiled in this period lays down that the Khalsa should pay no heed to any god or goddess, any temple or image, any place of pilgrimage, fasting or religious vows; they should not make libation to gods, repeat the Gayatri or any other prayer; they should never wear a sacred thread or hold a *shraddh*; they should have nothing to do with a Brahman; they should not seek to become well versed in the Shastras.[11]

The European observers in the late eighteenth century, generally talk of the Khalsa, equating the Sikh with the Singh and looking upon them as distinct from the Hindus and Muslims. The Khalsa never shaved their heads or beards, and they wore turbans generally of blue colour. They wore drawers (*kachh*) and iron bracelet (*kara*), and they wore arms. They ate all kinds of meat but never beef. They used *bhang*, opium and spirits but never tobacco.[12]

The chronicles of the early nineteenth century when the Punjab was under Ranjit Singh, provide information on state patronage and religious practices of the rulers. The evidence of the *Umdat ut-Tawarikh* underlines that the Maharaja and his successors showed utmost devotion to the Darbar Sahib and other sacred places in Amritsar.[13] Revenue-free lands were confirmed or granted to persons and institutions of all religious systems: Sikh, Hindu and Muslim. The largest share went to the Sikh institutions and descendents of Guru Nanak and Guru Ram Das that is the Bedis and the Sodhis. Many of the Bedis and Sodhis however held *jagirs*, with the understanding that like all other *jagirdars* they too were to maintain troops, generally horsemen, for the service of the State. All the important Sikh rulers 'served' the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar with revenue-free lands and other contributions from time to time.[14]

Ganesh Das refers to Amritsar as the foremost pilgrimage centre of the Sikhs with several sacred places: Harmandir Sahib, Dukh Bhanjani, Akal Bunga, Baba Atal, Bibeksar, Kaulsar, Ramsar and Santokhsar. He was thoroughly familiar with the *rahit* of the Khalsa and he makes a general statement about the contemporary Sikhs. The book which contained the compositions of Guru Nanak and his successors was called the Granth Sahib

and the person who attended to it was the Bhai. At the beginning of every lunar month *karha parshad* was prepared in the *dharmsalas* and distributed after the prayer. The Sikhs meditated on God in accordance with the teachings of Guru Nanak. The Sikh of Ganesh Das is the Khalsa Singh.[15]

Ram Sukh Rao provides far more detailed information on the rulers of Kapurthala, the successors of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. He creates the impression that it was a customary practice for both the rulers of Kapurthala and Maharaja Ranjit Singh to offer revenue-free land and cash to Sikh sacred places on all important occasions like birth, marriage, death, and coronation. Great regard was shown by both rulers to the descendants of Guru Nanak, the descendants of Guru Amar Das and the descendants of Guru Ram Das especially the Bedis of Una, the Bhalla Bawas of Goindval and the Sodhis of Anandpur. The Sodhis of Anandpur are referred to as 'gurus' and offerings were sent to all their four branches on all important occasions. Many of the Sodhis however were actually *jagirdars* and were treated as such. The attitude of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Fateh Singh Ahluwalia towards the Bedis was no different: they were treated with respect but not when it came to mundane matters. When it was so required the Maharaja did not hesitate to resume a certain territory after the death of Sahib Singh Bedi. The attitude of the Maharaja and Fateh Singh Ahluwalia towards the Akalis was very much similar: it was respectful but authoritative.[16]

Fateh Singh Ahluwalia's interest was not confined to the Sikh places of worship or the Sodhis, Bedis and the Akalis. He is said to have visited some Sufi shrines and along with the Maharaja Ranjit Singh he visited the temple at Jawalamukhi. Fateh Singh is presented as a great Vaishnava who got made temples at Kapurthala and Vrindavan, with adequate support for their maintenance. When as a prince he had suffered from small pox, his father, Raja Bhag Singh made arrangements for the worship of Sitala during his illness and also on his recovery. Brahmans were employed to conduct all rituals, and astrologers were consulted for auspicious moments. Customary charities were lavishly made.[17]

The Khalsa Singhs were in numerical superiority in the Sikh community. The section of Singhs who laid claim to be the representatives of the Khalsa Panth were actually the Akalis, also called Nihangs. For the mainstream the belief in one God was central to Sikh faith and the Gurdwara was the most important institution for Sikh worship. The doctrine of Guru-Granth followed by that of Guru-Panth was the most important doctrine of the Sikhs in this period. The Granth meant the Adi Granth alone. The Rahitnamas were meant to propagate the norms of personal and social life among the Singhs. The state did not impose any restrictions on the religious beliefs and practices of the people. Their concern for Sikh institutions never decreased. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's preference for the Khalsa Singh identity is evident from his insistence that the Sikhs who joined his army should be the baptized Khalsa. Even the non-Sikh functionaries of the state tended to wear turbans and keep flowing beards.[18]

It is important to note that though in their religious practices, the rulers ignored some of the norms of Sikhism, especially the negative ones, their example could be followed by the members of the ruling class. The respect shown to the Sodhis and Bedis did not place them outside the authority of the State and they were at par with the other jagirdars. The beliefs of the mainstream notwithstanding, the Sikh rulers can be seen visiting Sikh and non-Sikh places of worship and the performance of the rites of birth, marriage and death were carried out with the help of the Guru Granth or the Brahmans or both. In the same way although there was no scriptural or formal approval of the visit of a Singh to the shrines of Sitala, Gugga or Sakhi Sarvar the Sikh public can be seen doing so. Also, though the outcaste Singh was regarded as a part of the Sikh social order and a member of the Khalsa Panth, the Singhs with the caste background did not eat with the outcaste Singhs outside the sacred space.

Therefore, it appears that a certain degree of difference between the Sikh norms and the Sikh practice was taking place. The Nirankari and the Namdhari movements indicate a reaction to departure from the teachings of

the Guru Granth and the importance given to Brahmans in Sikh social life, which were seriously objected to by some of the Sikhs themselves. They placed the Guru Granth Sahib at the centre of religious life and they had nothing to do with Brahmans for the performance of any ceremonies. In this respect they were close to the norms of the Rahitnamas though the movements were Sahajdhari. It is in this context that we take a look at the sects mentioned in the census reports. A quarter of a century later exclusive importance given to the Adi Granth and the Sikh rites of passage, coupled with Singh identity, would form the core of the Singh Sabha Movement.[19]

Cunningham, writing in 1849 leaves no doubt that he was actually counting the Singhs in estimating the number of Sikhs. In his account of the Sikhs, the Singhs figure prominently among the top most *jagirdars* of the kingdom of Lahore. Of the nearly two scores of Generals and Commanders in the army of Lahore before the first Anglo-Sikh war, a little more than half were Khalsa Singhs. More significantly the Sikhs who joined the army were Singhs. There was hardly any unit of cavalry, infantry or artillery which did not have Singh soldiers and Singh officers. Cunnigham equated the Sikh virtually with the Singh. Cunningham lists at least eighteen sects or denominations of the Sikhs in the 1840's. All of these according to him were not 'sects'. The Bedis, Trehans, Bhallas and Sodhis, the Rangretas, Ramdasis and Mazhabis, the Bhais and Gianis, and the Akalis and Nihangsdid not form sects according to Cunnigham. The Nirmalas administered the *pahul*. A few groups had been excommunicated by Guru Gobind Singh or the Khalsa. The only ones left were the Suthra Shahis and the Udasis and of these the latter held the Adi Granth in reverence and were proud to be associated with the Sikhs but were essentially a 'Hindu sect'. Cunnigham was of the firm view that 'the great development of the tenets of Guru Gobind has thrown other denominations into the shade'.[20]

II

In the late nineteenth century can be seen the beginning of the Nirankaris. Baba Dayal, the founder, did not seem to have departed

from the teachings of Guru Nanak and the Adi Granth played a central role in Nirankari ritual and teaching. At Rawalpindi, Baba Dayal conducted his religious discourses in the presence of the *Adi-Granth* and attracted a moderate number of followers.[21] His successor, Baba Darbara Singh, further extended the sphere of his activities in the towns and villages outside Rawalpindi. During the time of the third successor Baba Ratta Ji, centers were founded in the districts like Ludhiana, Amritsar and Ferozepur.[22] Baba Dayal continued his mission till his death in 1855. He was succeeded by his eldest son Darbara Singh and then in 1870 by his third son, Rattan Chand, known as Sahib Ratta Ji. The latter was succeeded by his son Gurdit Singh who died in 1947. [23]

It was Baba Dayal's belief that God is one and formless or Nirankar and salvation was to be attained through meditation on God.The term Nirankar means 'the formless', and was used by Guru Nanak to refer to God. Since Baba Dayal based his message on the teachings of Guru Nanak, in practice the worship of idols and saints was denounced.[24] Quoting Guru Nanak, he stressed the futility of rituals and customs, rejected the Brahmanical orthodoxy, pertaining to the births and deaths and did not permit his followers to observe any ritual which would assimilate them to the Hindus. Opposition to the Nirankaris therefore came not from the Sikhs but from the Hindus due to the denial of the gods of the Hindu pantheon. The Nirankaris appear to have stood firmly within Sikh tradition from the outset. In the eyes of his contemporaries, Baba Dayal was an innovator in the area of religious ceremonies. According to Webster, Baba Dayal was a radical, if not an innovator and his aim seems to have been to bring Sikh ritual into conformity with Sikh teaching as found in the *Adi Granth*.[25]

In the late nineteenth century by way of a *Hukamnama* issued by Baba Darbara (1855-1870), 'innovations' in the *rahit* or conduct were made mandatory for all Nirankaris and the beliefs, practices and ideas of the Nirankaris were codified. The Sikhs according to the

Hukamnama were straying from the path laid down by the Sikh Gurus by following Brahmanical rites.[26] Addressing all the Sikhs, the *Hukamnama* referred to Baba Dayal as 'Sri Satguru Dayal Ji' and emphasized that he was commissioned by the 'Divine Court' to carry on the task of ten Sikh Gurus and to direct the Sikhs in the ways of the name as the Brahmans had misled them. The *Hukamnama* prescribed ceremonies pertaining to birth, engagement, marriage and death which were to be performed in accordance with the spirit of the *Adi-Granth.* For the birth ceremony, hymns from the *Adi-Granth* were to be recited and *prasad*, sacred food, be distributed. A son's name could be deduced from the *Adi-Granth* forty days after his birth. The marriage ceremony was to be performed in the presence of the Granth by four circumambulatory *lawan* of Guru Ram Das. The *Hukamnama* asked the Nirankaris to take death as an occasion of rejoicing rather than weeping and mourning. The dead-body was to be disposed of either by cremation or by releasing it into a flowing stream. The *Hukamnama* further enjoined the Nirankaris to give up certain practices like treating women as unclean at child birth; consideration of auspicious moments; displaying of dowry at marriage and the offering of lamps and rice-balls to the dead. Ritualism was to be given up and the Sikhs were to worship none save the word of the 'Gurus'.[27] The official sources confirm these beliefs and practices and also mention a few other ideas. It is mentioned that Nirankaris believed that pilgrimages and offerings were useless and Brahmans and cows were not to be revered. They also practised widow-marriage. They abstained from the use of wine, flesh and smoking. Lying, cheating and using false weights were considered 'crimes'.[28]

The numerical strength of the Nirankaris remained moderate throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, yet they did the spadework in preparing the foundation of the Sikh resurgence.[29] They initiated the quest for a separate religious identity for the Sikhs; rejecting those rites and rituals which were against the spirit of the *Adi Granth* and

evolving some according to the spirit of the Sikh scriptures. A task later carried forward by the Namdhari and the Singh Sabha movements.

Webster is of the view that since no rite of initiation was followed, Baba Darbara Singh did not see his followers as a separate group or sect, from the Sikhs or Hindus but a collection of people who had decided the reorder their ceremonial life along the lines laid down by Guru Nanak and Baba Dayal. The *Hukamnama* too is addressed to all Sikhs as coming from both Guru Nanak and Baba Dayal. The Nirankaris, according to Webster have been a small, non-aggressive basically religious Sikh body, which was not political or even social change oriented. Unlike the Namdharis they never got into trouble with the government and unlike the Singh Sabhas they neither developed an active publication programme nor established institutions. In addition, they seem not to have become numerous enough or 'heretical' enough to have caused alarm or stimulated much controversy within the Sikh community. In the Nirankari movement, however, a nascent idea of the importance later given to living gurus can be seen emerging because a living Guru was for them of utmost importance.[30] The *Hukamnama* of Baba Darbara too addressed Baba Dayal as Sri Satguru Dayal ji.

Another sect that was operative in Rawalpindi in Punjab was that of the *jagiasi* or *abhiasi* under the guidance of Sai Sahib Bhagat Jawahar Mal. One of his leading disciples was Bhai Balak Singh of Hazro who later exercised major influence on Bhai Ram Singh. The Namdhari movement was begun by Baba Balak Singh in 1847. His belief was in a return to the simple religious message of the Gurus. Baba Balak Singh was succeeded by Baba Ram Singh who established his headquarters at Bhaini in Ludhiana district where the Namdhari movement gained widespread popularity. Baba Ram Singh believed in abolition of all caste distinctions among the Sikhs. The Granth was the only accepted volume. He was against worship of pirs, tombs, Gugga and Sultan.[31]

According to Mufti Ghulam Sarwar at the end of his life Bhai Balak Singh emphasized thirteen beliefs. Important among these were repetition of God's Name; weddings to be carried out by *Anand*; dowry not to be exchanged; tobacco, meat and alcohol to be avoided; turban was to be worn along with a small *kirpan* to be kept in it; not to lie; not to ask for alms; not to eat *prasad* provided by anyone but a *gurbhai*.[32]

Bhai Ram Singh was the first reformer to emphasize the importance of Singh identity. He revived the Khalsa traditions and initiated his followers through the baptism of the sword without any discrimination on the basis of sex or creed.[33] He asked his followers to keep four of the five K's: *Kesh*, uncut hair; *Kachcha*, trouser to the knees; *Kara*, iron bangle; *Kangha*, the com. They were instructed to carry a heavy *lathi* instead of the *kirpan* which had been banned by the British government. His aim was to rid Sikh religion of the malpractices that had crept in and to rejuvenate it.

A Government correspondence of 1863 gives the following summary of the Kuka's belief's and the doctrine of Ram Singh. He abolishes all distinctions among Sikhs; advocates indiscriminate marriage of all class; enjoins the marriage of widows; enjoins abstinence from alchoal and drugs; but advocates too much free intercourse between the sexes; men and women rave together at his meetings; and thousands of women and young girls have joined the sect; he exhorts his disciples to be cleanly and truth telling. One of his maxims says: 'it is well that every man carries his staff', and they all do. The *Granth* is their only accepted scripture. The brotherhood may be known by the tie of their *pagris,* a watchword, and a necklace of knots made in a white woollen cord worn by all the community. The watchword mentioned above was *' Sat Akal Purkh*' in response to '*Sat Sri Akal'*.[34] It was a departure from Guru Gobind Singh's salutation '*Wahe Guru Ji Ka Khalsa, Wahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh'*.

The practices to be followed by the baptized members, the Sant Khalsa later called the Kukas, were well defined. They were to observe a strict code of discipline and were to lead pure and clean lives attuned to the Name of

God; develop regular and disciplined habits.[35] They were to rise at 03.00 a.m.; brush their teeth, bathe and recite the Name of God, especially the *Chandi Di Var*, a composition they attributed to Guru Gobind Singh. Recitation of *Chandi Di Var* was intended to invoke the martial spirit among the Sant Khalsa so that they could fight against tyranny. Baba Ram Singh also made an arrangement for the training of young Sant Khalsa in the use of *Gatka*, horse-riding and weapons. Already distinct in physical appearance, Baba wished that the Sant Khalsa should feel as if they were 'the eclect' while others were *mlechha*, unclean. For that matter, he taught them the virtues of 'purity and truth'.[36]

Baba Ram Singh denounced the beliefs and practices being advocated by the contemporary Babas and Gurus. He told his followers to regard Guru *Granth* as the only true one; the Bedis and the Mahants and others claiming Gurudom were impostors as no one could be Guru after Guru Gobind Singh; the *devidwaras*, *shivdwaras* and *thakardwaras* were means of extortion used by the Brahmans and were to be held in contempt and never to be visited; idol-worship was an insult to God and was not to be forgiven by Him. Baba Ram Singh insisted that any person could be admitted a convert irrespective of caste or religion. Through his discourses, he preached unity of God and equality of all human relationship.[37]

Major Perkins, the district superintendent of Police at Ludhiana wrote in a report that most of Bhai Ram Singh's followers were from the *jat, tarkhan, chamar* and *mazhabi* castes. Baba Ram Singh's message had an obvious appeal to that section of Sikh community which was socially and economically underprivileged and was exploited in the name of religion. According to a communication of June 1863 and another of September 1866 the Kukas found converts from the lower castes of the Hindus and Muslims too.[38] It can therefore be seen that the Namdhari movement was a harbinger of times to come while at the same time going back to the Sikh practice of equality of all peoples.

III

In the early twentieth century the information on the sects in the Sikh community has been dealt with in the census of 1911. The Sikhs are seen as divided into two broad categories: Keshdhari and Sahajdhari. Among the Keshdhari were Gobind Singhi who were the followers of Guru Gobind Singh. Their number in 1911 was decreasing due to the large number of unspecified Keshdhari Sikhs, and the Tat Khalsa or Khalsa. Another group was that of the Hazuris, again followers of Guru Gobind Singh who had paid a visit to Hazur Sahib and were initiated there. Among them were a large number of Keshdharis and a few thousands of Sahajdharis. Tat Khalsa was also returned as a sect. According to the census report, this term dated back to the times of Banda Bahadur. Those who accepted Banda as Guru called themselves Bandai-Khalsa and others who accepted only the Granth as the Guru called themselves Tat Khalsa (pure).[39]

Also enumerated in 1911 were the Kukas who seemed to be declining as they were looked upon with disfavour in political circles and also due to the rise of the Tat Khalsa movement. The Nihangs in 1911 were declining, as in the previous census they returned themselves as Gobind Singhi. In 1911, the other sects mentioned are Baba Gurditta, Baba Jawahir Singh, Nirmalas, Baba Kalu, Basant Singh or Sat Sahib (mentioned by Rose), Niranjani, Mahadev or Shiv Upasak, Bardbhag Singh, Jogi and Nirankari. In 1901, a few hundred Keshdhari Sikhs still adhered to worship of Shiva and followed Guru Gobind Singh's faith; in 1911 only 251 did so. People who signified their adherence to both Hinduism and Sikhism were also enumerated. Though conversions were thought to be the one of main reasons behind the increase in the number of Sikhs in 1911, details were available for only 8 conversions to the Sikh religion.[40]

Illustration 3

A Keshdhari Sikh

The Census of 1921 records that, the beginning of sects among the Sikhs, came with Guru Gobind Singh's instructions on 5 K's. Those who accepted it were the Kesdharis and those who did not were Sahajdharis. Further, when Banda came to power in the early eighteenth century, he again began the system of 'Charanpahul' which was recognized by some Sikhs and not by others. Therefore, this difference of opinion gave rise to sub-sects in the Khalsa religion.

Other important sects in 1921 were Akalis and Kukas. The Akalis were said to have been founded by Ajit Singh and were known as a militant organization. Its headquarters were at the Akal Bunga at Amritsar and they claimed the leadership of the Khalsa.Two other principal ascetic orders were listed in the sects in 1921. The Udasi sect was founded by Baba Sri Chand and the Nirmalas claimed that their order had been founded by Guru Nanak himself.

All the sects in 1921 were grouped under 2 main categories – Keshdharis and Sahajdharis. A number of Keshdhari Sikhs did not return any sect. They were around twenty lakhs in number while the number of Sahajdharis who did not do so was around two lakhs. Taken as a whole an overwhelming number of the Sikhs, approximately 92 per cent were Keshdhari. In the Keshdhari sects, the most important were the Tat Khalsa, Hazuri and Nanak Panthis. The largest percentage of Tat Khalsa was in the Patiala State.[41] This was largely the work of the Singh Sabha Movement.

The two main divisions of the Sikhs in 1931 too remained the Keshdharis and Sahajdharis. About 88 per cent of the Sikh population of the Punjab was Keshdhari. A small number of Sikhs returned themselves as sects which were the same as in the census of 1921.[42] Other sects in existence were the "sects analogous to other religions" such as Guru Bhag Singh, Nirmala, Namdev, Nirankari, Baba Budhi, Kabir Panthi, Bedhi Sodi, Baba Kalu, Sadu, Baba Bindu and Gulab Devi. The strength of the minor sects was decreasing in 1931, owing to a general tendency of modern times to do away with sub sects in

the interest of the community as a whole.[43] Included under the miscellaneous category were Akali, Amritdhari, Khalsa and Ramgarhia the last two being the names of classes and not sects.[44]

At the end of our period we can see that Keshdharis increased in numbers. The orthodox sects like "Gobind Singhi" and "Hazuri" were decreasing but sects like Nanak Panthi and Mazhabis (largely returned by Chuhras, Chamars, Sainis and Bawarias) showed a large increase. The increase in the unspecified was due to lack of return of sect on the part of the persons who were formerly recorded as belonging to a particular sect. Sects like Udasi, Panj Piaria and Sarwaria were also losing popularity.[45]

As far as our definition of sect is concerned, none of the above groups except perhaps the Udasis meet the requirement of a sect. A better classification of these 'sects' would perhaps be splinter groups which practised the Sikh religion somewhat leniently than the majority of the believers and in some cases followed different ideological streams. These are mainly groupings of people who broadly believed in a line of succession different from the main line of succession.

The beliefs of the above sects were as follows. The Keshdhari were the Sikhs who were like the Gobind Singhi which is referred to in some of the census as Gobind Singh. They wore the *kes* and followed other restrictions enjoined by the tenth Guru. The Sahajdhari were the Sikhs who did not keep their *kesh* uncut and did not follow the other tenets of Guru Gobind Singh. The term Tat Khalsa according to the census of 1911 was revived by the neo-Sikhs who were devoted to the tenets of the ten Gurus and did not like their religion to be corrupted by association with any non-Sikh belief. They were trying to restore the faith, to what they considered its pristine purity. They disregarded caste and other restrictions and aimed a

Illustration 4

A Sahajdhari Sikh

universal brotherhood. The movement was more or less reactionary. The chief centre of the movement was Amritsar. Khalsa meant the 'pick' and implied the true followers of Guru Gobind Singh. The term Khalsa was applied generally to all Keshdharis, but had recently acquired a special significance similar to that of Tat Khalsa.[46]

The other sects mentioned in the census were those of the Sat Kartaris who were Udasis and revered Guru Arjan and Baba Badbhag Singh, a decendent of Dhir Mal. He was credited with miraculous powers and held fairs at Holi and Baisakhi at which exorcising was the main activity. The Ramdasis held Guru Ram Das in special reverence and accepted the Sikh form of baptism. The Ram Rais were the followers of Ram Rai the elder brother of Guru Harkrishan and were disclaimed by Guru Gobind Singh. They revered the *Adi Granth* but followed Ram Rais scripture. The Nirmalas were highly respected for their learning, believed in Vedanta and observed customs prescribed by Shastras but considered themselves as enlightened Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh. They were celibate ascetics. The Bedis were descendents of Guru Nanak and enjoyed special reverence among the Sikhs. Most of them believed in the orthodox line of succession and were the Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh. The Sodhis of Anandpur were descended from Suraj Mal son of Guru Hargobind and worshipped their own Mahants. The Jogis included the followers of Jogi Pir, Goi Chand, Gorakh Nath and the sect of Jangams. They rejected the Vedas, preached equality of all men and followed Shiva. The Udasis were the followers of Baba Sri Chand son of Guru Nanak whom they considered to be the incarnation of Shiv. They revered the *Adi Granth*. They respected Guru Gobind Singh and looked after several Sikh shrines and were almost always celibate. They sang the praises of Sikh Gurus as well as the Devi. The Nanak Panthis did not feel obliged to observe the precepts of the Khalsa or their ceremonial. They did not maintain long hair. The term Nanak Panthi was traditionally

Illustration 5

An Udasi

Illustration 6

Nirmala Singh

applied to all the Sikhs also.

It can therefore be seen that in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, there was a wide variety of self-identification among the Sikhs. Externally, however, they appeared to fall into two categories: the Khalsa and the Sahajdhari. The former were larger in number from the very beginning and by 1931 constituted the majority of the Sikh population. By 1931 the numbers of Sikhs returning sects were greatly reduced due to the work of religious reform carried on by the Singh Sabha movement in these decades.

IV

The process of reform begun by the Nirankari and the Namdhari movements was carried forward by the Singh Sabha movement. The Amritsar Sabha was founded in 1873 and was extremely moderate in its approach. It was followed by the Singh Sabha founded at Lahore in 1879. The view of the Lahore Singh Sabha gained ascendancy in Sikh affairs over that of the Amritsar Singh Sabha ('*Sanatan* Sikhs') and came to be viewed as legitimate by both Sikhs and the government.[47]

The leaders of this Singh Sabha belonged to the middle class and had obtained western education. They included aristocrats, lawyers, teachers like Bhai Jodh Singh and Bhai Gurmukh Singh, publicists like Bhai Ditt Singh, businessmen like Trilochan Singh and petty bureaucrats like Bhai Jawahar Singh. These were enlightened men who believed in progressive measures and were keen to introduce reforms according to the teachings of the Gurus. The functioning of this association was 'democratic' and its membership was drawn from the Sikhs of all classes including the low- castes.

The Lahore Singh Sabha adopted practically the same objectives, as the Amritsar Singh Sabha.[48] However, the Sikhs associated with the Lahore Singh Sabha had a very different perspective on the nature of Sikhism. Their vision of a rejuvenated Sikhism came to be known as "*Tat Khalsa*", that is, a "true" Sikhism stripped of popular custom and clearly separate from Hinduism. This

Illustration 7

A Namdhari Singh

Singh Sabha began preaching adherence to Guru Gobind Singh's dictates and was therefore, unfalteringly Singh.[49] They believed in a more egalitarian and separatist identity. The Lahore Singh Sabha actively tried to get rid of caste and other such social customs. "Living Gurus" such as *pirs*, local saints, and the Guru's descendants were not encouraged and their worship looked down upon. A return to the *Adi Granth* was advocated as a source of theology and authority.[50]

The Singh Sabha movement played a decisive role in bringing about transformations within Sikh socio-religious practices and the social order clarifying the beliefs and practices of the Sikh in the process. The period after the formation of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902 was one of introspection for the Sikh community as for the first time the Singh Sabhaites examined the authenticity and rationale of the scriptures. They delineated the Sikh religious beliefs and practices on the basis of these studies and the Sikh code of conduct. The *rahit* was also evolved.[51] The Sikh belief in one God was reinforced and it was made clear that the Brahmans had no place in the Sikh religious ceremonies. The Anand marriage was advocated, clearly separate from the Hindu ceremony of marriage. Belief in auspicious, inauspicious, fasts and pilgrimages to Hindu places of worship were all considered against the tenets of Sikhism. The Singh identity was advocated as the preferable identity. Sikh Gurdwaras as places of worship were clearly identified and belief in the caste system was sought to be negated by means of intense propaganda and the admittance of the so called lower castes into the Gurdwaras. Worship of living Gurus was discounted by the example of Baba Khem Singh Bedi who was not allowed to sit on a cushion in the presence of the *Granth Sahib*. Issues relating to the beliefs and practices of the Sikh community were also reinforced by a large number of Sikh scholars, associations and publishing agencies, by way of the study of the cultural identity of the Sikh community, Sikh history, Punjabi language and literature.[52]

Fox interprets this activity as the ' creation of boundaries of religious tradition' by these twentieth century reformers who to him were advancing basic religious tenets, which he believes characterize what Singhs today take

as orthodoxy. These basic tenets include monotheism, honest labour (*kirat*), contemplation (*nam simran*) of the holy scriptures (*Granth Sahib*), baptism or initiation (*pahul*), interdining (*langar*) and equality of all persons.[53] The reformers however felt that they were trying to restore the faith to what they considered 'its pristine purity', as they did not want their religion to be corrupted by association with any non-Sikh beliefs.[54]

To clearly establish Sikh practices and to promote them among the Sikh community as markers of the preferred Singh identity the Sabha reformers took up various issues relating to the beliefs and practices of the Sikhs. The *kirpan morcha* was launched when the cases of harassment and humiliation of those Sikhs who wore the *kirpan* were regularly reported in the Sikh press.[55] With growing awareness about the religious taboos among the Sikhs, the demand for opening the *jhatka* slaughter houses in the towns and villages was taken up. The turban case was also taken up. The Government was persuaded to permit the Sikh students to wear a turban instead of putting on a cap while appearing in the medical examination competition and this facility was extended to the Sikh prisoners in jails who were permitted to retain their religious emblems and allowed to keep their turbans.[56]

Another issue which had much to do with the beliefs and practices of the Sikh community was that of the mismanagement of the historical Gurdwaras. These Gurdwaras had been under the control of *mahants*, *pujaris* and the *sarbrahs* who were the Government appointees. Under colonial rule, this priestly class had begun the distortion of the Sikh religion and its practices.[57] They had begun to introduce personalized rites and ceremonies contrary to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus to increase incomes and attract Hindu worshippers; they even installed images of Hindu Gods and Goddesses in Gurdwara premises. Enormous increases in income radically corrupted the class in charge of the Gurdwaras. Gurdwara premises began to be misused and cases of gambling, drinking, robbery and theft were reported. They 'began to live a life of luxury and dissipation verging on depravity'. The immoral activities of these priests were exposed by the Sikh press. Periodicals such as the *Khalsa Samachar* and the *Khalsa Advocate* protested

against their activities, but when they did not mend their behavior, began to ask for their removal.[58]

The Tat Khalsa were extremely concerned about the customs and practices which had the 'taint of Hinduism'. They took up cudgels on behalf of the Sikhs. In 1905 they removed the Hindu idols installed in the precincts of the Golden Temple. The *mahants* and *pujaris* of Hazur Sahib retaliated and declared these reformers *tankhayias or* apostates and exhorted the priests of other temples to do the same.[60] After the death of the *sabrah* of the Golden Temple the reformers asked the officials to end the existing system and establish Panthic control. The Chief Khalsa Diwan also passed a resolution 'asking the Government that rules governing the management of the Golden Temple be so changed as to allow to Panth the right to appoint its Manager and other officials. ' [61]

In continuation of their policy to clearly demarcate Sikh practices from those of other religions, the Anand Marriage was promoted by the Singh Sabha reformers. Intense public propaganda was carried out by them in order to raise public opinion in its favour. In defence of the Bill, Sikh scholars quoted Gurbani and Rahitnamas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of them produced booklets, tracts and articles.[62], In '*Ham Hindu Nahin*', Bhai Kahn Singh wrote that Guru Ram Das composed *Chhants*, *Ghorian* and *Lavan* for the occasion of marriage. These were meant to be used on the occasion of marriage. He also cited the example of Guru Gobind Singh, who performed the marriage of a Sikh girl in accordance with this rite. To further emphasize his point, he wrote that the *Rahitnama* of Bhai Daya Singh insists that Sikhs should not adopt any ceremony of marriage other than 'Anand'.[63] In spite of the opposition of the Arya samajists, *mahants*, *pujaris* and some Sikhs, the Bill was passed and became an Act on 22 October 1909.[64]

The Singh Sabha reformers also took up the issue of the demolition of wall of the Rakabganj Gurdwara as it was reported in the Sikh Press that the *mahants* in charge of the Gurdwara had alienated the land in favour of the government.[65] They were trying to reinforce the idea that the Gurdwaras belonged to the Panth as a whole and not the *mahants* and *sarbrahs*. After

the First World War this issue was carried forward and a call was given to the Sikhs to form *jathas*. The response was enormous and several Gurdwaras were taken over from the *mahants* and *pujaris*. The most significant was the replacement of *sarbrah* of the Golden Temple. [66] As the government had no definite policy to deal with this type of agitation and wanted to pacify Sikh sentiments, it announced reforms in the management of the Golden Temple and permitted the Sikh soldiers to wear the *kirpan*. [67] It also promised to observe certain Sikh festivals as public holidays having already given up its control over the management of the Khalsa College, Amritsar and reconstructed the outer wall of the Rakabganj Gurdwara.

V

It can be seen, in retrospect that in the eighteenth century the Singhs were in larger numbers in the Sikh community. The mainstream of the Sikhs believed in the doctrine of the Guru-Granth followed by that of the Guru-Panth and the most important institution was that of the Gurdwara. In the nineteenth century the position of the mainstream of Sikhs remained the same. The major concern of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was for the Sikh institutions but the rulers did follow some non-Sikh practices. The worship of Gugga and Sakhi Sarwar was prevalent among some Sikhs but no religious sanction for such beliefs existed. In the late nineteenth century the census reports of the British for 1855 and 1868, did not list the sects and the report of 1881 gave three Sikh sects as 'recent sects' of the Sikhs. It was in the report of 1891 and 1901 that extensive lists of the sects of the Sikhs along with their beliefs and practices were tabulated. The late nineteenth century was also the time when the Nirankaris and Namdharis gained recognition and a beginning of the concept of 'living gurus' is visible but at the same time a return to the teachings of the *Adi Granth* and exclusively Sikh beliefs was being advocated. In the second decade of the twentieth century a fall in the return of the sects of the Sikhs can be seen. By the 1930's a phenomenal rise in the number of Keshdharis and a corresponding fall in the number of Sikhs returning sects signified that

the Sikhs were again returning to the original Sikh beliefs due to the reform activity of the Singh Sabha reformers.

The religious and social concern of the Singh Sabha reformers in the early decades of the twentieth century were expressed in an increasing volume of tracts and pamphlets and in direct action in the case of the Gurdwara Rakabganj. The religious beliefs and practices of the Sikhs were sought to be reinforced by the means of general appeals for return to teachings of the Gurus and arguments against idol worship, observance of fasts, notions of auspicious and inauspicious days, the practice of shraddhs, the celebration of Holi and other 'Hindu' elements of belief and ritual.To differentiate the clearly Sikh beliefs and practices and to provide alternative ceremonies for the Sikh community, a comprehensive code was published by the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1915 as the *Gurmat Prakash Bhag Sanksar*. The authenticity of the *Dasam Granth* was questioned because its contents appeared to compromise the ideal of monotheism. The idea of Guru-Panth was strenghthened with the increasing importance given to the Singh identity. The idea of the worship of the descendants of the Gurus was negated by means of tracts like the one published in 1919 where it was argued that no human being could be the Guru of the Sikhs after Guru Gobind Singh decided to vest Guruship in the *Adi Granth*. The Sikhs were exhorted 'to view themselves as the Panth and not to recognize any single person as their sole leader'. It can be seen that the idea of Guru-Panth was re-emerging as clearly as the equation of the Guru with the *Adi Granth*.[68]

During this period, the Singh reformers tried to promote the relevant Sikh beliefs and practices through journalism. Their viewpoint was consistently represented by the *Khalsa Samachar*. Apart from an attempt in its numbers to counter the propaganda of Christian missionaries, the Arya Samajists and the Ahmadiyas, there is an insistence on the separate socio-religious identity of the Sikhs, an emphasis on the study of Sikh religious literature and Sikh history, an increasing criticism of Udasis, *pujaris* and *mahants*, argument for the good treatment of the Ramdasia and Rehatia Sikhs, and an advocacy of the education of women. There are pleas for the

use of Punjabi in Gurmukhi script at least at the primary level in education, in courts, in post offices, and in railway carriages. There was advocacy of the Anand marriage. There was criticism of the management of the Gurdwaras and there was the argument that they should be handed over to the committees of the Singhs because they belonged to the Panth. There was a general expression of loyalty to the British Government with pleas for separate representation for the Sikhs in the municipalities, local boards, the provincial council and the imperial legislature. The dominantly religious concerns of the late nineteenth century were thus spilling over into the political concerns of the early twentieth century.[69]

NOTES

1. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, p. 1680.
2. *Census of India 1881*, Punjab, p. 137. *Census of India 1891*, Punjab, p. 100. It is clarified in the census of 1891 that the record of religious sects was not one of the main objects of the census. The sects were enumerated merely with the object of checking the correctness of the figures for religions.
3. Koer Singh, *Gurbilas Patshahi 10*, ed., Shamsher Singh Ashok, Patiala: Punjabi University, 1968, pp. 138, 139, 283, 286.
4. Kesar Singh Chibber, *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka*, ed., Ratan Singh Jaggi Chandigarh: Panjab University (Parkh, vol.II), 1972, pp. 163, 164, 198, 215, 221.
5. Sarup Das Bhalla, *Mahima Prakash,* ed., Gobind Singh Lamba and Khazan Singh, Patiala: Punjab Language Department, 1970, Vol. II, p. 892; Sukha Singh, *Gurbilas Patshahi 10,* ed., Gursahran Kaur Jaggi, Patiala: Punjab Language Department, 1989 (rpt.), p. 45; Ratan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Prakash*, ed., Bhai Vir Singh, Delhi: Bhai Vir Sahit Sadan, 1993 (rpt.) pp. 58, 81, 297, 298, 389, 417.
6. J.S. Grewal, 'The State of Sikhism under Sikh Rule', lecture delivered at Punjabi University, Patiala (seen through the courtesy of the author) ,p. 2.

7. For details see; Koer Singh, *Gurbilas Patshahi 10*, pp. 17-21, 10-26; Chibber, *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka* pp. 1, 102-08, 113-16; Bhalla, *Mahima Prakash* pp.820-24.
8. Grewal, 'The State of Sikhism under Sikh Rule', p. 3.
9. Bhai Gurdas, *Varan Bhai Gurdas Ji*, Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee,1952, Var 41. For a brief analysis of this Var, J.S. Grewal, 'Celebrating Liberation: the Var of Bhai Gurdas', *Journal of Regional History*, Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 2002, (New Series vol.III),pp. 15-24.)
10. Grewal, 'The State of Sikhism under Sikh Rule', pp. 5, 6, 7.
11. W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs of the Khalsa: A History of the Khalsa Rahit*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 297, 298, 299, 300, 302, 313, 316, 317, 318, 321, 322.
12. Ganda Singh (ed.), 'Early European Accounts of the Sikhs', Calcutta: *Indian Studies Past and Present*, 1962 (rpt.), pp. 18-19, 63-65, 71-75, 79, 83, 92.
13. Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat ut-Tawarikh*, translated into English by V.S. Suri and published by Guru Nanak Dev University.
14. Indu Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1978, pp. 146-67.
15. Ganesh Das, *Char Bagh-I Panjab*, ed., Kirpal Singh, Amritsar: Khalsa College, 1965, pp. 105-06; for the Khalsa *rahit*, pp. 114-16.
16. Ram Sukh Rao, *Sri Fateh Singh Pratap Prabhakar*, ed., Joginder Kaur, Patiala: 1980, pp. 61-63; Grewal, 'The State of Sikhism under Sikh Rule', pp. 14-15.
17. Rao, *Sri Fateh Singh Pratap Prabhakar*, pp.63-64.
18. Grewal, 'The State of Sikhism under Sikh Rule', pp. 15, 22.
19. Ibid., p. 23.
20. J.D. Cunnigham, *A History of the Sikhs*, Delhi: S. Chand and Company, (rpt.), 1955, pp.11-12, 16, 75-76, 81n1, 137-38, 245, 289, 321-46, 347-49, 383-90.

21. John C.B. Webster, *The Nirankari Sikhs*, India: Macmillan Company, 1979, pp. 10,11, 12.

22. Rev. J.H. Morrison, "Appendix A : India, Ludhiana Mission : Journal of Tour from Lahore to Rawalpindi", reproduced in Webster, *The Nirankari Sikhs,*pp. 66, 67. Rev. Morrison gives the number of Nirankaris in 1853 as sixty-one persons.

23. Webster, *The Nirankari Sikhs,* p. 15.

24. Khushwant Singh, *A History of Sikhs*, Vol.II, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 124.

25. *Annual Report of Lodiana Mission*, Ludhiana: The American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1853, pp. 11, 12, 22-23.

26. Ibid., p. 12.

27. For details, see, "Appendix G : The Hukamnama", Webster, *The Nirankari Sikhs*, pp. 83-99.

28. H.A. Rose (ed.), *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, Vol. III, Patiala: Language Department Punjab, 1970 (first published in 1883), p. 171.

29. Webster, *The Nirankaris Sikhs*, 15-16 : "In 1861 Orbison estimated that there were several hundred of them in this city perhaps four or five hundred and a few scattered in some of the neighbouring towns. No separate figures were given in 1881 census, but the 1891 Punjab Census listed 50, 716 Nirankaris in the British territory and undoubtedly highly inflated ... The Nirankaris could have not been too numerous at that time." The 1901 Census and the subsequent ones give very low figures.

30. Ibid., pp. 7, 14, 39.

31. A Government Report dated 1867 gives near about 1847 as the year of the formation of the Jagiasi/ Abhiasi sect. See Ganda Singh, *Kukian Di Vithiya (pbi.),* Patiala: Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, 1990, pp. 4, 6,13, 17.

32. Ganda Singh, *Kukian Di Vithiya*, p. 6.

33. Ibid., p.

34. Ibid., pp. 1, 6, 13, 14, 16.

35. Ibid., pp. 14, 20.

36. For details, see, Fauja Singh, *Kuka Movement*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1965, pp. 19-28. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs,* pp. 127, 128, 129.

37. Ganda Singh, *Kukian Di Vithiya*, pp. 15, 37-39.

38. C*ensus of the Punjab 1881*, Vol I, Pt. I, pp.137-38; also see Ganda Singh, *Kukian Di Vithiya*, p. 14.

39. *Census of India 1911*, Table VI A, Sects of Main Religions, pp. 38, 58, 156.

40. *Census of India, 1911,* pp. 156,157, 158, 159.

41. *Census of India, 1921,* pp. 185, 186.

42. *Census of India, 1931,* Table XVI, Religions, p. iv.

43. *Census of India, 1931,* p. 309.

44. *Census of India, 1931,* for actual figures see table XVI A, Sects of Main Religion, pp. 98-101.

45. *Census of India, 1931,* p. 309.

46. *Census of India, 1911,* pp. 58, 156.

47. N. Gerald Barrier, 'The Singh Sabha Movement 1875-1925', *Social and Political Movements* ed., Harish K. Puri & Paramjit, Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2000, p. 65.

48. Gurdarshan Singh, "Origin and Development of the Singh Sabha", *The Panjab Past and Present,* Vol. III, Pt. 1, Patiala: Punjabi University, 1973, p. 48.

49. Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, p. 170.

50. N. Gerald Barrier, 'The Singh Sabha Movement 1875-1925', p. 65.

51. See chapter on *Self Identification*.

52. Joginder Singh, *The Sikh Resurgence,* New Delhi: National Book Organization, 1997, p. 49.

53. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab,* pp. 8, 170.

54. For details, see, D. Petrie, "Memorandum on Recent Developments in Sikh Politics", *The Panjab Past and Present*, Pt.II, Patiala: Punjabi University, 1970, pp. 323, 24; *Census of India, 1911* : Punjab, Vol. XIV, Pt.I, p. 257.

55. Ruchi Ram Sahni, *The Gurdwara Reform Movement* ed., Ganda Singh, Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 1965, p. 464.

56. Joginder Singh, *The Sikh Resurgence,* pp. 64-67.

57. Sardul Singh Caveeshar, 'The Akali Movement', Patiala:*The Panjab Past and Present,* Vol.VII, Pt.1-2, Patiala: Punjabi University, 1973, p. 112.

58. A Statement of Mehtab Singh in the Punjab Legislative Council quoted in Joginder Singh, 'Resurgence in Sikh Journalism : Early Decades of the 20th Century', *Journal of Regional History*, Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1982, pp. 110-14.

59. For details, see, D. Petrie, "Memorandum on Recent Developments in Sikh Politics", pp. 323, 24; *Census of India, 1911* : Punjab, Vol. XIV, Pt.I, p. 257.

60. The Hukamnama pronounced by the priests of the Hazur Sahib was reproduced in the *Punjab periodical* of August 15, 1907, pp. 4-6; Joginder Singh, *The Sikh Resurgence,* p. 77.

61. Joginder Singh, *The Sikh Resurgence,* p. 77

62. See Bhai Kahn Singh, 'Introduction', *Gurmat Sudhakar and Gurmat Prabhakar,* Patiala: Punjab Language Department, 1970 and 'Introduction' *Gurmat Martand;* Bachan Singh, *Jeha Muhn Tehi Chaped*, Amritsar: Punjab Commercial Press, 1905, p. 22.

63. Bhai Kahn Singh, *Ham Hindu Nahin*, Amritsar: Dharam Parchar Committee (Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee), 1981 (reprint of the 5th ed.), pp. 146-49.

64. *Papers relating to Act VIII of 1909, 27, also see,* Bhai Kahn Singh, *Gurshabad Ratnakar: Mahankosh*, Patiala: Punjab Language Department, 1970 (first published in 1931), p. 75; *Khalsa Samachar*, November 11, 1908, p. 4.

65. Joginder Singh, *The Sikh Resurgence,* p. 78.

66. Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian Da Ithas*, Delhi: Navyug Publications, 1972, pp. 38-45.

67. Joginder Singh, *The Sikh Resurgence*, p. 79.

68. J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 147.

69. Joginder Singh, ' Resurgence in Sikh Journalism', pp. 99-116; Satpal Kaur, 'Journalism in the Punjab and the Khalsa Samachar(1899-1919)', M.Phil. Dissertation, Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1985; Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, p. 150.

Chapter 5

THE ISSUE OF IDENTITY

The issue of identity gained importance in the last decades of the nineteenth century, when numbers began to count, in argumentation as well as in census reports, strengthening democratic assumptions without even the semblance of a democratic system.[1] Since 1877, the Arya Samaj had been carrying out reform work among the Hindus in the Punjab as were the Singh Sabhas to bring about reform in Sikhism. Swami Dayanand's *Satyarth Prakash* advocated a strong argument against Christianity and Islam than against Puranic Hinduism and Sikhism. However, after the split in the Samaj in 1893-1894, the 'militant' Aryas in particular waged a war in print against Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and the traditional Hindus. The 'Arya' consciousness was being transformed into 'Hindu' consciousness. This led to a corresponding awareness in the Sikh community as the Aryas argued that the Sikhs had no separate identity of their own and were to be included in the Hindus. This was not acceptable to the Sikhs as the community had become reform oriented and politically aware, thinking that without a distinct identity and its acknowledgement by others, the Sikh community would be subsumed by the larger Hindu community and suffer politically, economically, socially and in the field of religion.

The British policy of maintaining a 'balance' between the various communities encouraged competition between them for jobs, funds for education of their respective communities and other such community related work. Communal consciousness was not confined to the Hindus or Aryas and Sikhs. Muslims too began to form associations like the Anjuman-i-Islamia and *Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam* to carry on reform work, propagate education and look after the general interests of the Muslims in the province. Closely connected with the issue of numbers was thus the issue of identity of the

religious communities of the Punjab in which their very existence was perceived to be at stake. To make the issue of identity more important in the first and second decades of the twentieth century the idea of Hindu Muslim separation was given constitutional and political recognition in the Punjab and the rest of the country while the Sikhs got nothing. The political situation along with the Sikh-Arya confrontation sharpened the issue of Sikh identity. The death of Dyal Singh Majithia in 1898 made the question of Sikh identity a legal issue especially when the court ruled that he was a Hindu. A new urgency was imparted to the Sikh-Arya debate on the identity of the Sikhs.

The present chapter is divided into three sections. The first section deals with our understanding of the identity of the Sikhs as depicted in the Guru period till the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Our endeavor is to ascertain the status of the distinct identity of the Sikhs in this period so as to be able to make a meaningful analysis of the issue of Sikh identity in the colonial period. It may therefore be useful to analyze the views and self-image of the Sikh Gurus, the early Sikh society and early Sikh writers. The second section takes up the issue of Sikh identity in the colonial period and the steps taken by the Singh Sabhaities to assert the distinct identity of the Sikh community and distinctive rites and ceremonies, including the *rahit* evolved and reinforced by the Singh Sabha reformers in their bid to foster the distinct identity of the Sikh community. The third section sums up the chapter and briefly analyses some recent views on the subject of Sikh identity.

I

It is apparent from the writings of Guru Nanak that he does not quote any authority or source outside God for his religious views. At the end of every verse uttered by him is placed his name, Nanak indicating that he declines to accept any authority except that of the Almighty. At several places, he affirms that he is 'an unemployed minstrel in the service of God' (*Ham dhadhi bekaar*

kaare laya). 'O Lalo, I express what the Lord conveys me to speak' (*Jaisi mein ave khasam ki bani taisa kare gyan ve* lalo). 'I have no voice of my own; all that I have said, is his command' (*Aapo bol na janda mein keha sab hukam aao jiyo)* Guru Nanak tells the Sikhs, 'consider the Bani of the Satguru the word of Truth. O Sikhs, it is the Lord who makes me convey it.[2]' (*Satgur ki bani sach hai gursikho har karta aap muho kadai*). Guru Nanak severely criticized the prevalent religions of the times making it clear that he does not have any affinity with any one of them. He repeatedly showed his intention of establishing his own path outside the prevalent religions of the time.[3] This he made clear also by appointing Guru Angad to succeed him.

Guru Angad continued to speak in the same vein and acknowledged Guru Nanak as 'the transmitter of spiritual light stronger than that of hundreds of moons and thousands of suns'.[4] The Guru also stressed the importance of *langar* to establish the casteless character of the new society over which he was presiding. By doing so his followers were separated from 'others'.

Guru Amar Das, also called himself Nanak and organized an order of preachers to propagate the new faith. For recording his writings, like his two predecessors he abandoned the Sanskrit language and adopted the language of the people, using the *gurmukhi* alphabet developed by Guru Nanak and Guru Angad. Thus Guru Amar Das, added more elements of the separateness of the Sikhs. Guru Amar Das took yet another step towards setting up the independence of the Sikh religion he established pilgrim centres other than the Hindu and Muslim ones as gathering points for the new faith. He gave clear instructions to his followers to make no secret of their faith and to openly acknowledge Guru Nanak alone as their spiritual guide.[5] Before his death, he appointed Guru Ram Das to succeed him as an organizer and spiritual guide for the new faith. Guru Ram Das established the central shrine of Sikhism in Amritsar besides testifying to the distinct character of his faith in his writings.

His successor, Guru Arjan, placed the seal of distinctiveness on the new faith by collecting together the verses written by his predecessors and by

adding his own to the volume now known as the eternal Guru of the Sikhs. Bhai Gurdas, a contemporary of Guru Arjan, and Guru Hargobind, states that Guru Nanak 'established the distinctive character of his path with 'God's word'. The Guru's message became the basis of a distinct casteless society with on the amalgamation of all castes into a single whole.

The popular level, the *janam-sakhis* reveal a conciousness of distinction.In the *Puratan Janamsakhi* the Guru is shown as claiming direct divine sanction for his mission. On the basis of internal evidence, it is deduced to have been written during Guru Hargobind's time which makes it one of the earliest sources claiming a separate identity of the Sikhs.[7]

In mid-seventeenth century the distinct identity of the Sikhs is proclaimed in the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib.* The words *tabqa*, *ta'ifa*, *guroh*, *jama'at*, *firqa*, or *panth* are used by him to identify the people who subscribe to a certain set of doctrines. In his view in each of the category discussed by him possessed a distinct identity of its own. In its second part in the twelfth section he deals with the religious principles and practices of people of India other than those treated in the first eleven sections. Here he takes up the category of Nanak-Panthis also known as *gursikhs*. The traits of the Nanak-Panthis noted by him distinguishes them from all other people treated in the book, including Hindus and Muslim. The Sikhs did not make any distinction between Guru Nanak and his successors, regarding them all as one. If a Sikh did not regard Guru Arjan (the fifth *mahal*) exactly as Guru Nanak (the first *mahal*), he was treated as an unbeliever (*kafir*). Every Sikh was regarded as the Sikh of Guru Nanak, and why the Panth was called the Nanak Panth. He is of the view that the Sikh belief in transmigration distinguished them from Muslims, and the Sikh insistence on the unity of God distinguished them from the Hindus. 'Mobad' 'encountered' the Sikhs in 1643-1644. According to him the 'Guru-Sikhs do not believe in images or idol-temples, or count the *avtars* for anything. None of the austerities and customary forms of worship of the Hindus have any currency. He notices the presence of the Sikhs in many cities in the inhabited region.[10]

One of the earliest reference to Sikh identity by a contemporary of the tenth Guru is Sainapat's *Gur Sobha* . He records the reaction of the Khatris and Brahmans of Delhi to the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh. 'They closed shops and struck work protesting against the strict abandoning of age old rituals of Hinduism by the Guru's Khalsa. They said they would not let the Khalsa carry on their business so as to make it financially difficult for them. This would make them give up their new Singh identity. They protested and petitioned the Mughal authority against the new fangled practices.[9]

He is considered an authoritative voice on the Sikh code of conduct. In a *Rahitnama* attributed to Bhai Nand Lal the Sikhs are distinguished from the Hindus by upholding the new religious practices. From Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh all Gurus are one, and shauld be recognized as such. 'Gurgaddi' is given to the Granth and the Panth creating a distinct personality. The Sikhs are told not to worship Goddess four *varnas* are not to be upheld. Every religion must be sacrificed for the Guru's path.[10]

In the mid-eighteenth century *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* by Koer Singh gives a picture of the life and times of Guru Gobind Singh. Koer Singh was associated with Bhai Mani Singh. In his understanding, one of the main objectives of the new *pahul* ceremony was to establish a casteless society. The distinctiveness of the Sikh faith is further depicted in his statement that both Hindus and Muslims are acceptable as Khalsa, provided they abjured previous beliefs. He also refers to the Granth and Panth as Guru Granth and Guru Panth.[11]

The *Mahima Prakash* of Sarup Das Bhalla, written in 1776, gives a connected account of the Guru period. According to the evidence of this work, the decision to distinguish the Sikhs from the Hindus had been taken early. Guru Amar Das created the stepwell at Goindwal to counter the influence of the Ganges. When Guru Amar Das visited Hardwar he was exempted from the payment of pilgrimage tax which every Hindu had to pay.[12] This shows the existence of a distinct identity of the Sikhs from early times and 'others' knew and acknowledged its existence.

During the period of Sikh rule, the Sikhs were seen as a distinct community. Writing in 1849, Cunningham expressed the view that the Sikhs were not numerous but their strength was to be estimated by their religious fervour. In religious faith and worldly aspirations the Sikhs were wholly different from other Indians and they were bound together by a community of inward entiment and of outward object unknown elsewhere.[13] According to Bhai Santokh Singh, who completed his work in 1841, Guru Gobind Singh had created the order of the Khalsa to make the Sikhs distinct so that they could be recognised as different from others even in gathering of Hindus and Muslims.[14]

After the annexation of the Punjab a considerable volume of literature continued to appear on the Sikhs. Now the emphasis was on the contemporary Sikhs and how to rule them effectively than on the Sikh past. Trumpp's work (1877) commissioned by the India Office was the first to appear and since he was not familiar with the language of the *Adi Granth* his monumental work on the *Granth* was hopelessly inadequate. Trumpp placed Guru Nanak not only with the medieval reformers but also with the Hindu thinkers in general.[15] Macauliffe reflected the views and attitudes of the Sikh scholars of his day who were generally associated with the Singh Sabha Movement. He supported a distinct Sikh identity, saw Sikhism as a totally independent world religion, advocated Punjabi as the official language of the province and held the view that Guru Gobind Singh was opposed to the worship of gods and goddesses, demons and spirits and that the Guru had vested Guruship in the Granth and the Panth.[16] Trumpp and Macauliffe represented two opposing views on Sikh identity - one as part of the larger milieu and the other as a distinct group of people with their own identity.

Till the mid-nineteenth century there was no serious dissent on the distinctiveness and independence of the Sikh religion. The Skih Gurus gave a separate identity to their followers which was acknowledged by others. After the founding of the Khalsa at the end of the seventeenth century, Singh identity was considered the ideal Sikh identity though the Sahajdharis were

accepted as a part of the Panth of Guru Nanak. The Sikh writers of the pre-colonial period upheld the idea of distinctive identity. The distinctness of the Sikhs was also obvious to some of the Europeans writers in early nineteenth century. The identity and distinctiveness of the Sikh religion and the Sikh community were taken for granted by the Nirankaris and Namdharis prior to the annexation of the Punjab by the British.

II

In the early decades of colonial rule in the Punjab, the distinct identity of the Khalsa Singhs was taken for granted but for the purpose of census they were bracketed with Hindus. *The Report on the Administration of the Punjab for 1849-1850* and *1850-1851* places the Sikhs in the Hindu category.[17] The earliest British *Census Report* published in 1855 classifies the population of the province as Hindus and Muslims, with the Sikhs included among the Hindus.[18] The census report of 1868 identifies the Sikhs separately, mentioning no criterion of identification. Even for the census of 1881, the Sikh was not defined. Ibbetson was clear, however, that the Sikhs were either Nanaki Sikhs who followed the tenets of Guru Nanak and called themselves Hindus or the Govindi Sikhs who followed Guru Gobind Singh and were the ones referred to when the word 'Sikh' was used. He further clarifies that the more educated of Guru Nanak's followers returned themselves as Hindus though were aware that they were Sikhs. The Nanakpanthis were equated with Sahajdharis.[19] In the census of 1891, the enumerators were instructed to return as Sikhs only those who wore long hair and did not smoke, while others even if they claimed to be Sikhs were to be entered as Hindus.[20] The general assumption is made explicit here : the Sikh was equated with the Singh. In the census report of 1901, the same instructions were followed though Rose reports that this rule was objected to in nearly every district in which Sikhs in any number existed and Rose was frequently asked how the 'mona' Sikhs (those who cut their hair) be recorded.[21] It was only in 1911 that the Sikhs were given the right to record themselves as they wanted without having to

toe the official line.[22] This decision was highly significant because it showed that a large number of Sahajdharis were keen to be returned as 'Sikhs' and not as 'Hindus'.

However, this did not put an end to the debate about Sikh identity. The Hinduised priests in charge of the Gurdwaras, including the main Sikh shrine at Amritsar, began to consider Sikhism as a sect within Hinduism. Baba Khem Singh Bedi, a member of the old religious aristocracy who was patronized by the British, was among the first to declare that Sikhs were Hindus. He was joined in this by the rulers of Faridkot and Patiala who were keen to maintain the status quo. It was argued that Sikhism was like a wing within a large inn called Hinduism. 'It shared the same foundation and courtyard but had its own separate rooms and terraces.' The book '*Sikh Hindu Hain*' made a case for the inclusion of the Sikhs in the Hindu fold.[23]

This book was written in response to Bhai Kahn Singh's '*Ham Hindu Nahin*' which was the most popular tract on the subject in the early decades of the twentieth century. He had written it in 1898 when communitarian consciousness was gaining ground among an increasing number of people in the Punjab, as in the rest of the country. Bhai Kahn Singh was of the view that though some Sikhs believed that the Sikhs were 'Hindu' they did so due to ignorance of Sikh scriptures and Sikh history accepting the interpretation of the Sikh tradition put forward by parties which were inimical towards Sikhism. 'Such self-interested parties were anxious to see the Sikhs merged with the Hindu 'nation' (*qaum*). Bhai Kahn Singh leaves no doubt that the Hindus who insisted that Sikhs were 'Hindu' were not the Arya Samajists so much as the Sanatanists. He argued that a distinctive Sikh identity was not a new thing. The authorities he invokes in support of his thesis are nearly all pre-colonial.[24] His exposition of Sikh identity was meant to show its political implication as much as its independence. The equation of the Sikh Panth with the 'Sikh *qaum*' made the Sikhs a political community and Sikh politics for him came to be based on Sikh identity. In response to the question whether or not the Sikhs were Hindu and whether or not it was politic on the part of the Sikhs to

insist that they must be treated as a separate people, he holds: 'No progress (*unati*) is possible without becoming independent (*swatantar*). To be a branch (*shakh*) of another *qaum*, is to remain in 'slavery' (*ghulami*), and such subordination involved all kinds of depression.'[25]

Singh Sabha leaders began to treat Singh identity as the preferable Sikh identity due to its greater visibility and also because they were closer to the Sikh tradition of the eighteenth century in which Singh identity was the preferable Sikh identity.[26] The formal aims of the Singh Sabha however were to restore Sikhism to its pristine purity, edit and publish historical and religious books, propagate current knowledge, use Punjabi as a medium and start magazines and newspapers in Punjabi, reform the apostates and bring back into the Sikh fold, and to interest the highly placed Englishmen and ensure their association with the educational programme of the Sikhs. Besides, the association also aimed at cultivating loyalty to the Crown.[27] It is clear that the Singh Sabha reformers intended to underline the distinct identity of the Sikhs without any friction with the colonial rulers, but in direct confrontation with the Hindus, specially the Sanatanists. The debate that Sikhs were Hindus had become acrimonious after the foundation of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902. It was no longer a social or a cultural issue. Its political implication were becoming clear to both the sides.

The Singh Sabha reformers were not unaware of the political implications of their socio-religious programme. They realized that if the Sikh community was to progress and have some say in the future it had to assert its independence from the Hindu community. The Sikh community at this point of time had to assert its distinct identity in order to make social, economic and political progress under the changed circumstances of colonial rule when other communities were also aiming at the same goals.

Education of the Sikh community was seen as essential for the purpose of reform. The Sikh reformers felt the need for Khalsa institutions for a proper orientation of the Sikh community. They welcomed English education, western sciences and technology, but the idea of Christian

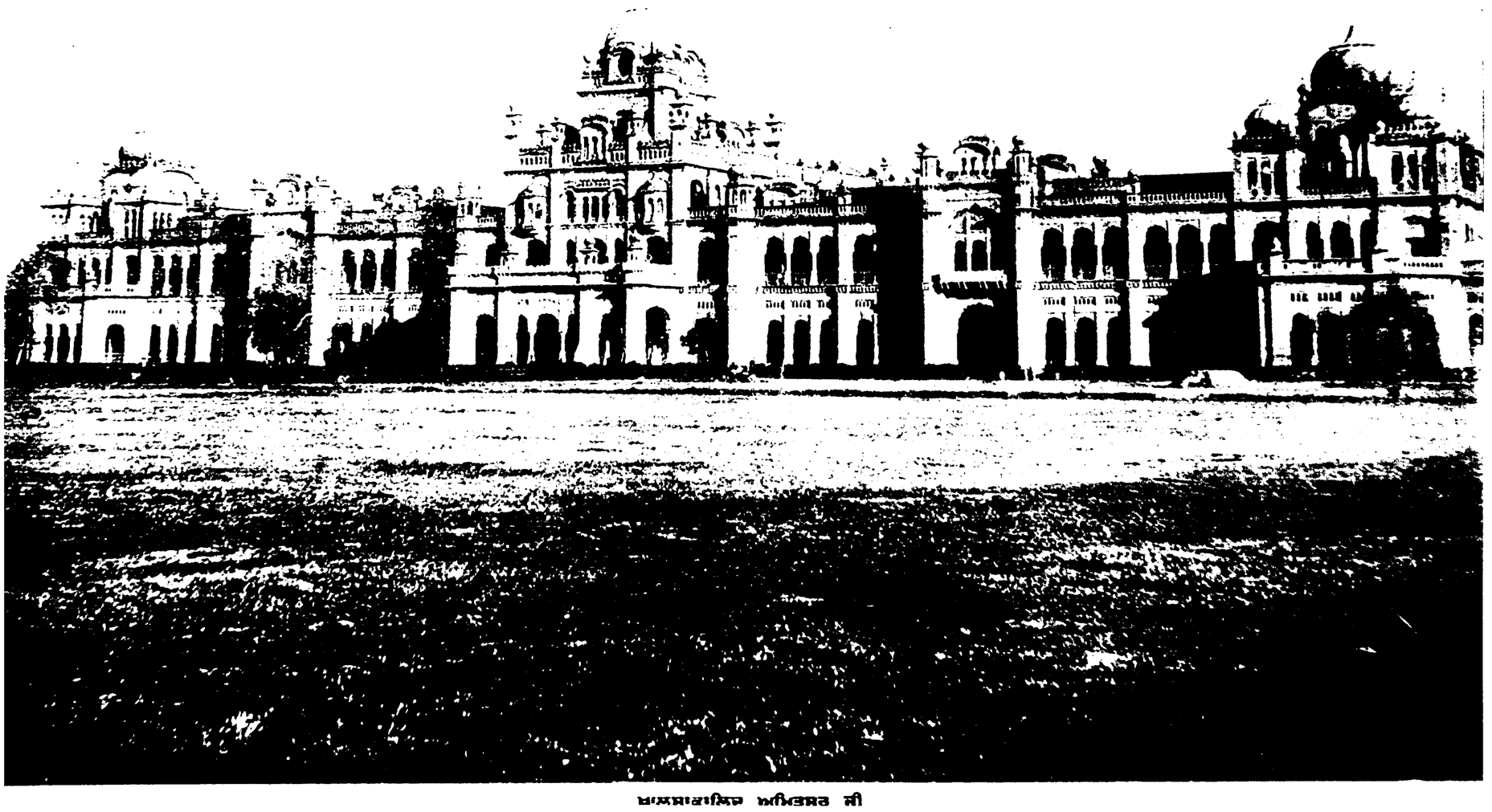
instruction in missionary schools and the absence of religious instruction in government institutions was not liked by them. The 'Hinduized' atmosphere of the D.A.V. institutions was also a problem. They wanted to teach Sikh tenets and Sikh history to their boys and girls as well as western science and literature. This Anglo-Sikh system of education was an important plank of reform, and it promoted Sikh identity.[28]

The Khalsa College founded at Amritsar in 1892. had the official support. The British administrators wanted to promote centre of 'denominational culture' in keeping with their effort to maintain a balance between all communities.[29] The moderate Sikh leadership itself was keen to groom the Khalsa College into a centre of 'denomination culture'. Malik Mohan Singh, a member of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, said that the Khalsa institutions were to produce loyalist and obedient subjects of the British Sarkar.[30] In addition to making the Sikhs aware of their distinctiveness, the Khalsa College soon became the leading educational institution of the Sikhs.

Equally significant from the point of view of the dissemination of ideas in accordance of the reform required in Sikhism was the Kanya Maha Vidyalaya founded at Ferozepore by Bhai Takht Singh in 1892. It was run without any grant from the government and without any fees from the girls. This was followed by girls' schools at Lahore, Amritsar, Rawalpindi and Ropar. The education of women was an important part of the reform agenda of the Singh Sabha. It was argued that unless the women got education based on Sikh tenets the family could not progress. The Sikh Educational Conference provided opportunities to women to play a part in the 'unfolding drama of the Sikh social and political arena'.[31] With a view to educating the Sikh community and at the same time bringing in reform and an awareness of the distinct identity of the Sikhs High Schools were established not only in cities but also in small towns like Damdama Sahib and new towns like Lyallpur. A college was established at Gujranwala before 1920 when the number of Sikh educational institutions was more than three scores.[32]

Illustration 8

Khalsa College, Amritsar : An Early Twentieth Century View



ਖਾਲਸਾ ਕਾਲਜ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ ਜੀ

To meet the challenge of 'Hinduized' atmosphere and 'western evangelization', the Sikh Educational Conference was founded in 1908.It resolved to promote Sikh religion, history, Punjabi language and literature.[33] The conference served several functions. Its meetings brought together thousands of Sikhs who discussed educational issues along with related problems such as the spread of Punjabi. Resolutions and speeches often dealt with broad themes of history, tradition, the need for change, new approaches to the family. The conference became virtually a symbolic gathering of Sikhs who shared a common commitment and view of the world.[34]

For the purpose of making the Sikh public and the students aware of their actual heritage and unique identity the reconstruction of history could also be seen in the textbooks provided by the Sikh Educational Conference for the Khalsa schools. Along with the study of Sikh religion and history these textbooks included historical accounts, for instance, of the Hindu-Muslim relations till the first battle of Panipat (1526), and of the Mughal-Sikh relations. To further transform the values and attitudes of the Sikh students studying in Khalsa institutions and thereby taking them a few steps nearer the Sikh ideal, and also influencing the Sikh public, the Sikh superintendents of the boarding houses were asked to ensure that the Sikh students observed the Sikh symbols and rituals, and did not indulge in irreligious activities. In this connection, the Conference passed a resolution asking the government to prohibit juvenile smoking and drinking in boarding houses. In accordance with the policy initiated by the Chief Khalsa Diwan, the Sikh educational institutions during this period became not only dispensers of education, but they also served as strongholds of Sikhism wherever they were established. Even the Singh Sabhas which were organized for propagating reform could not compete in popularity with schools. The study of religious texts comprising the life account of the Sikh Gurus, the *sakhis* and *janamsakhis* and selected compositions of the *Guru Granth Sahib* was included in the curriculum. Along with modern education the Khalsa institutions emphasized the study of Sikh

history and Punjabi language and Gurmukhi script in order to make the Sikhs aware of their heritage and its uniqueness. Stress was laid on the memorization of the religious compositions of the Sikh Gurus. Subsequently, a department for the propagation of Sikh religion and its study was also established in the Khalsa College, Amritsar. This was in addition to the work of Parcharak Vidyalaya (Missionary College) started at Tarn Taran in 1908. The reformers agenda of educating the Sikh youth by making them aware of their heritage and fostering an attitude of distinctiveness from the other communities was carried forward by the founding of Gurdwaras in the campuses of some schools and colleges. Here Sikh identity was reinforced by the daily of recitation of Gurbani, *akhand paths* and religious discourses by learned scholars. Special arrangements were also made to celebrate the birthdays and martyrdoms of the Sikh Gurus. These occasions served the purpose of providing a forum for the propagation of the religious activities of the Sikh organizations. They also helped to bring to the notice of the students researches on Sikh history thereby reconstructing Sikh history in a balanced and unbiased manner. All these educational activities contributed to the re-creation of a distinct identity of the Sikhs.[35]

By the opening decades of the twentieth century, the Singh reformers and the Arya Samajists were fighting not only on the issue of religious identity but over the linguistic issue as well. Differences in language and script came to be progressively associated with differences in religion, deepening communal consciousness and its appeal. The Singh Sabha reformers like the Brahmos and the Aryas, were opposed to the use of Urdu as a medium of education and administration. Unlike them, however, they argued strongly that the school education should be based on 'the language of the people'.

The use of Punjabi language and the Gurmukhi script began to be emphasized by the reformers to further accentuate the independence of Sikh religion. They brought to the notice of the Sikh public the importance of Gurmukhi as the language adopted by the Sikh Gurus to spread their message. The Singh Sabha of Lahore had organized a Punjabi Pracharni

Sabha as early as 1882. In the same year, Bhai Jawahar Singh and his colleagues formed a deputation and submitted the memorial to the Education Commission. The memorial emphasized the physical, mental and moral degeneracy of the Sikhs due to the neglect of Gurmukhi and appealed the Commission to promote the Punjabi language in Gurmukhi script.[36]

The Oriental scholar G.W. Leitner was probably the first official to underline the relevance of the Gurmukhi language and literature and the urgency of maintaining 'Gurmukhi schools'. 'Etymologically and historically', he tried to identify Gurmukhi with the Sikh Gurus. He founded the *Anjuman-i-Panjab* (1865) which was responsible for translating many important English books into Punjabi,[37] Punjabi was introduced as a subject in the Oriental College at Lahore in 1877.

The purpose of the maintenance of a distinct identity could not be met without having a distinct language to support it. The growth of the Punjabi language was only possible if it was used in writing by the Sikh public. By the end of the nineteenth century, scholars of the 'Gurmukhi language' were producing, literature on Sikh religion and history. Giani Gian Singh had published his *Panth Prakash* in 1880, followed by his *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa* in 1892. The Sikh leaders founded a large number of printing presses and periodicals, popularizing Punjabi. Prominent among them were the Wazir Hind Press, the Khalsa Tract Society and the *Khalsa Samachar* by Bhai Vir Singh. Mohan Singh Vaid wrote in Gurmukhi and Braj Bhasha and contributed articles to the *Khalsa Samachar.* Two organizations, the Panjab Parchar Ratnawali and the Punjabi Parchar Book Agency, were started by him in Lahore in 1900. In 1906 he founded *Dukh Nivaran*, a monthly periodical whose publication continued till 1920.[38]

These scholars, the press and institutions made passionate appeals to all Punjabis, not only to Sikhs, to rise above the prejudices of religion and caste and own their mother tongue. The most valuable service they performed was the enrichment of the language by the publication of an assortment of articles, essays and stories dealing with socio-religious or historical issues

and also with the contemporary problems in the field of science, education, technology and politics, thus encouraging new writings. They also requested the government to make Punjabi language a medium of instruction at least at the primary level.[39] However, Punjabi teaching remained confined to Sikh institutions and lost ground perhaps due to having no importance for government jobs.[40]

The purpose of the delineation of the separate identity of the Sikh religion and Sikh community was carried forward by the interpretation of religious and semi-religious Sikh scriptures and the reconstruction of Sikh historical past. This helped to establish the distinctiveness of the Sikh community in the minds of the Sikhs themselves and the 'others'. Historical writing on the Sikhs had been started by European writers for their purposes. Their interpretation was not always acceptable to the educated Sikhs. They entered the field to present Sikh history from their own perspective,

Hoping not only to fight against false propaganda but also to bring to the Sikh people a balanced history showcasing their independent identity of the Sikh religion and people. The issue of Sikh identity could not be handled independently of a meaningful reconstruction of Sikh history to back it up, nor could an adequate understanding of Sikh past be attempted without an in-depth impartial study.

This writing of history was not a new process. The Gurbilas tradition extended well into the nineteenth century. The works of Bhai Santokh Singh and Ratan Singh Bhangu, both of which appeared in the 1840s, and Bhangu's *Panth Prakash* proclaimed the distinctive nature of the Khalsa identity and claimed that this was the identity which Guru Gobind Singh had intended his followers to adopt. Gian Singh's *Panth Prakash* and his *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa* can be regarded as examples of the sustained predominance of Khalsa identity.[41]

in the late nineteenth century, Giani Gian Singh expressed concern over the fact that historical literature was written by non-Sikh writers who neither comprehended nor appreciated the emergence of the 'Panth Khalsa'

and its achievements. He wrote two dozen books on the Sikh Gurus, 'Khalsa Panth' and the historical places of the Sikhs, the best known of these being the *Panth Prakash* and the *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa*.[42] Both these books glorified Sikh religion and history. The works of other prominent writers like Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Kahn Singh, Bhagat Lakshman Singh and Karam Singh 'historian' played a prominent role in establishing a distinct identity of the Sikhs and ensuring that a correct and sympathetic interpretation of Sikh history and religion was made available to Sikh society. They tried to differentiate and refute the ideas that Sikhs were somehow connected to Hindus or shared common ground with them. Bhai Vir Singh and the Khalsa Tract Society produced a large number of tracts dealing with the life accounts of the Sikh Gurus, Sikh martyrs and the Sikh struggle for political power. During this period, the Society did not publish anything placing Sikhs and Sikhism within the fold of Hinduism.[43]

Bhai Kahn Singh was the most prominent scholar of the Singh Sabha Movement. He wrote among other things, against the anti-Sikh propaganda of the Arya Samaj. His important writings on Sikh religion, history and literature are *'Ham Hindu Nahin', Guruchhand Diwaker, Gurushabad Alankar, Guru Shabad Ratnakar : Mahan Kosh and Chandi Di Var Steek*. He was keen to correct or reject all such notions that did not accord well with the ideas of the *Adi Granth* thereby establishing the separate socio-religious and cultural identity of the Sikhs. His *Ham Hindu Nahin* is considered one of the best expositions of Sikh identity which according to him made the Sikhs a political community.[44]

Another important scholar of the Singh Sabha Movement was Bhagat Lakshman Singh, a staunch protagonist of 'Sikh Hindu Nahin' thesis. He was the first biographer of Guru Gobind Singh. His work was remarkable for its rational and humanistic approach to the life of the Guru. He wrote several articles and launched *The Khalsa*, an English periodical, to encounter the anti-Sikh propaganda of the Arya Samajists. He also wrote several books and booklets dealing with Sikh history.[45]

Illustration 9

Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha (1862-1938)

ਭਾਈ ਕਾਨ੍ਹ ਸਿੰਘ (੧੮੬੨)]

The Sikh characters in Bhai Vir Singh's novels are Sikhs committed to their faith, free from evils and devoted to the cause of the Panth. He wrote three novels: *Sundri* (1894); *Bijay Singh* (1899) and *Satwant Kaur* (1900), in the milieu of the eighteenth century when the Khalsa was engaged in a life and death struggle with the Mughals and Afghans. In the preface to the eleventh edition of *Bijay Singh,* Bhai Vir Singh clarified that 'the lives led by the Sikhs in the times goneby can reform, inspire and elevate the degrading condition of the Sikhs'.[46]

Another scholar of the Singh Sabha was Karam Singh 'historian'. His important works are *Baba Banda Bahadur, Shrimati Bibi Harnam Kaur* and *Maharaja Ala Singh*. He published a work entitled *Kattik-Ke-Vaisakh*, in order to clearly separate Sikh history from Hinduised legacy. In this he argued that Guru Nanak was born in Vaisakh (April) and not Kattik (November). The book is a critique of the *Bala Janam sakhi*, the source of the Kattik date.[47]

The encounters of the Singhs with the contingents of the Mughals and Afghans stressed the heroic tradition of the Sikhs. The Singhs were honest, valiant, courteous and dedicated to the cause of the Panth, both in the battle-field and in their day to day life. On the other hand, the soldiers and s*ardars* and a*mirs* of the contemporary rulers were corrupt, coward and disloyal. They remained under the dread of the Singhs and avoided straight fight. The Sikh rulers and *sardars* were projected as the 'ideal Sikhs'. Another recurrent theme was of an ideological conflict between the Gurus and the contemporary rulers. The former were the upholders of righteousness whereas the latter personified tyranny and fanaticism.[48]

Martyrdom was a part of the Sikh tradition prior to the rise of the Singh Sabha in 1873. It was made an integral feature of the Tat Khalsa interpretation of Sikh tradition. According to Fenech, Ditt Singh was the first to 'recognize the rhetorical potential which martyrdom possessed'. It was utilized by the Singh Sabha reformers to lay emphasis on sacrifice and martyrdom. Ditt Singh, for example alluded to the sacrifices made in defense of the Sikh Panth in both his *Khalsa Akhbar* articles and his 'martyrologies' and tried to persuade Sikhs to act in a way similar to that of past Sikh martyrs, maintaining

that it was altruistic Sikh warriors of this nature who were required to save the present day Panth from a variety of evils. The *Khalsa Advocate* and the *Khalsa Samachar* regularly appealed to the Sikh sense of selfless sacrifice so that the present social and political position of the Panth may be dramatically improved.[49]

Thus, we can see that by making a study of the past, these scholars and writers were influencing Sikh public opinion. They not only reinforced their separate identity, but also gave Sikh society the the ideal type of Singh characters which an ordinary person could relate to Sikh history. A people who had forgotten their past were given a heritage they could be proud of and want to emulate. By writing stories and giving accounts of the ideological conflict between the Gurus and the contemporary rulers, these writers made the Sikh society aware of the existing condition and conscious of the problems facing their community like that of identity.

To reinforce the independent entity of the Sikh religion and the Sikh people the Singh Sabha reformers realized the importance of a set of distinctive rites and ceremonies. For this purpose they began the process of evolving and underlining characteristic rites and ceremonies as far removed from Hindu tradition as possible. The Nirankaris had initiated this quest for a separate religious identity for the Sikhs, rejecting those rites and rituals which were against the spirit of the *Adi-Granth* and evolving others according to the spirit of the Sikh scriptures. The Namdharis carried on this practice, reviving Khalsa traditions in the process. Carrying on the work of the Namdharis and Nirankaris, the Singh reformers made serious efforts to define Sikh religion in terms of 'monotheism' and to modify and clarify its *rahit* in the late nineteenth century.

The *rahit* relates primarily to the Sikh way of life and its emphasis is therefore on Sikh beliefs and practices. It also laid down norms for the Sikh social order. In the trying circumstances of the twentieth century, the *rahit* was also defined in terms of contemporary political relevance.[50] Bhai Kahn Singh's *rahit* asked the Sikhs to follow the rules and regulations of the *jathebandi* and eliminate groupism and factionalism in the Panth. His *rahit* likened dissenters

to the Minas, Masands, Dhirmalias and Ram Rais, the traditional enemies of the Panth. He even exhorts the Sikhs to socially shun these dissenters. His *rahit* advised the Sikhs to be *namak halal*, loyal to the Crown as it could be influential in their progress.[51] Bhai Vir Singh emphasized the same code. The context however was different. With references to *rahitnamas* composed by the scholars like Bhai Chaupa Singh, he prescribed 'moral bindings' on the Sikhs to settle their mutual feuds harmoniously in Gurdwaras and to refrain from the denigration of the fellow-Sikhs and scheming against one another.[52]

The process of defining the Sikh rituals and customs and *rahit* created complicated problems. The issues related to the inclusion or non-inclusion of the Sehajdhari Sikhs, collations and exegesis of the *Adi-Granth* further accentuated the problem. The controversy over the Anand Marriage Bill underlined the urgency of the standardization of the principles of Gurmaryada and its acceptability by the Sikhs. It was finally published under the title *Gurmat Parkash Bhag Sanskar*.[53] It was meant for all the Sikhs who believed and worshipped the *Guru Granth Sahib* as the embodiment of ten Gurus.[54]

As the Singh Sabha reformers responded to Arya attacks by emphasizing their distinctive religious identity, removal of Hindu practices and refuting the Hindu caste system they increasingly came into direct confrontation with temple authorities and shrine functionaries. Pressure was built up on these keepers of faith to sever all links with Hinduism by breaking free of Hindu practices in Sikh religion. In 1905 all idols were removed from the shrines' precincts. Low castes began to be admitted to religious worship in Sikh shrines. With increasing political gains in sight the Arya attack on Sikhism attained a new fervour early in the twentieth century and was expressed in the public ritual of re-conversion. They began in 1900 to convert low-caste Sikhs *en masse* forcing the Singh Sabha reformers to distinguish themselves even more sharply by refuting the Hindu caste principle. In 1909 at Jullundur, one hundred low caste men were formally accepted into Sikhism.[55]

The Singh Sabha reformers tried to raise and mobilize public opinion to get acceptance for new ceremonies. Such Bills as the one on Anand Marriage

made into an Act so as the clearly delineate Sikh ceremonies and rites from those of other communities, thus emphasizing their distinctiveness legally. To further this purpose, help was sought by the Singh Sabha reformers from members of the ruling families like Yuvraj Ripudaman Singh who was representing the Sikhs in the Imperial Council. To establish the validity of distinct Sikh rituals and remove the legal objections raised by the judicial officials in the civil suits, Ripudaman Singh, Maharaja of Nabha, on behalf of the Sikhs, presented a draft of Anand marriage in the Punjab Council on October 30, 1909.[56] It was meant to give legal recognition to the Sikh ceremony of marriage. This bill was opposed by Arya Samajists, Granthis, Pujaris, Mahants and Sants of Amritsar on behalf of the Golden Temple and other temples connected with it. Opposition also came from Maya Singh and some Sikhs of Lahore. The support of the Nirankaris, who were basically Sehajdharis, proved crucial in a tussle between the conservative Sikhs and Singh reformers.[57] This bill finally became an Act on October 22, 1909 despite all opposition.

Thus we can see that in the ongoing battle to ensure an independent and distinct place for the Sikh religion help was received from unlikely quarters. The confrontation with the Aryas and their propaganda not only gave the Sikhs a platform to put forward their view point but also helped the 'Sikhs clarify, refine and delimit their own religious identity'. This brought about not only consciousness of their distinct identity, but also transformed the attitudes of the Sikhs towards other communities bringing communitarian consciousness into play.

The instruments of the raj like the census operations also played an important part in engendering a consciousness of distinct identity among the Sikhs. In 1891 two thirds of the Sikhs believed they constituted a separate religion, and among these, not only were the expected Singh's but also a large Sahajdhari minority, comprising nearly 40% of them. The Sikh population was almost evenly divided between Singh's and Sahajdharis. Census reports accurately show the results of the efforts of the Singh Sabha reformers though incentives for government jobs and conversions were also

to account for a small percentage of the increase. The numbers of the Sikhs increased from less than 2 millions in 1881 to over 4 millions in 1931 with an increase in the proportion of Keshdhari Sikhs in the Sikh population, who increased from less than 70 to more than 90 in less than half a century.[58]

III

It can be seen that although concerns for the reform of Sikh religion were being voiced even before the annexation of the Punjab by the British, the announcement of four Sikh student's intention to convert to Christianity at Amritsar in 1873 served as a wake up call for the Sikh community. This communitarian consciousness received a boost when the Christian missionaries gained two high profile converts from the Sikh community – Maharaja Dalip Singh and Kanwar Harnam Singh. The Sikhs first formed the Amritsar Singh Sabha in 1873 and later the Lahore Singh Sabha in 1879. Then for twenty years, six Singh Sabhas on the average were added every year.

If we look at the figures from 1834 to 1886, the total number of converts by the Punjab and North India Missions was 347 with just 23 Sikhs, 116 Muslims and 208 Hindus respectively.[59] The rate of conversion was not alarming but the Sikhs became increasingly aware of the danger that could befall the community.

In their quest for establishing a distinct identity of the Sikhs and of the Singh Sabha reformers came into increasing contact with the Arya Samaj and the other reform movement in the Punjab. The relationship between the Singh Sabha reformers and the Arya Samaj ranged from cooperation to confrontation at different periods of time. Arya and Sikh reformers cooperated in the re-conversion of Indian Muslims and Christians until the mid 1890's. They were both trying to bring reform into their respective religions. Despite Swami Dayanand's negative view of Sikhism in the *Satyarth Prakash*, several eminent Sikhs had

Illustration 10

A Sikh Officer in the British Indian Army

joined the Arya Samaj. A decisive break came in 1888 when the Arya 'fire-brands' mounted a 'thoughtless attack' on the Sikh Gurus. Bhai Jawahar Singh and Bhai Ditt Singh Giani felt obliged to leave the Arya Samaj and to join the Singh Sabha reformers. More than a threat from Islam and Christianity, the Singh reformers felt a threat from the Arya Samaj. It moved them to develop a distinctive religious identity as far removed from Hinduism – and the Arya Samaj – as possible.[60]

Therefore the first decades of the twentieth century witnessed an upsurge of Sikh journalism and the volumes of tracts and pamphlets expressing the social and religious concerns of the Singh reformers increased sharply. Apart from the general appeals for return to the teachings of the Gurus, there were arguments against idol worship, observance of fasts, notion of auspicious and inauspicious, the practice of *shradhs*, the celebration of Holi and other 'Hindu' elements of belief and ritual.[61]

The concern for the establishment of the separate identity of the Sikhs and reform in Sikh religion and society was reflected in the reconstruction of the history of the Sikhs, the introduction of the Khalsa institutions and the Anglo-Sikh education, the propagation of distinct ceremonies like the Anand Marriage, the evolving of a meaningful *rahit*, the increase in journalistic activity and above all a direct reiteration of the distinct identity of the Sikhs. There were those Sikhs too who believed that the Sikhs were Hindu and they represented an additional problem. However by the 1930's, the census reports noted that not only were the Sikhs not returning castes and sects in large numbers but also the number of Keshdharis in the Sikh community had increased to around 82 per cent. The reason cited was the activity by the Singh Sabha reformers.

Richard G. Fox is of the opinion that 'those who labeled themselves "Sikh" in the nineteenth century embraced no single cultural meaning, religious identity, or social practice; rather an amalgam of what later reformers made into separate Hindu and Sikh cultural principles prevailed'. He argued further that, the 'major activity was precisely to define that tradition, to fix those cultural meanings, and to exclude all other versions of Sikh identity as

uncanonical. Fox put forth the view that Singh identity was created by the British and appropriated later by the reformers to serve their own purpose.[62]

McLeod does not agree with Fox. He is of the view that 'It was Sikh tradition, and specially a Khalsa tradition, which they (reformers) developed and glossed. To suggest that they developed a new tradition is false. Equally it is false to claim that their treatment of it can be described as a simple purging of alien excrescence or the restoration of a corrupted original. The Khalsa of the Singh Sabha reformers was both old and new'. The work of evolving distinct Sikh rites was carried forward by the Singh Sabha reformers. As in the case of history writing, it was realized by these reformers that unless they clarified, modified or rejected popular traditions in existence in the Sikh society, they could not hope to portray their religion as independent, or their identity as distinct from that of other religions. In view of the concentrated attack by the Aryas a need was felt to define inherited traditions in whatever way that seemed appropriate. According to McLeod 'the chosen method of defense involved educational influence and use of available technology. He further says that these reformers 'began to produce definitions and to shape systems in the light of ideals and modes of thinking acquired from western literature and education'.[63]

Harjot Oberoi is of the view that the 'Tat Khalsa' managed to overshadow the 'Sanatanists', 'through a series of innovations, purges and negations'. They 'endowed Sikhs with their own texts, histories, symbols, festivities, ritual calendar, sacred space, life-cycle rituals, in short a meaningful universe, separate and radically different from other religious traditions. Sikhs could now confidently lay claim to being an exclusive pan-local religious community'. This according to him represented a 'rupture' that clearly distinguished 'modern Sikhism not only from the Sanatan tradition but also from the earlier Sikh tradition including the Khalsa.[64]

J.S. Grewal underlines that objective realities and subjective self-image are intermeshed in a consciousness of distinct identity in relation to others in any given historical situation. As the product of these variables, identity cannot be a static or 'fixed' entity. Nor can there be objective uniformity or

'homogeneity' among all the members of a community identified as distinct from others. Neither fluidity nor diversity, thus, invalidates distinct identity.

The objective realities of the Sikh Panth and the self-image of the Sikhs from the days of Guru Nanak to the present day have not remained the same, but the consciousness of distinction from the others around has remained constant. Nor did 'others' try to argue that Sikhs were 'Hindu' or 'Muslim', till we come to the late nineteenth century. Sikh identity gets recognized even in the self-contradictory statement that 'the Sikhs are Hindu'. If anything, this statement shows that Sikh identity was not only distinct from but also older than the emerging consciousness of 'Hindu' identity. This debated became important when Sikh identity in the late nineteenth century began to have political implications for Sikhs and the 'others'.[65]

NOTES

1. Discussed in detail in the chapter on Political Attitudes
2. *Guru Granth Sahib*, pp. 308, 722, 763, (ref. 2)
3. J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*, Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1969, See Chapter on Contemporary Religion and Guru Nanak.
4. *Guru Granth Sahib,* (Je Sau Chanda Ugave, Suraj Charhe Hazaar, Ette Chanan Hondian, Gur Bin Ghor Andhar).
5. Ibid.,
6. Bhai Gurdas, *Varan Bhai Gurdas Ji*, S.G.P.C., Amritsar, 1952, p. 16. 1st var, pauri 31, (Shabad Jiti Siddh Mandali Kitos Apna Panth Nirala);
7. Bhai Vir Singh (ed.), *Puratan Janamsakhi*, Amritsar; Wazir Hind Press, , 1927, pp. 39-40.
8. For an English translation of the portion dealing with the Nanak Panthjis in the Dabistan, see J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib (eds.), *Sikh*

History From Persian Sources, Indian History Congress, 2001. pp. 59-84.

9. Sainapat, *Sri Gur Sobha*, ed., Ganda Singh, Patiala: Punjabi University, 1967, pp. 46, 47.

10. Ganda Singh (ed.), *Bhai Nand Lal Granthavali* (translations of the Persian writings of Bhai Nand Lal) Malacca (Malaysia),1968, pp. 189, 190, 191-94, 196.

11. Koer Singh, *Gurbilas Patshahi 10,* ed., Shamsher Singh Ashok, Patiala, Punjabi University, , 1968, pp. 38, 42, 58, 59.

12. Sarup Das Bhalla, *Mahima Prakash*, 2 Vols., Patiala: Punjab Language Department, 1970, 1971, Vol. II, pp. 152, 155.

13. Joseph Davey Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs*, Delhi: Rupa & Co.,2002, pp. 14, 82.

14. Bhai Santokh Singh, *Gur Partap Suraj*, Guru Gobind Singh ji Sun Kar Aise Garjat Bole, Kanhar Jaise Vidh Ko Panth Banayun ....

15. J.S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretation of the Sikh Tradition*, Delhi: Manohar, 1998, p. 32.

16. J.S. Grewal, "Legacies of the Sikh Past", Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century ed., Joseph T.O' Connel and others, Toroto: University of Toronto, 1988, p. 31.

17. Selections from the Records of the Government of India # 2, *Reports on the Administration of the Punjab, 1849-1850, 1850-1851*, Calcutta, 1853, pp. 5, 6.

18. Selections from the Records of the Government of India # 11, *Reports on the Census, taken on the 1st January, 1855, on the Population of the Punjab Territories*, Calcutta 1856, pp. 22-23.

19. *Report on the Census of the Punjab 1881*, p. 136.

20. *Report on the Census of the Punjab 1891*, pp. xiii, 91.

21. *Report on the Census of the Punjab 1901*, p. 124.

22. *Report on the Census of the Punjab 1911*.

23. Bawa Narain Singh, *Sikh Hindu Hain* (Pbi.), Amritsar: Public Service Printing Press, 1908, pp. 4, 6-32.

24. Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, *Hum Hindu Nahin*, Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2000 (rpt.), pp. 10, 11, 124, 125.

The sources that Bhai Kahn Singh cites are the *Adi Granth* which was compiled in 1604-05, the works of Bhai Gurdas written mostly in the early decades of the seventeenth century, the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh and others in the *Dasam Granth* which were written mostly before the end of the seventeenth century, the works of Bhai Nand Lal as a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh, the *Gursobha* which was written a few years after Guru Gobind Singh's death, the *Rahitnamas* which were composed largely in the eighteenth century, the *Gurbilas Patshahi Das* which was written towards the end of the century, and the works of Bhai Santokh Singh which were composed in the early nineteenth century. At a few places, the evidence of *Janamsakhis*, which were compiled in the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century, is also invoked.

25. Ibid., p. 124.

26. Grewal, *Historical Perspectives on Sikh Identity*, p. 75. ????

27. Harbans Singh, 'The Origin of the Singh Sabha', *The Panjab Past and Present: Essays in Honour of Dr Ganda Singh,* Patiala: Punjabi University, 1973, p. 280.

28. J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 148.

29. Ganda Singh, *A History of the Khalsa College*, Amritsar, p. 66

30. Joginder Singh, *The Sikh Resurgence,* National Book Organization, New Delhi: 1997, p. 68.

31. Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History: Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 243.

32. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, p. 149.

33. Ganda Singh, 'Sikh Educational Conference', *The Panjab Past and Present*, Vol. VIII, Patiala: Punjabi University, 1973, pp. 68, 69.

34. N. Gerald Barrier, 'Sikh Politics in the Punjab Prior to the Gurdwara Reform Movement', *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* ed., Joseph T.O' Connel and others, University of Toronto, 1988, p. 178.

35. Joginder Singh, *The Sikh Resurgence*, p. 70.

36. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, p. 149. 'Bhai Jawahar Singh – Arya Samaj – Singh Sabha'. *The Panjab Past and Present*, vol. 7, part I, April 1973, p. 92.

37. G.W. Leitner, *History of Indigenous Education in the Panjab since Annexation and in 1883*, Patials : Punjab Language Department, 1971, p. 37, 86.

38. S.S. Amol, *Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid*, Patiala: Punjabi University, 1969, pp. 7, 10.

39. Joginder Singh, *The Sikh Resurgence*, p. 74.

40. *Census Report of the Punjab*, vol. XV, 1921, p. 292.

41. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretation of the Sikh Tradition*, p. 59.

42. For details, see Bhagat Singh, *Gyani Gian Singh*, Patiala : Punjabi University, 1978, pp. 1-9. *Panth Prakash* was completed in 1867 and published in 1880. It deals with the life account of the ten Gurus, emergence of Dal Khalsa and establishment of the Sikh *misls.* The account also highlights the struggles and sacrifices of the Khalsa. The *Twarikh Guru Khalsa* is in five parts: (a) the early account of the Sikh Gurus, (b) Shamsher Khalsa, (c) Raj Khalsa, (d) Sardar Khalsa, and (e) Panth Khalsa. The first three parts were published in 1891.

43. Joginder Singh, *The Sikh Resurgence*, , page 53.

44. Grewal, *Historical Perspectives on Sikh Identity,* p. 100.

45. J.S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretation of the Sikh Tradition* , pp. 67-71.

46. Kirpal Singh, 'Historical Significance of Sundari, Bijay Singh and Satwant Kaur', *The Panjab Past and Present*, Vol VI, part 2, October 1972, p. 315.

47. W.H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, Oxfod : Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 22.

48. Kirpal Singh (ed.), *Bhai Vir Singh Di Ithasik Rachna*, Patiala: Punjabi University, 1974, pp. 223-59, 301-59.

49. Louis E. Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition: Playing the 'Game of Love'* , New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 203.

50. Joginder Singh, *The Sikh Resurgence*.

51. Bhai Kahn Singh, *Gurmat Martand*, Shiromani Gurudwar Parbandhak Committee Amritsar: 1978 (first published in 1899), pp. 80-83.

52. Joginder Singh, *The Sikh Resurgence*, pp. 5, 6.

53. Joginder Singh, 'Bhai Vir Singh and the Singh Sabha Organization', *Studies in Sikhism and Comparative Religion*, Vol. VIII, New Delhi: Guru Nanak Foundation, 1989, p. 18.

54. *Gurmat Prakash: Sanskar Bhag*, Amritsar: The Chief Khalsa Diwan, 1915. To meet this problem the Chief Khalsa Diwan set up a committee comprising major Sikh scholars and activists on October 3, 1910. This committee's draft was presented to the conference which was held on April 6, 1913. In this conference, 27 Jathas and 105 scholars participated. A threadbare discussion on the basic principles of Gurmaryada was held and then a draft was prepared. It was approved by another Committee especially constituted by the Chief Khalsa Diwan on May 24, 1914. The approved draft first got the consent of the Executive Committee and then the General Committee of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1915.

55. Bhai Narayan Singh, *Jathedar Bahi Kartar Singh Jhabbar: The Life and Times*, Amritsar : Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, 2001, pp. 42-47.

56. *Papers relating to Act VIII of 1909*, p. 27.

57. Petitions regarding the Anand Marriage Act, VII of 1909, part I.

58. *Based on the Census of the Punjab Report 1891, Census of the Punjab 1921, Census of the Punjab 1931.*

59. John C.B. Webster, *The Christian Community and Change in Nineteenth Century North India*,Delhi : Macmillan, 1976, p. 49.

60. Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. p. 168. Ganda Singh (ed.), *Bhagat Lakshman Singh*, *Autobiography,* Calcatta : Sikh Cultural Centre, 1965, p. 58.

61. N. Gerald Barrier, *The Sikhs and Their Literature*, New Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1970, p. x.

62. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making*, pp. 109-112.

63. 3W.H. McLeod, *Who is a Sikh? The Problem of Sikh Identity, Oxford:* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, pp. 60-70

64. Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 381, 29, 30.

65. Grewal, *Historical Perspective on Sikh Tradition,* p. 75.

Chapter 6

POLITICAL ARTICULATION

In this chapter, the endeavor has been to provide a connected account of the growth in the political awareness of the Sikh community from the mid- nineteenth to the end of the second decade of the twentieth century. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first details the expression of political aspirations of the Sikhs from the mid to the late nineteenth century. The second section deals with twentieth century Sikh political expression and the third section talks of the effect of overseas movements of the Indians on the Sikh politics of the Punjab and the formation of the Central Sikh League. The fourth section gives an overview of the milestones in the development of the political system based on separate representation and elections and the position of the Sikhs in this new political situation.

I

Political activity of the Sikhs did not come to an end with the annexation of the Punjab in 1849. The political aspirations of the Sikhs were first signified by Bhai Maharaj Singh. Henry Lawrence, the Resident at Lahore, referred to him as 'the first man who raised the standard of rebellion beyond the confines of Multan in 1848, and the only leader of note who did not lay down his arms to Sir Walter Gilbert at Rawaplindi'.[1] Bhai Maharaj Singh planned a general insurrection against the British in 1849. Until he was arrested in December 1849, the Punjab remained in considerable turmoil and the British tried their utmost to arrest him.

The attitude of the Sikh community and its leadership after the uprising of 1857-1858 was one of ambivalence. The Sikh aristocracy and the Sikh priestly class owed their position to the British and therefore, expressed their loyalty by

turning their backs on any happening that could threaten their position. They constituted the leadership, what there was of it, of the Sikh public and, therefore, the attitude of the Sikh public too was one of indifference or hostility.

The Namdhari Movement in the 1860's was the next expression of political aspirations of the Sikhs in the Punjab. Baba Ram Singh did not accept the British rule and its institutions. He instructed his followers not to join the service of the British Government. Send their children to government schools or use Courts of Law, foreign goods and the Government Postal Services. He suggested that the Sikhs should make parallel arrangements for the above services.[2] Though Ram Singh had been kept under watch for many years, the British Government had not been able to clearly regard him a threat to their rule. Conflicting reports had been received on his aims. According to some informants he was merely a reformer while others specified his attempts at establishing a basics administrative system.[3] That the Namdharis were overtly hostile to British rule in the Punjab could be discerned from Baba Ram Singh's rejection of all British institutions and advice to his followers to make their own arrangements. The alarm was sounded in June 1863 when at a Diwan held at village Khote in Ferozepur District, the Kukas were seen openly preaching against the British and predicting that the Kukas would soon rule and demand only a fifth of the produce from the farmers. In addition to the above propaganda, a version of *Sau Sakhi* which was being attributed to Guru Gobind Singh was in circulation. It predicted the end of British rule amidst bloodshed and the establishment of the rule of a carpenter named Ram Singh.[4] In spite of this some historians view the Kukas as only a reform movement with no political ambition. It is also insisted that the Kukas were just an example of the typical millenarian movement in the Punjab. The above evidence, the action taken by Cowan in 1872 of blowing off the arrested Kukas from mouths of guns, and the subsequent deportation of Baba Ram Singh from the Punjab can be taken to suggest that the Kuka threat was

considered significant enough by the British to make an example for future political dissenters.[5] This action was supported by the Anglo-Indian press except for the *Friend of India.* The loyalist attitude of the Singh Sabha was reflected in their memorandum submitted to the Lieutenant-Governor commending Cowan's action.[6]

The next episode to have political undertones was that of the projected return of Maharaja Dalip Singh to the Punjab in the 1880's. This was viewed by the British as a greater threat to Sikh loyalties and initially a large portion of the police and intelligence network was put to work gathering information. The British feared other sources of authority who could challenge the legitimacy of British rule in the Punjab and Dalip Singh represented the traditional authority within the Punjab, a rallying point for Sikhs.[7] Early in 1878, in his letter to Lord Salisbury, the Secretary of State, Dalip Singh accused the Indian Government of 'dereliction of duty'. He held that he had been unjustly dethroned and his kingdom annexed by the British. According to Dalip Singh, the Revolt of Multan, which was the cause of his loss of kingdom, had taken place after he had been placed under the guardianship of the Indian Government and was, thus, the responsibility of the British. The British were committed to keep him on the throne till he was sixteen years of age. The Indian Government instead of taking prompt action to stem the revolt of Multan, sent no European troops to put an end to the revolt. Disillusioned with the British Government and convinced of the prophecies foretelling him to be the Eleventh Guru, Dalip Singh decided in March 1886 to quit England and come to India. He also declared his intention of abandoning Christianity and embracing Sikhism. Meanwhile amidst rumours of the return of the Maharajah to India, the Abstracts of Political Intelligence, dated 20 March and 4 April 1886 reported 'anxious enquiries' being made about Duleep Singh and speculation about powers that were to be conferred on him. The Sikhs according to the report were 'elated'. The Hindus, says the report, 'pray that Duleep Singh

and the Sikhs never come into power again, but are of the opinion that the Nihangs and Kukas may be foolish enough to join in any demonstration got up in his favour.' Hope was said to be expressed by one Jamiat Rai that Dalip Singh would be placed in power before long as a ruler. Mention was made of a secret understanding with the Russians.[8]

D. Petrie notes in his memorandum that hopes ran high in a large section of the Sikhs who anticipated their rule being established in the Punjab again with the return of Dalip Singh. A village in the Lahore District refused to pay its land revenue, saying that tribute was due only to their King, who was shortly to arrive in India.[9]

As in the case of the Kukas, almost the entire local leadership in the Punjab supported the British in the case of Dalip Singh. The *lambardars, zaildars, jagirdars* and the leading rulers of the Princely States supported the government and believed that they could prosper only under British patronage than under Sikh rule. In 1887, Dalip Singh declared himself to be the 'sovereign' of the Sikh 'nation' and asked his fellowmen to rise against the British. But they called him a false pretender and proclaimed that they would die for their sovereign, and would never accept Dalip Singh as their ruler.[10]

However, not all Sikhs were totally loyal to the British. As Petrie puts it, 'the Sikhs have all along had among their ranks a leavening of disaffected and even actively disloyal persons'. We can include the Kukas, the followers of Baba Ram Singh, the village in Lahore district and the 'elated' Sikhs that 'made enquiries' about Dalip Singh and the 'Nihangs' in this category.[11]

Bhagat Lakshman Singh in his autobiography alludes to 'how the Sikh community felt the wrong done to them in the forced return from Aden of their beloved Emperor. And the memory of this grave injustice will, I dare say, rankle long in the breasts of all in whose veins runs the Sikh blood'. The Bhagat noted,

however, that Baba Khem Singh Bedi, one of the most influential members of the Amritsar Singh Sabha, was against the visit of the Maharaja to the Punjab and on one occasion, offered to place all resources at the disposal of the government to suppress any rising that might result from the visit of Maharaja Dalip Singh. At another place he mentions that Bhai Jawahar Singh was actively opposed to the return of the Maharaja to the Punjab in 1886 owing to his enthusiastic loyalty to the British Government.[12]

We can, therefore, presume the existence of a considerable section of the Sikh population that desired the return of the Maharaja to the Punjab and perhaps the return of Sikh rule. At the same time there were among the Sikhs, Singh Sabhaites, who felt insecure at the projected return and were anxious to let the British know that they opposed it and remained loyal to the Raj. The politics of the Sikhs at this time was loyalist.

The pro-British stance of the Sikhs gained a larger number of converts from among the Sikh community by the late nineteenth century. By this time the British rule and its institutions had been consolidated to a large extent and the Namdhari episode of Malerkotla as well as the uprisings of 1857 had further strengthened their position in the province. The Sikhs by the early twentieth century were gradually becoming aware of the political nature of their quest for identity though in an entirely different setting.

The British in their turn had begun to see the Sikhs as a subject people but ones that had till recently had been a power to contend with. In the early years of colonial rule the British relationship with the Sikhs fluctuated and the government was more ambivalent towards the Sikhs because of their recent political prominence although they had been reassured by the Sikh role in the uprising of 1857. The Punjab Mutiny Report contains the basic assessment: 'As regards the Sikhs, one decade only has passed since they were the dominant power in the Punjab. They are a highly military race. Their prejudices are

comparatively few. But their religion constitutes a strong bond of union: though depressed by political disaster, it still has vitality, and a power of expansion through the admission of new converts. It might revive in a moment thrcugh any change in the circumstances, and spread far and wide. Again the memory of the Khalsa, or Sikh commonwealth, may sleep, but is not dead.'[13] Due to their continued militancy the Sikhs were appreciated as military recruits but suspicion and worry about them as a potential threat remained alive. The rulers took the Sikhs very seriously yet tried to avoid their being seen as either favoured or distrusted.[14]

However, in the 1850's the decline of the ruling class of Ranjit Singh was thought to be inevitable by the British. Their concern was to 'render their decadence gradual' by allowing them pensions, or part of their *jagirs*. All the *jagirdars* thought to have been loyal to the British got pensions or part of their *jagirs* and with the uprising of 1857 more were added to this number and began to be looked at as 'natural leaders' of the society. Nearly half of the Sikh aristocratic families survived into the twentieth century, readjusting themselves to the new situation. Many of them played a leading role in socio-religious reform and constitutional politics.[15] A new political system was evolved by the British by borrowing ideas and structures from the earlier regime and transferring new doctrines and institutions that gave Punjab politics a particular cast. The British followed a deliberate policy to foster an acceptance of British rule by the use of indigenous institutions and developed support groups among the Sikhs and ruled over Punjab with appreciable help from those associated with former regimes.[16] They were involved in the processes of government as honorary magistrates, *zaildars* and extra-assistant commissioners. The British also maintained a symbolic world of public honouring and honours not unlike that present in Ranjit Singh's time.[17]

Another important aspect of this policy was to wed leading Sikhs and Sikh religious men to the British by the continuation of patterns of material support which had been established at the time of Ranjit Singh. Control of the Golden Temple played a central role in the process. So did the continuation of other colonial practices such as employment of many Sikhs as soldiers and baptismal requirements for army recruits.[18]

The emergence of the Western-style of political system in the Punjab reflected both traditional and modern elements. The previous 'ruling class' of local and regional men of prominence through their control of land, access to shrines and patronage by the British continued to be viewed as legitimate leaders. At the same time the legacies of the past tended to encourage communal tendencies in the religious communities of the Punjab. Inter-communal differences were understood and affected public life and under British rule these legacies became accentuated and influenced political roles.[19] The British became the source of decisions about resources and access to power. This encouraged the need to form associations, the development of improved communications and in general the search for effective means of focusing opinion and mobilizing support. This in turn led to the competition `among the communities, agitation among the emerging urban elites and new forms of political organization.[20]

The Singh Sabha organization represented such an organization among the Sikhs though its declared aims were all religious. The formal aims of the Singh Sabha were to arouse love of religion among the Sikhs, propagate the true Sikh religion, print books on the greatness and truth of Sikh religion, propagate the word of the Gurus, publish periodicals to further the Panjabi language and Sikh education, interest the highly placed Englishmen and ensure their association with, the educational programme of the Sikhs, not to speak against any other religion, and not to discuss any matters relating to government. The

association also aimed at cultivating loyalty to the Crown. The individuals who opposed Sikhism, who had been excluded from the holy spots, who had been associated with other religions or who had broken Sikh laws were excluded from the Sabha. They could join the Sabha by repenting and paying a fine.[21]

The Amritsar Singh Sabha, formed in 1873 under the leadership of the traditional leaders such as Bhais, *gianis* and aristocrats, supported the expansion of education among the Sikhs and tried to defend the community against proselytization by Muslims and Christians. On the central issue of identity, Baba Khem Singh Bedi was content to view the Sikhs as the reformist element within Hinduism. The Lahore Singh Sabha, formed in 1879, was led by the professional and middle class Sikhs involved in education or journalism such as Gurmukh Singh and Jawahar Singh and so-called lower caste Sikhs such as Ditt Singh. These men asserted Sikh distinct identity and attacked popular customs, such as respect for caste and Hindu influence in ceremonies and shrines.[22] Politics and religious revitalization were frequently inseparable in the last decades of the century. These reform oriented organizations, which included the Arya Samaj and the Muslim *anjumans,* re-evaluated their traditions in the light of contemporary demands and thereby focused the attention of co-religionists upon issues and strategies. Unlike the others at least one group of the Sikhs addressed a special problem, that of trying to define and promulgate a sense of identity and separate consciousness at a time when a limited awareness of it existed. Bhai Kahn Singh was one of the first to declare in 1898 that distinct Sikh identity, made the Sikhs a political community.[23]

Amidst the clearly emerging political concerns were the Singh Sabhas had their avowed objective to remain apolitical. The pro-establishment stance of the Singh Sabhas was demonstrated in the Kuka episode in the early 1870's, and the issue of Maharaja Dalip Singh in the late 1880's. The Singh Sabhas at this time were mainly struggling with the issue of the distinct identity of the Sikhs and

staving off the attacks by the Arya-Samaj to assimilate the Sikhs within the fold of Hinduism. The Singh Sabhas clearly identified themselves with the government of the day. A need was felt for a political body when concerns of religion acquired a political hue. The question of the control of the Gurdwaras was to be resolved. Even the question of the formal recognition of Sikh identity was pending as Dyal Singh Majithia's will was being questioned in British courts. It was at this time that the traditional tactics of representing needs and relying totally on British aid were questioned. The need for co-ordination among the Singh Sabhas brought into existence the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902. It was the first organization of the Sikhs to have as its objective, among other things, the protection of the political interests of the Sikh community.[24]

II

In the early twentieth century the relationship of mutual dependence and goodwill between the government and Sikh leadership in the form of leading Sikh gentry, the custodians of important Sikh Gurdwaras and the Chief Khalsa Diwan worked remarkably well. The Sikh politicians largely accepted the structure of British administration and assumed the benevolent and paternalistic government. The distribution of government patronage, demands for the development of education in the Sikh script of *gurmukhi* and other such issues affecting the community sporadically brought petitions and memorandums to the government for redress. However, such petitions were couched in respectful terms and constantly stressed the humility and passionate loyalty of the petitioners. Beneath the surface, the Anglo-Sikh relations began to shift during the first two decades of the twentieth century.[25]

The control of the Harmandir was one such issue that brought a change in the British Sikh relations. It was seen as central to the political influence of the

British over the Sikh community. The British sought to cosset and control the Sikhs through the Golden Temple and its functionaries.[26] By 1904 the Singh Sabha had begun to ask for the control of the Gurdwaras. The issue of the worship of idols in the *parkrama* of the Golden Temple and the presence of Brahmans on the *Har Ki Pauri* brought the issue of control of the Harmandir Sahib into Sikh focus. Tikka Ripudaman Singh was one of the first to complain about idol worship in the Gurdwara and demanded that 'some orthodox Sikhs possessing force of character' ought to be appointed to the post of the *sarbarah*. The issue of the idols escalated into a widespread agitation for the control of the Golden Temple and other Gurdwaras. Among those Sikhs who wanted control of the Golden Temple were also the Raja of Jind and Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha.[27]

In 1906, the *Khalsa Advocate* and the *Punjab* of Amritsar began to ask for an alteration of the rules governing the Gurdwaras and that the Panth should have the right to appoint the s*arbarah*. It was also argued that the *jagirs* and other property attached to the Golden Temple belonged to the Panth and was not the personal property of the *sarbrah*. They also asked for the restoration of the old committee of 1859.[28] In 1907 the demand for the formation of a committee for the control of Gurdwaras was raised. The news of the alienation of the land of the Gurdwara Rikabganj by the *mahant* of the Gurdwara and the consequent demolition of the wall of the Gurdwara by the government spread to the Punjab and was protested by a spate of telegrams, petitions and memoranda addressed to the Viceroy, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, and the Commander–in-Chief. Sikhs living in Burma, China, Hongkong and the United States sent telegrams asking for the reconstruction of the wall. A pamphlet was written on the eye-witness account of the Gurdwara and its demolished wall concluding that the Sikh public disapproved of the railing being put up and that the religious sentiments of the Sikhs would be hurt if it was done. Public participation and protest by the Sikhs was demonstrated by the series of *diwans* held at Lyallpur,

Lahore, Shimla, Amritsar, Ludhiana, and Jalandhar protesting against the demolition and the reconstruction of the wall at government expense.[29]

The Sikh collaborators of the *raj* like Raja Sir Daljit Singh were contacted by the government to resolve the issue. Sunder Singh Majithia, the secretary of the Chief Khalsa Diwan issued a pamphlet explaining the whole issue and supporting the government. This support by the Chief Khalsa Diwan was protested against by the Sikhs who held protest meetings in Lahore, Patti, Ropar, Gojra, Khanna and Bhasaur.[30] Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha proposed to finance the trip of Master Tara Singh to present the case of the Rikabganj wall before the British Parliament and the people. In March 1914, a monthly magazine, *the Sikh Review* was launched, from Delhi under the patronage of Bhai Arjan Singh Bagrian, a friend of the Maharaja of Nabha. Sardar Sardul Singh Caveeshar was appointed its editor. When the movement was beginning to gain support in rural areas, the First World War broke out weakening the agitation. The Gurdwaras were finally handed over to the Sikhs in 1925 after a long agitation while the wall of Rikabganj Gurdwara was rebuilt by the government in 1920.[31] This was done when on the appeal of Sardul Singh for 100 martyrs, 700 responses came and they declared their intention to either construct the wall or lay down their lives in the process.

Related to the issue of the control of the Gurdwaras was that of Gurdwara reform. The introduction of canal irrigation under the British had greatly increased the income from the grants provided to the Golden Temple by the Sikh rulers. Cases of misappropriation of Gurdwara funds came to the fore but no action was taken by the British Government as it realized the political importance of keeping the Golden Temple under its control. The misuse of funds was not the only problem, the *mahants* had begun to convert the landed property of these Gurdwaras into their personal possessions.[32] Three reasons were responsible for this state of affairs. One was the British legal system, which did not differentiate

'possession' as servants of the public for carrying out charitable and religious services connected to the Gurdwara; another was that the early Singh Sabha leadership had comprised many people who were direct beneficiaries of this state of affairs and, therefore, no real effort was made to clean up things. The third reason was the British policy which dictated that the control of the Golden Temple was to be maintained in all circumstances and, therefore, the British refused to dismantle the system of management of the Golden Temple under s*arbrahs*.[33]

The sarbrah system not only corrupted the *mahants* in charge of Gurdwaras as they were not accountable or answerable to the public but was also responsible for the distortion of the Sikh religion and its practices by the *mahants*. They began to introduce personalized rites and ceremonies contrary to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus; to increase incomes and attract Hindu worshippers, they installed images of Hindu Gods and Goddesses in Gurdwara premises. Enormous increases in income radically corrupted the class in charge of the Gurdwaras. Gurdwara premises began to be misused and cases of gambling, drinking, robbery and theft were reported. They 'began to live a life of luxury and dissipation verging on depravity'. The immoral activities of these priests were exposed by the Sikh press. Periodicals such as the *Khalsa Samachar* and the *Khalsa Advocate* protested against their activities, but when they did not mend their behavior, began to ask for their removal.[34]

In 1905 Tikka Ripudaman Singh wrote to the Lieutenant governor saying that the worship of idols in the Golden Temple ought to be stopped as the Granth Sahib strongly prohibited idolatory. Before the government could intervene, the *sarbrah*, Sardar Arur Singh on May 1, 1905 issued orders prohibiting the Brahmans from sitting on the *parkarma* with the idols for worship and also prohibited them from washing their clothes in the tank, besides spitting and rinsing their mouth in it. They however could bathe, do *puja* and apply *tilak*. In

response to Arur Singh's order the Sanatan Dharm Hindus objected, declaring through an *ishtiar* that Guru Nanak and the other Sikh Gurus were Hindus. The Brahmans returned with the idols on 6 May though previously they had complied with the *sarbrah's* order. The matter was reported to the police by the manager and another order was issued by the manager on 7 May and was finally complied with thereafter.[35]

The issue however continued to be debated in the press for almost a year. Memorials were sent to the Lieutenant Governor. Some were for the removal of idols and others against it. The Sri Guru Singh Sabha of Quetta, the Sikhs of Rawalpindi and the Hindu community of Shikarpur appreciated the action while Seth Radha Krishan of Amritsar presented a petition signed by 13,000 Hindus and Sikhs of Amritsar disapproving the action and stating that it was 'not in accordance of the great majority of the Sikhs'. Among the princely states, Raja Hira Singh of Nabha was against the removal of the idols while Raja Ranbir Singh of Jind and Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha approved of the action.[36]

Much of the political efforts of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in the first decade of the twentieth century were defensive. The Diwan and the Singh Sabhas generally pursued policies that would further delineate Sikh boundaries and remove any lingering Hindu influence. Their pressure and negotiations paved the way for the removal of idols from the Golden Temple in 1905. Attacks from the Arya Samaj persisted and the heightened sensitivity to external attack and the cry of 'Sikhism in danger' complicated the Diwan's strategy of winning patronage and benefits from the government while at the same time maintaining the loyal image of the Sikh community. The disturbances of 1907 accentuated the Diwan's problems.[37]

The issue that flared up in 1907 was of the Punjab Colonization of Land Bill and the Bari Doab Canal rates. The Colonization Bill introduced among other things, inheritance by primogeniture, legalized the fine system and established

retroactive conditions concerning sanitation, tree planting and construction. An increase of water rates by 50 per cent in the Bari Doab was also mooted at the same time. The discontent already simmering in the colonies due to the extra-legal fine system, corruption of lower officials and the tight rein under which the cultivators were held by officials, led to an outburst in 1907.[38] The Punjab Government's efforts to retain effective control of the Colony and run it like a model farm were not appreciated by the colonists.

There were apprehensions that the Punjabi agriculturists as individuals and as soldiers had moved towards rebellion. The central Punjab was the recruiting ground for more than a third of the Indian Army, the majority of whom were Sikhs. The protest was, however, principally rural. The Chenab *zamindars* and their sympathizers organized mass demonstrations. The unrest spread over the central districts of the Punjab. The leading families of central districts who had relatives in the colonies or aspired to a future grant also joined the protests. Also affected was the Indian Army and the ex-government servants. The educated Punjabis living in the colony, headed the agitation, not urban politicians. Though deported to Burma due to this unrest, Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai were late entrants into the protests. The government came down with a heavy hand on public meetings, suppressed newspapers, carried out mass arrests and political trials. In order to appease the agitators the British Government withdrew the rural legislation and gave the canal colonists, proprietary rights and freedom from Canal Officers that they demanded.[39]

Denzil Ibbetson had observed with some concern that 'if the loyalty of the Jat Sikhs of the Punjab is ever materially shaken, the danger will be greater than any which could possibly arise in Bengal'. The Sikh peasantry participated in this agitation in larger numbers than the Muslim or Hindu peasants in proportion to their numbers. Also a part of the agitation were Sikh sepoys who were observed

at meetings held by Ajit Singh. A Sikh barrister was one of the principal accused in the Rawalpindi riots case.[40]

The agitation of 1907 showed the percolation of political awareness to the grassroot level of the Sikh peasantry. A contemporary notes that the isolation from the centers of political agitation was the main reason why the Sikh peasants had so far refrained from politics. However, a steadily widening circle of political agitation in the towns, the spread of education and political awareness through the Press, in addition to the excesses by the Punjab Government were responsible for the politicization of the Sikh peasantry. These peasants in turn were in constant touch with their brethren in the Central Punjab which further widened the area of political influence.[41]

Though the Singh Sabha and the Chief Khalsa Diwan had little to do with the agitation of 1907, several Singh Sabhas and the Diwans criticized British policy towards the canal colonies and revenue rates.The *Khalsa Advocate* joined in by congratulating the cultivators who by 'constitutional agitation' had brought the government to see its folly . The Amritsar Singh Sabha however urged the Sikhs to be cautious and when the Sikhs were called disloyal in certain rural meetings, were of the view that a wedge was being driven between the Sikhs and the British by the enemies of Sikhism. The Chief Khalsa Diwan was instrumental in arranging several meetings between the government and the Singh Sabha in which the British measures of conciliation were applauded and the Sikhs were warned to avoid being seen as seditious.[42]

The next encounter of the Sikhs with the British was over the Anand Marriage Bill. In order to clearly differentiate the Sikh ceremonies from that of the Hindus the Anand marriage had been propagated by the Singh Sabha as the Sikh ceremony of marriage. The Chief Khalsa Diwan also approved of the simple marriage ceremony. The Bill was introduced in the Legislative Council by Tikka Ripudaman Singh of Nabha. While the bill was being discussed the Diwan

mobilized the largest mass demonstrations ever seen in the Punjab. Regiments, Singh Sabhas outside India, large meetings in most districts-all produced memorials validating the Chief Khalsa Diwan claim that the Sikhs as a community supported the measure. Though the British had not been very enthusiastic to begin with, the Sikh show of unity assured the Bill's passage. This was proclaimed as the benefit of British rule.[43]

The British intelligence officer, David Petrie, thought of the neo-Sikhs in 1911 as the source of disaffection among the Sikhs. These neo-Sikhs were equated by him with the Tat Khalsa or the Singh reformers. The activities even of the Chief Khalsa Diwan and its leading light, Sunder Singh Majithia, appeared to him to be potentially subversive.[44] One of the issues taken up by the Tat Khalsa around 1914 was that of the ban on carrying the *kirpan*. This was regarded as official intervention in the internal affairs of the Panth. The Sikh reformists launched *kirpan morcha* when the cases of harassment and humiliation of those Sikhs who wore the *kirpan* were regularly reported in the Sikh press. In many cases, the Sikhs were arrested and imprisoned. In some cases, the Sikh soldiers were dismissed with fines on account of their refusal to stop wearing the *kirpan*. The British disallowed any *kirpan* longer than nine inches, closed down the manufactory where longer ones were made, and arrested any one wearing one exceeding the legal dimensions. The Tat Khalsa rationalization was that only a Singh could determine what dimensions his *kirpan* should have.[45]

The Sikh organizations passed resolutions and the Sikh periodicals published these resolutions along with the articles and editorial notes pleading with the government to exempt the sword from the purview of the Arms Act, 1858. The outbreak of World War I and the Ghadar Movement pressurized the Government into issuance of a notification in 1914 exempting the *kirpan* from restrictions. The Sikhs were allowed to carry or possess *kirpans*, but only in the provinces of the Punjab, Delhi and U.P. The reformists continued to ask for it's

exemption throughout British India. Later the government conceded this demand too.[46]

With growing awareness about the religious taboos among the Sikhs, the demand for opening the *jhatka* slaughter houses in the towns and villages was taken up. The Sikh reformer's put forward the plea, that eating *jhatka* meat had been their established custom and was essential for the Sikhs who were engaged in the exercise of wielding the weapons. The *Khalsa Advocate* stated 'Sikhs are by nature a military race and consequently, the bulk of them are meat-eating. We have pointed out that for a Sikh to use *halal* meat is an act of apostasy. The authorities then wish that the Sikhs should either become out and out vegetarians, or degenerate into apostates by resorting to *halal* meat.' The Punjab Government viewed the *jhatka morcha* 'partly in a genuine desire to conform more strictly to undoubted tenets of the Sikh religion and partly in a factious effort to aggravate racial and religious differences'. This policy resulted in the local officials exercising their authority in the manner that wherever the Sikhs could not build up strong pressure, the officials did not concede their demand. The *jhatka* issue therefore, remained alive till the beginning of the Gurdwara Reform movement.[47]

The case of the turban was also taken up. The Government was persuaded to permit the Sikh students to wear a turban instead of putting on a cap while appearing in the medical examination competition and this facility was extended to the Sikh prisoners in jails who were permitted to retain their religious emblems and allowed to keep their turbans. The Sikh reformers laid emphasis on the daily use of turbans by the Sikhs of all ages especially while attending the religious discourses or any functions being held in the presence of *Guru Granth*. Wearing a turban was stated as essential as to keep the other Sikh symbols.[48]

The period from 1849 to 1919 is usually seen as that of a positive relationship between the Sikhs and the British but it can be seen that by 1914

clear lines had been drawn in Sikh politics between those Sikhs who continued to maintain a pro-British stance and these included the members of the Chief Khalsa Diwan who were supposed to be looking after the political interests of the Sikhs, and those Sikhs, mainly the Singh Sabhaites or the Tat Khalsa who were no longer ready to compromise on Sikh interests and began to protest for changes in British policy towards the Sikhs.

III

In 1912 David Petrie had 'sufficient evidence available to prove that a spirit of anti-British disaffection is commonly prevalent among the Sikhs in Canada'.[49] Indeed the Executive Committee of the Sikh temple at Vancouver had resolved in October 1909 that 'No member of the Executive Committee of the Sikh Temple should wear any kind of medals, buttons, uniforms or insignia which may signify that the position of the party wearing the article is nothing but of a slave to the British supremacy'.[50] The resentment that thousands of Indians felt against the blind racial prejudice of their white neighbours was transferred to the colonial rulers of India. A meeting was held between the United India League and the Khalsa Diwan Society where it was decided to send a delegation to meet the Colonial Secretary and the Governor General of India to present the case of Indian emigrants against the legal disabilities and statutory discrimination they were suffering at the hands of the states and the federal government in Canada. Lord Hardinge expressed his inability to meet the committee while the Colonial Secretary in London refused to meet them. They were however well received by the press in the Punjab.

Before they returned a new association, the *Hindi Association* of the Pacific Coast was formed and was given the popular name of the Ghadar Party in its very first weekly the *Ghadar*.[51] The Urdu and Gurmukhi editions of the *Ghadar* began to circulate among the Indian settlers in three continents. It advocated an armed revolution to throw out the British. Through its regular

features, *Angrezi Raj Ka Kacha Chitha* and *Ankhon Ki Gawahi*, it highlighted the destructive consequences of British exploitation in India. For the first six months, the *Ghadar* carried out extensive anti-British propaganda and was also forwarded to India when in May 1914 the Japanese steamer the *Komagata Maru* reached Vancouver with 376 emigrants. Except for 21 Punjabi Muslims, practically all passengers were Sikhs. The press in the Punjab pleaded the right of these passengers to land in Canada and warned about serious consequences if they were returned.[52]

The entry of the Sikh on the *Komagata Maru* into Canada became a tense legal issue which resulted in their being turned back. The steamer was on high seas when the war broke out in 1914. None of the passengers was allowed to disembark before Calcutta where at Budge Budge, the passengers refused to be shipped straight to the Punjab and eighteen of them were killed when the troops opened fire. The first batch of Ghadarites had already left America. Batches of Ghadarites began to return to India. The *Komagata Maru* appeared to merge into the revolutionary programme of the Ghadar Party.[53]

The war was looked upon as an ideal opportunity to take advantage of the British by starting a rebellion. The Government of India armed with the 'Ingress into India Ordinance, 1914' intercepted over 3,000 such people at Calcutta and Ludhiana, 190 were interred and more than 700 restricted to their villages.The Ghadharites message of revolution mostly invited ridicule. The Ghadarites were considered crazy and the Chief Khalsa Diwan issued a call for institution of *Akhand Paths* to pray for British Victory.[54]

The Diwan leaders considered the Ghadarites as fallen Sikhs who had fallen into the hands of the agitators and brought disgrace to the community. Committees were constituted to help the government track down these criminals. The only important convert to the Ghadarite agenda was Randhir Singh of Narangwal. Generally as Michael O'Dwyer recorded, the Ghadarites were

regarded with indifference. The Ghadharites established contact with Rash Behari Bose and other revolutionaries. February 21 and later February 19 were fixed as dates for the uprising. Both these dates were known to the British, who disarmed the affected regiments and court-martialled and executed suspects. Of the 57 conspirators convicted only 21 were not returned immigrants. This shows how little support the Ghadarites got from the public of the Punjab. The common people of the Punjab 'had the common sense to believe that a handful of badly organized adventurist could not topple the British Government'. [55]

Michael O'Dwyer, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, gave credit for the failure of the Ghadarites 'to the members of Sikh Committees' which were constituted by the Chief Khalsa Diwan and village notables. In the Punjab at this time were the landed aristocracy and *zaildars* and *sufaidposhes* who were at the service of the British. The Sikh Gurdwaras were controlled by Government appointed *mahants*. So much so that event he widespread fury over the Jallianwala Bagh massacre did not deter the *sarbrah* of the Golden Temple from honouring General Dyer with a *siropa*.

The *Komagata Maru* episode, as also the Ghadarites did not make the expected waves in Punjab society, yet they did not sink without a trace either. These incidents had a radicalizing influence on Singh Sabha reformers who realized the futility of the Chief Khalsa Diwan's way of doing politics. It was also realized that the British Government was not ready to take any steps to bring about a change in the prejudicial treatment of Sikh immigrants to Canada. The massacre at Budge Budge in 1914 further heated up things. The Manager of the Golden Temple was increasingly criticized for toeing the British line. The Lahore Singh Sabha condemned the Manager. The Chief Khalsa Diwan also received flak for its silence on the Budge Budge affair.[56]

The attitude of the Chief Khalsa Diwan on these issues and issues of the constitutional development of the country after the war resulted in the more

radical and younger reformers breaking away. The two important developments during the war on the future constitutional arrangement that had a bearing on the inauguration of the Central Sikh League were interconnected. The first of them was the rapprochement between the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League beginning to take place as early as 1913 but reaching its culmination in the Lucknow Pact of 25 December 1916.The second was the announcement of the goal of the British policy on the future of the Indian Constitutional development. These were some of the issues that led to the final break in the Chief Khalsa Diwan in December 1919 and the formation of the Central Sikh League, that became the left wing of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.

IV

By the end of the nineteenth century, the politics of numbers was gaining ground in the Punjab. There was little representation on the basis of people's will in legislative or executive bodies. Numbers were, however, equated with employment opportunities under the Government and changes in numbers were viewed with concern. Competition between the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities received a boost as did communal politics.[57] Within the Sikh community too there was a difference of opinion over political strategy. Sikhs with pro-British leanings supported 'constitutional methods'. The Indian Councils Act of 1861 was made operative in the Punjab only in the last decade of the nineteenth century with all nine members of the provincial council to be nominated by the Lieutenant Governor. The Act of 1892 'gave recognition to the principle of communal representation in disguised form', further accentuating differences between the communities.[58] The non-official members of the Provincial Councils were to be nominated by certain local bodies such as Universities, District Boards and Municipalities.[59] This act ensured the rise of such political awareness amongst the Sikh, Hindu and Muslim communities, as

would help them gain entry into the Provincial Council based on what standing their community had on District Boards and Municipalities.

An important role therefore was played by the British Government and its policies in engendering a political consciousness amongst the Sikhs. Also the colonial officials in their bid to introduce a measure of democratic institutions in Indian politics, without relinquishing the reins of power, tended to encourage communal demands in principle. Therefore, amidst a general expression of loyalty to the British Government by the reformers, we find requests for separate representation for the Sikhs in municipalities, local boards, the provincial council and the imperial legislature. In their pursuit of a policy of ensuring 'a communal balance on the basis of population', the British introduced the system of separate electorates and in general encouraged communal deputations, memorials and petitions.[60]

The need for a workable Sikh political strategy was accentuated when in the first and second decades of the twentieth century the idea of Hindu Muslim separation was given constitutional and political recognition in the Punjab as in the rest of the country. The Muslim League was founded in 1906 and made the demand for separate electorates in 1908. The Muslims made up 54.85 per cent of the population of the Punjab. Not willing to be left behind in the race for greater representation for their community the Punjab Hindu Sabha was set up at Lahore in December 1906. They were 33.46 per cent of the population of the Punjab. The Sikh activists too tried to form a political 'Central Association of the Sikhs'. Due to internal differences and the fact that the Chief Khalsa Diwan's position would be compromised, no association was brought into being. The Sikhs formed 13 per cent of the total population of the Punjab.[61]

The Morley-Minto Reforms were implemented by the Indian Councils Act, 1909. This Act provided for the first time, for separate representation of the Muslim community and also gave them weightage to offset the Hindu

preponderance. This Act also made the local self-Government bodies, i.e., the Municipal Committees and the District Boards, the electorates for Legislative Councils. In the rural constituencies for the district boards, the Muslims, dominated and in the urban constituencies, that is, for municipal committees the Hindus were in majority.

The Government of India Act 1909 conceded the right of separate electorates to the Muslims. The Chief Khalsa Diwan asked for the same concessions for the Sikhs being a minority community and asked to be represented separately on all Government and semi-Government bodies – educational institutions, Municipal Committees, District Boards and the Provincial and Imperial Councils.[62] The Lieutenant Governor, Punjab too supported these demands and wrote to the Viceroy but nothing was done. Under the Act of 1909, the Provincial Council was enlarged with provisions for eight elected members. For nearly a decade only one Sikh made it to the Council. Due to the policies of the British and their minority status in the Punjab the Sikhs could find representation only through nominated members like Pratap Singh Ahluwalia, Daljit Singh of Kapurthala, Baba Gurbaksh Singh Bedi, Sunder Singh Majithia and Gajjan Singh Grewal, respectively.[63]

In the meantime, the Sikhs were finding out that without weightage they could not get any representation when elections were held and therefore, their voice could not be heard by anyone in a position of authority and power. The elections held under the Act of 1909 for the Provincial Legislative Council, resulted in all three seats going to the Muslims, while in 1912 out of the twelve seats, one went to the Sikhs, four went to the Muslims and one to a Hindu. In 1916, out of the eleven seats, five went to the Hindus, five to the Muslims and one to a European. The demand for separate electorates for the Sikh community began to be voiced in various Sikh forums. Sardul Singh Caveeshar, in *the Sikh Review* in 1915 and the *Khalsa Advocate,* in 1917 expressed the need for

separate electorates and an organization of the Sikhs to defend 'their communal rights or political interests'.[64]

The Lucknow Pact of 1916 between the Muslim League and the Congress brought home to the Sikhs that they were losing their hold on gaining any ground in electoral politics, thus, leaving them virtually without any representation in elected bodies and therefore, in their community's future. This pact ensured separate electorates for Muslims in every province and weightage in those in which they formed a minority.[65] No such safeguards were made for the Sikhs and the Congress which had claimed to represent all Indians seemed to have become a mouthpiece of Hindu interests only.

Soon after the Lucknow Pact, Sunder Singh Majithia wrote to the Lieutenant Governor asking for a share in excess of their proportion for the Sikhs in the Councils and administration keeping in view their importance, their status before annexation the Punjab, their present stake in the country and their services to the British empire. In November 1917, a deputation of the Sikhs met Chelmsford, the Governor General, to plead for separate electorates and weightage for the Sikhs on the basis of their unique position. The Montford Report noted that the Sikhs had remained unrepresented in spite of their services to the empire and it was recommended that the same system as that for Muslims be adopted for the Sikhs. In September 1918, representation of the entire Sikh community under the initiative of the Chief Khalsa Diwan prepared a memorandum to impress upon the Government that the principle in the Montford Report be carried out. However, the proposal of 30 per cent share for the Sikhs in the Provincial Council was not acceptable to its Hindu and Muslim members. On a strong recommendation from the Punjab Government, the Franchise Committee conceded 'a separate electoral role and separate constituencies for the Sikhs.' In terms of weightage, however, the Sikhs got merely half of what they had demanded, ten out of fiftyeight seats and not 30 per cent.[66] The

absence of any political organization like the Muslim League among the Sikhs was felt keenly by the Sikh community. It became one of the reasons for the formation of the Central Sikh League, the first political party of the Sikhs.

NOTES

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Chapter 7

REFLECTIONS IN RETROSPECT

The aim of this study was to focus on social transformation in Sikh society under colonial rule during the period 1849-1919. The theme is rather wide in scope and demands detailed analysis at several levels to make a complete assessment. As the chapter on the overview of literature clarifies, no single work takes into account the census information on numbers and demographic data, the demographic change in the twentieth century in terms of numbers and other demographic features, the beliefs and practices of the Sikhs, the question of identity, and the political aspirations of the Sikh community in the period from 1849 to 1919. This work is an attempt to understand some elements of transformation in all these areas. It is clear that profound changes did occur in Sikh society during this period, covering almost all aspects of life economic, social, cultural and political. These changes amounted virtually to a social transformation of the Sikh people. The term social transformation obviously includes social structure, cultural norms and political attitudes of those who called themselves 'Sikhs' and were recognized as such by others.

In the early census reports, no definition of a Sikh was explicitly provided and in the beginning the Sikhs were bracketed with the Hindus, though the works of the European writers made a very clear distinction between the Sikhs and other communities. In the census taken in the beginning of British rule the Sikhs are seen as in danger of vanishing. In such observations, the Sikhs were equated with the Singhs. The major change witnessed in this period was a phenomenal increase in the number of the Sikhs, including the Keshdharis. In addition to a natural increase, the change in numbers was due to a profound alteration in the self-image of the Sikhs. The number of Sikhs increased from 6.5 per cent of the population in 1881 to about 12.3 percent of the population in 1921, and 14.2 per cent in 1931. The majority of the Sikhs still belonged to the central districts of the Punjab. In

1931 the highest percentage of Sikhs was in the districts of Amritsar, Ferozepur, Ludhiana, Jalandhar and Lahore. The proportion of females to males remained low throughout the period though by 1931 there was a slight improvement, with 793 females to 1,000 males. Till 1911 the Sikhs were at par with the Hindus in literacy and the Sikh women were leading in the area of vernacular education. The decade from 1911 to 1921, and even from 1921to 1931, did not see much change in the proportion of literate Sikhs. The reason for this apparent 'stagnation' was thought to be the addition of comparatively illiterate Mazhabis to the Sikh community. On the whole, literacy was on the rise among the Sikhs. The Sikhs in our period remained largely rural and continued to follow their traditional occupations with agriculture as the main occupation. This carries the implication that the proportion of Sikhs in the new professions was in considerable. The census reports, in all probability, did not take adequate notice of this kind of change.

The number of Keshdharis was on the increase and about 88 per cent of the Sikh population was Keshdhari by 1931, while 7 per cent was Sahajdhari and 5 per cent of the Sikhs returned as sects analogous to other religions. The number of Sikhs returning their sects in 1931 was much smaller as compared to that of the earlier census. The question of identity appears to have induced the people to follow the outward symbols of Sikh religion more meticulously than they were known to have observed in the immediate past.

The increase in numbers was due not only to the change in the manner of returns in 1911 but also to the emphasis of the Sikhs on their identity and due to the *prachar* by the Singh Sabhas which advocated the importance of a casteless social order in accordance with the teachings of the Gurus. The transformation of self-image conforming to a casteless order was so widespread that it percolated to the village level with the ordinary Sikh not returning his caste. A culmination of this attitude could be seen st the Darbar Sahib when the Khalsa *baradari* was led by the teachers of Khalsa College to offer *prasad.* The practice of allotting fixed hours and particular spaces for the use of the Sikhs from the 'untouchable' castes was done away with at the Darbar Sahib, the holiest of holies, and the other major shrines, on demand

from the ordinary practising Sikhs. The Singh Sabha reformers carried forward the reform begun by the Nirankaris and the Namdharis in the early nineteenth century in their attempt to revive the norms and mores of the early Sikh tradition.

What was new in the colonial situation was not the ideas and institutions so much as the means of spreading the message of reform. British rule had brought with itself modern methods of communication and organization. Following the example of the Christian missionaries the Singh Sabha reformers made the maximum use of printing technology and institutional organization. The numbers of books, tracts and newspapers began to increase with the passage of time. Historical works on the Sikhs and by the Sikhs, with a target audience of the Sikhs, was addressed to other sat the same time. The writings of Giani Gian Singh and Bhai Vir Singh became very popular. These writers relied heavily on the works of early Sikh writers in order to emphasize the continuity of their message of a distinct identity of the Sikhs.

In retrospect, a small but significant number of Sikhs can be seen at the forefront of the Singh Sabha movement. These Sikhs represented the emerging middle class among the Sikhs. They were the ones who had taken advantage of the institutions, educational and others, of the British and carved a niche for themselves in the newly emerging social order. The impact of their activities can be seen in the census reports of the British and the emerging political consciousness of the Sikh people. They managed to pass on their message of reform and revitalization to the Sikhs in the rural areas and to mobilize their support for the Sikh causes.

This period saw a return to the teachings of the Gurus. An emphasis was laid on understanding of the various aspects of every day life, whether it was the education of women or the political aspirations of the Sikhs or the relevance of the prevailing beliefs and practices in the light of the word of the Guru contained in the *Guru Granth.* The Sikh society was sought to be rid of the excess baggage of un-Sikh rituals it had acquired in the course of its

history. The guide of the Singh reformers in this endeavour was the eternal Guru, the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Changes were sought to be brought about in the self-perception of the Sikhs with regard to their unique identity. The beginning was made with the removal of idols from the precincts of the Darbar Sahib and there was an increasingly popular demand that the Sikh shrines should be controlled by the Sikhs themselves. The Sikhs began to subscribe to the more precise definition of a Sikh by redefining their main religious ceremonies as observed in the society of believers. Changes were sought to be made in various Sikh ceremonies relating to birth, initiation, marriage and death.

In the beginning, the Anand Marriage was advocated by the Nirankaris and Namdharis. With the intervention of political leaders like the Nabha Prince, Ripudaman Singh, and the intellectual leadership of men like Bhai Kanh Singh of Nabha, public support was gathered for the Anand Marriage Bill and it was legalized as the Sikh way of marriage, becoming a permanent feature of Sikh practice in the future. Practices regarding death also underwent a change and the throwing of ashes into the Ganges was considered an un-Sikh act. Kiratpur became the destination on such occasions. Sikh beliefs were clearly delineated and clarified and Sikhs in large numbers were won over to the Singh Sabha understanding of the Sikh tradition.

The activity in the area of transformation of social values was based on the premise that the Sikh Gurus had abandoned the previous path and prescribed new norms for the universal order they brought into existence. The only means of having an intense look into the past was an examination of the scriptures, works of the early Sikh writers, religious literature, and writings of the respected theologians of the past. The historians, political and social leaders, religious heads of institutions, writers and poets tried to discover their society and religion as it was supposed to have been in the 'golden past'. They came to the conclusion that Sikhism had always been an autonomous religion and had always projected a different personality from the beginning. The Gurus had laid down norms and values new to the practice of faith in

India and had called into existence mental attitudes and transformed the mode of worship and object of worship. All this was brought home to the Sikh public through their publications and *prachar,* leading to the reaffirmation of faith in the Sikh society and reflected in the increasing numbers of the Sikhs in the census reports.

The intensity of self awareness led the Sikhs to increasing participation in political activity. The Singh Sabhas, which in the beginning had as their objectives only reform and the assertion of loyalty to the British, began to create political awareness among the Sikhs. After the beginning made at Amritsar and Lahore in the 1870's, Singh Sabhas spread all over the Punjab. The threat from the Arya Samaj and Christian missionaries who had managed to get two high profile converts from among the Sikhs was considered real enough. In 1888, came a break with the Arya Samaj. The Khalsa Diwan in its farewell address to the Governor General in 1888 expressed the view that the Sikhs should not be 'confounded with Hindus'; in all respects they should be treated as 'a separate community'. The death of Dyal Singh Majithia in 1898, and the subsequent ruling of the court, gave a new impetus to the Sikh-Hindu debate. Bhai Kahn Singh published his well known work, *Ham Hindu Nahin*, as an affirmation of a distinct Sikh identity.

After the annexation of the Punjab, the British had tried consciously to involve the aristocracy of the Sikhs, the landed families and the rulers of nearby states in public affairs, partly to legitimize the new government and partly as a help in administering the province. The British had also tried to control the affairs and institutions of the Sikh community by means of appointment of the *sarbrah* of the Darbar Sahib, the central Sikh shrine. In addition to this the Sikhs had a large presence in the British army. Eventually, however, the British administrators did not succeed.

A transformation in political perceptions was dictated by the gradual relaxing of tight political control of the British over the Indian population. With the corresponding rise in political aspirations came awareness of the importance of the politics of numbers. The result was the formation of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902 for coordinating the activities of the Singh

Sabhas. Sikh 'political' activity in the 1900's involved conflict with the British over some basic and volatile issue: the issue of the Khalsa College, the agitation of 1907 in the canal colonies, the Anand Marriage Bill, the definition of Sikh for the census, the issue of the *kirpan*, the wall of the Rikabganj Gurdwara, and the issue of control over the Gurdwaras.

The formation of the Ghadar Party, though limited in scope, brought about a qualitative change in the minds and aspirations of the Sikhs. With the continued failure of the Sikhs to win enough seats in the Punjab Legislative Council, and the Lucknow Pact of 1916, the Sikhs realized their precarious position in the Punjab and began to agitate for adequate representation. In 1916-17, requests became demands. This change in the tenor of Sikh politics, involving direct action and confrontation as a means of protecting Sikh interests, was not acceptable to the Chief Khalsa Diwan. To meet the new challenges the Central Sikh League was founded in 1919 as the first political party of the Sikhs, committed to 'freedoms' of several kinds, in opposition to the British.

On the whole, the Sikhs of 1920 were far removed from the Sikhs of 1850. Their transformation embraced social change, a new cultural awareness and a new political articulation. One end of their response was the early Sikh tradition and the other, the challenges of the colonial environment.

GLOSSARY

Adi Granth: the Sikh scripture, compiled by Guru Arjan in 1604 (containing the compositions of the first five Gurus and a number of *bhaktas, sants* and Sufis) and authenticated by Guru Gobind Singh with the compositions of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Now known as *Guru Granth Sahib*.

akhand path: 'unbroken reading'; an uninterrupted reading of the entire Adi Granth performed by a team of readers.

akhara: arena; a temple or monastry of the Udasis.

Amir: a noble, a rich person.

avtar: 'descent'; incarnation of a deity, usually Vishnu.

bani: speech; the utterances of the Gurus and *bhaktas* recorded in the Adi Granth; the amplified form *gurbani* or *bhagat-bani* is commonly used.

bhang: hemp, cannabis, its leaves and pistils; hashish.

charan pahul: nectar of the foot; the practice of drinking the water in which the toe of the *guru* has been dipped, symbolizing humility and dedication on the part of the initiate; also called *charanamrit*.

chhimba: calico-printer.

chhut: the practice of untouchability.

Dasam Granth: the term used for the compilation earlier called the Book of the Tenth King (*dasven patshah ka granth*); its compilation is attributed to Bhai Mani Singh; the authorship of its contents (a number of independent compositions) and the date of its compilation have been the subject of debate.

dharmsal: the place for earning merit; Sikh sacred space or the Sikh place of worship in early Sikh history, now generally called Gurdwara.

gaddi: a throne; also used for the seat of the head of a religious fraternity.

Giani: one who has acquired knowledge or attained to divine knowledge; a learned Sikh.

gurbani: an utterance of the Guru; compositions of the Gurus included in *Guru Granth Sahib.*

gurbhai: a fellow disciple of the same *guru*, given great importance in the Sikh tradition.

gurbilas: a poetical work written in praise of the Gurus, or one of the Gurus.

Gurmukhi: a script adopted by the first successor of Guru Nanak for recording his compositions and used subsequently for the Sikhs for writing Punjabi,

haumai: the psyche of self-centredness, arising out of attributing to oneself what actually is due to God's will.

hukamnama: 'a written order'; used generally for the letters of the Sikh Gurus to their followers.

jagir: an assignment of land revenue in lieu of salary for performing service for the state.

jamaat: a group of an uncertain number.

Janamsakhi: a collection of episodes associated with the life of Guru Nanak, meant primarily to depict his doctrines, ethics and his spiritual status; several traditions of this genre developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

jatha: a group, a band; used particularly for the fighting unit of the Khalsa in the eighteen century.

jhatka: the mode of slaughtering an animal for meat with one stroke of the sword or some other weapon; the traditional non-Muslim mode of slaughtering animals in India. Unlike *halal*, it did not carry any religious significance.

jhiwar : a water-carrier by caste.

julaha: a weaver by caste.

kachh: short drawers of a special kind meant to be worn by those Sikhs who have been initiated through baptism of the double-edged sword.

kafir: an infidel from the Muslim viewpoint; a non-Muslim who does not belong to the category of 'the people of the book' like the Christians and the Jews.

kara: an iron bracelet meant to be worn by the baptized Khalsa.

karha parsad: sacramental food distributed in Gurdwaras to all persons present, generally prepared with equal quantities of wheat flour, sugar and ghee.

kes (*kesh*): hair of the head, uncut hair.

keshdhari: a baptized Singh who maintains long unshorn hair.

kirpan: a sword.

Lambardar: a village headman.

langar: the kitchen attached to a Gurdwara from which food is served to all regardless of caste or creed; a community meal; a kitchen.

lathi: a staff; a club, prop, support.

lohar: blacksmith.

mahal: a revenue sub-division usually corresponding with *pargana* also applied to a source of revenue.

mahant: the head of a religious establishment, generally celibate but not in all cases; therefore, succession in some cases could be hereditary; used for the custodians of Gurdwaras to whom recognition and support was given by the British administration.

Majha: the central portion of the Bari Doab, covering the region from Amritsar to Kasur and from Lahore to Bhairowal on the Beas.

Malwa: The region covered by the district of Ludhiana, a large part of the district of Ferozepore and parts of the former states of Patiala and Nabha.

mlechha: impure; a derogatory term used for an outcaste or a foreigners, both were regarded as outside the four-tier *varna* order.

nai: a barber by caste.

Nihang: The militant followers of Guru Gobind Singh who regarded themselves as the guardians of the faith.

Nirmalas: an order of ascetics in Sikhism.

pahul: water used for initiating a person as a Sikh (*charan pahul*) or a Singh (*khande ki pahul*).

Panth: literally a path; the people following a particular path; collectively the followers of the Gurus; the Sikh community.

parchar: propagation of ideas, particularly of one's faith.

pir: among Muslim mystics the guide who leads on the path of union with God; believed to be a bestower of blessings after his death.

qaum: a significant social group or a particular occupation; a nationality; a nation.

rahit: way of life, used especially for the Sikh way of life in accordance with the philosophic and ethical principles advanced by the Gurus.

Rahitnama: a written code of belief and conduct; norms laid down for the Sikh way of life in accordance with the principles of Sikhism, including 'punishment' for infringing those principles.

Sahajdhari: a Sikh who is not baptized as a Singh and does not observe the Khalsa code of discipline; a non-Singh Khalsa.

sangat: assembly, religious congregation; a congregation of Sikhs; the collective body of Sikhs at one place.

sanyasi: a renunciant, generally a Shaivite.

sarbrah: manager, head.

shabad: the word; a hymn; a verse of *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Shastra: a religious or secular treatise regarded as authoritative.

shraddh: the rite by which the dead ancestors are supposed to be fed through the mediacy of Brahmans.

siddh: a person who has attained to a high spiritual state so as to command supernatural powers.

Sufedposh: the middle category among the grantees of colony land, with 50-150 acres.

Tarkhan: a carpenter by caste.

tat khalsa: the staunch Khalsa; used for the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh who opposed Banda Bahadur and his followers in the early eighteenth century, and also for the Singh reformers of the early twentieth century.

thakardwaras: a temple dedicated to Vishnu or one of His incarnations.

tilak: the sacred mark on the forehead a Brahman, an upper caste Hindu, or the member of any religious sect; also used for the coronation of a ruler.

zaildar: The head of zail or a group of villages; placed above the village lambardar in the British Punjab; his earlier prototype was the Chaudhary who had more power having the support of his retainers.

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