

**RELOCATING GENDER IN SIKH HISTORY:
TRANSFORMATION, MEANING AND IDENTITY**

by

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Abstract:

The term 'gender' has been defined as an evolutionary, fluid construct; gendered realities are thus open to the vicissitudes of circumstance and time, emerging and developing with the shifting needs of the community within which they unfold. An analysis of gender construction is thus a useful mechanism to interpret the historical process on the whole. This theoretical position forms the framework for a reinterpretation of the Sikh community in the colonial context.

The Sikh tradition itself has been part of an evolutionary process. From a primary focus on interior religiosity upon its inception, Sikhism developed into an increasingly militaristic order with highly prescribed exterior symbols and rituals. Accompanying this shift was a 'theology of difference', giving religious, symbolic and ritual sanctioning to a specific gender hierarchy. With a primary focus on male Sikh identity, female religious identity was relegated to a secondary position.

Under-girding the annexation of Punjab into the British Empire were Victorian notions of the 'manly Christian', Christianized imperialism and chivalry, alongside rigid female ideals such as the 'helpmate'. The Sikhs came to be highly favoured by their imperial masters for their monotheistic ideals and what was perceived as their 'manly' and militaristic character. This hyper-masculine, militaristic construct, already enshrined within Sikh history through the creation of the Khalsa in 1699 received renewed emphasis by the British administration. The Singh Sabha reform movement initiated in the late-nineteenth century ingeniously accommodated selected aspects of the Victorian worldview into their reform agenda, particularly with regard to gender constructs.

Leaders of the Singh Sabha began to actively safeguard Sikh interests in a political milieu increasingly defined by communal rivalry. A Sikh renaissance was born, bringing about a successful focus on linguistic concerns of the Sikhs, education, literature and a highly selective interpretive process of Sikh history and religion.

Gender politics were pivotal to virtually all aspects of this endeavour. Novel interpretations and in certain instances 'inventions' of distinct female ritual traditions and symbolism alongside female educational initiatives fostering the 'ideal' Sikh woman were central to the objectives of the Singh Sabha reform movement.

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Chapter One:

*The Construction of Women in Sikh History and Religion - Attitudes and Assumptions:
An Overview of Secondary Sources*

The status of women was not an issue in Sikhism. Equality was implicit...Women are considered as an integral part of society who must not be excluded by any ritual or doctrinal consideration. Since rituals tend to be exclusive, they cannot be made part of a true faith. In other words, the position of women could be a touchstone for the genuineness of a faith.¹

To know whether to take speakers seriously is difficult in a society that blurs the boundary between serious and strategic communication. When are promises or statements of intent, for instance, merely the casual talk of everyday life or strategic maneuvers in compromising situations rather than acts of serious communication?²

The study of history from a feminist perspective has not been given a great deal of attention in Sikh Studies. While Sikh apologetics repeatedly insist that men and women are inherently equal in the Sikh world view, in reality, historical writings say virtually nothing about women apart from minimal 'asides' referring to the occasional exceptional woman who has been deemed worthy enough to have *made* the pages of history. These 'exceptional' women are then typically held up as the standard by which to measure the egalitarian ethos of the Sikh tradition. Clarence McMullen notes that in speaking of religious beliefs and practices of the Sikhs there is the need to make the distinction between what he labels as normative and operative beliefs.

Normative beliefs and practices are those which are officially stated and prescribed or proscribed by a recognized religious authority, which can be

¹ Surinder Suri, "Position of Women in Sikhism," in Jyotsna Chatterji, ed *The Authority of the Religions and the Status of Women*, Banhi Series, Delhi: WCSRC-CISRS Joint Women's Programme and the William Carey Study and Research Centre, 1989, p. 112.

² Richard K. Fenn, "The Sociology of Religion: A Critical Survey," in Tom Tottomore, Stefan Nowak, Magdalena Sokolowska, eds., *Sociology. The State of the Art* London: Sage Publications, 1982, p. 113.

a person, organization, or an official statement. Operative beliefs and practices, on the other hand, are those actually held by people.³

While McMullen utilizes these distinctions in his delineation of contemporary beliefs and practices of the Sikhs in rural Punjab, they are useful in analyzing the role and status of women from the larger theoretical perspective of history as well. With regard to the inherent egalitarianism of Sikh men and women, one writer notes: "[t]he Sikh woman has enjoyed superior status compared with her counterparts in other communities. She has earned this by showing the ability to stand by the side of her husband in difficult times."⁴ Yet, if women and men are inherently equal in the tradition in terms of roles and status, why are they not given similar representation in the pages of Sikh history? It is a question that can perhaps best be explained in light of McMullen's analysis of differentiation. Namely, what is officially touted as normative with regard to gender in history is not necessarily the same as the actual and operative aspects of the same Sikh history. Further, Harjot Oberoi has posited that the principles of 'silence' and 'negation' are paramount in addressing issues that could be conceived as ambiguous within the tradition.⁵ This chapter addresses the principles of 'accommodation' and 'idealization'

³ Clarence Osmond McMullen, *Religious Beliefs and Practices of the Sikhs in Rural Punjab* New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1989, p. 5.

⁴ Kanwaljit Kaur-Singh, "Sikhism," Jean Holm with John Bowker, eds., *Women in Religion* Themes in Religious Studies Series, London: Pinter Publishers, 1994, p. 152.

⁵ With regard to the principles of silence and negation, Oberoi notes: "In the Sikh case, historical texts are virtually silent about religious diversity, sectarian conflicts, nature worship, witchcraft, sorcery, spirits, magical healing, omens, wizards, miracle saints, goddesses, ancestral spirits, festivals, exorcism, astrology, divination, and village deities. When, occasionally, some of these are mentioned in historical texts, they serve to dress up an argument about how Sikhism was rapidly relapsing into Hinduism in the nineteenth century, how its adherents deviated from the 'true' articles of faith and subscribed to 'superstitious' and 'primitive' beliefs. Ultimately, this argument in official Sikh historiography goes on to establish that Sikhs were delivered from the bondage of un-Sikh beliefs by the intervention of the late-nineteenth-century Singh Sabha movement. Scholars who favour such interpretation are backing what I call the principle of negation. They are of the view that Singh Sabha reformers were in line with traditional Sikh doctrines when they opposed a large terrain of Sikh beliefs and practices in the nineteenth

along with those of 'silence' and 'negation', specifically with regard to the question of gender within the tradition.

The Principle of Silence:

The guiding principle within Sikh history is silence with regard to women. Given the traditional assumptions of history pertaining to the realms of politics and economics, historians have generally neglected women's history. Given the lack of tangible evidence with regard to women participating in the businesses of economics, war or politics, they have been viewed as having nothing to offer in the production of historical knowledge. It must also be underlined that given that women have not generally written their own histories, historical accounts are written through the lens of the male gender.⁶ What was and is important to men thus becomes the focus of historical analysis. Needless to say, the overwhelming impression one receives from Sikh historiography is that women do not *have* a history. From the silences surrounding women, their experiences and lives can only be perceived as inconsequential. Yet "[w]e know that besides history through

century." Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries. Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 30-31.

⁶ Amrita Pritam, the celebrated poet and novelist was asked to write a poem for the five hundredth anniversary of Guru Nanak. She produced a work entitled "The Annunciation," which caused considerable uproar in Punjab and in the wider Indian community. Focusing on the hopes, dreams and bodily experiences of the pregnant Tripta, Guru Nanak's mother, it was not typical of the devotional poetry written for this quincentenary. Furthermore, the son is never even mentioned, the focus and silent acclamation being of his mother, the life giver of Guru Nanak. For Pritam it was enough, more than enough to become one with Mata Tripta as she awaited the birth of her extraordinary son. Nonetheless one becomes well aware of Pritam's love and devotion to Guru Nanak. See Amrita Pritam, *Time and Again and other Poems* Calcutta: United Writers, 1975, pp. 37-40.

The outcry that followed the publication of the poem was ruthless, demanding that the poem be banned by the government, questioning how a lowly "love's worm" could attempt to write on so elevated a theme. It would appear that history, understood and presented from the perspective of the feminine can only be

mankind there exists a 'herstory'. Many aspects of this herstory have been wiped out so that it is quite difficult to reconstruct its basic elements."⁷

According to some feminist historians, history has less to do with facts than it has to do with the historians' perception of history. While historical writers have operated on the principle of objectivity, pursuing facts, stringing these bits of information together and thus presenting objective 'history', a new wave of scholarly analysis, including feminist theory argues that the process is not nearly as objective as was once believed. There has been a slow recognition that "the writing of history [is] a mental activity in its own right, somewhere between natural science and the writing of fiction."⁸ The historian thus has an active, creative role in the documentation of the process of history. The specific questions asked are of the essence. Through the questions addressed, one chooses to attend to certain aspects of history; presumably what is presented is in the writer's estimation more important than what is left out. When looking to Sikh women's history, we are told as much about the values of the chroniclers of history, as about the actual events surrounding women themselves. Consequently, one is faced with the often painstaking task of piecing together aspects of historiography which have been either disregarded or interpreted to fit into the dominant male world view of the time. Ultimately then, to know about the history of half the Sikh population, namely, male history, is a distorted history. Thus, integral to the study of women in Sikh history is the principle of stony silence, a

vilified and postulated as incomparable to *real* history, that of the male perspective. See Amrita Pritam, *Life and Times* Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1989, p. 53.

⁷ Astrid Albrecht-Heide, "Women and War: Victims and Collaborators," in Eva Isaksson, ed., *Women and the Military System* London: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1988, p. 124.

⁸ Mineke Bosch, "Women's Culture in Women's History: Historical Notion or Feminist Vision?" in Maaïke Meijer and Jetty Schaap, eds., *Historiography of Women's Cultural Traditions* Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1987, p. 48.

mechanism utilized to deal with the discrepancies between Sikh ideology as egalitarian and women's exclusion from the process of history.

The Principle of Negation:

The second principle noted above is that of negation. Harjot Oberoi utilizes the axiom to point out how heterogeneous elements in Sikh history, those labeled as deviant, marginal, threatening or unimportant are negated in order to "generate homogeneity and represent the Sikhs as a collectivity which shared the same values and movements."⁹ Though not dealing here specifically with the same issues of heterogeneity and homogeneity, the principle of negation is particularly useful in exploring the ways in which ambiguous aspects of a women-focused history have been presented. An obvious example of the principle of negation in full force is a volume written by M.K. Gill, *The Role and Status of Women in Sikhism*.¹⁰ Though the title denotes an extensive analysis of the role of women within Sikhism, Gill instead primarily focuses on what she presents as the "institution" of the *Guru Mahals*, the wives of the Gurus. While giving attention to each *Mahal* within the tradition in terms of their achievements and contributions, she also addresses the fact that these women are simply not known within or outside of the tradition; this in spite of Gill's presentation of the *Guru Mahals* as integral to the very development of the fledgling Sikh movement. While she mutely questions the indifference of Sikh historians regarding these women, she does not delve into their inattention to the *mahals*. For Gill "it is the attitude of the Gurus towards women which

⁹ Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 34.

becomes more important than the availability of material regarding the Guru Mahals.”¹¹

Gill purports that the Gurus unequivocally raised the status of women, despite the fact that

Guru histories are, by and large, silent about the wives of the gurus. From Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh the wives have been treated as part of the historical background, not as individual in themselves...[Yet]...man does not communicate by words alone...even the silence of later historians all point to a sociological fact. It is the silence of respect that is accorded to womanhood in the Punjabi culture and ethos. It helps surround her with an invisible cloak of dignity...The silence that surrounds the Guru's family is an intrinsic feature of Sikh tradition.¹²

Negating the obvious, namely, that women, *even* the *Guru Mahals* have simply not been viewed as consequential in the history of the Sikh tradition, Gill maintains that the silence surrounding the *Mahals* is indicative of the respect given women in Sikhism.

Further, Gill notes that after the death of the tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh, it was Mata Sundri, one of his three wives who for thirty-nine or forty years took over the political and spiritual leadership of the Khalsa. Ironically, this points to Mata Sundri leading the Sikh Panth longer than any of the nine Gurus subsequent to Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh tradition. Though Gill presents Mata Sundri as leading the Sikh Panth through one of its more difficult and divisive periods,¹³ she acknowledges that there is

¹⁰ M.K. Gill, *The Role and Status of Women in Sikhism* Delhi: National Book Shop, 1995.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

¹² Ibid., pp. 52-53.

¹³ Traditional sources maintain that after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, Banda Bahadur also emerged as one of the principal authority figures among the Sikhs. He became the leader of a schism group within the Khalsa known as the Bandei Khalsa.

According to W.H. McLeod, the disputes between the so-called Tat Khalsa, or the 'true' Khalsa and the Bandei Khalsa stemmed from disagreements concerning proper forms of Khalsa observances. See W.H. McLeod, *Who is a Sikh? The Problem of Sikh Identity* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 48. While Banda has come to be viewed as a rather mythical figure, an honoured warrior fighting for justice during a time of fierce persecution of the Sikhs, he was also the source of a tremendous rift in the fledgling Khalsa movement. Mata Sundri was at the helm of the Khalsa during the time period following Guru Gobind Singh's death.

surprisingly little known of her actual leadership.¹⁴ Accordingly she notes: "History is silent on this point, but the silence of history is merely a reflection of her personality."¹⁵

Though dealing more specifically with scriptural exegesis rather than with women of history, Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh's contributions too tend to fit into the paradigm of negation. Singh purports that "[b]reaking all patriarchal idols and icons, the Sikh sacred literature celebrates the feminine aspect of the Transcendent and poetically affirms the various associations and images that are born from her."¹⁶ Focusing on the feminine grammatical forms and images within the Sikh scripture Singh insists that it is the feminine in its myriad of forms which is predominant over the male.¹⁷ Yet, this prevalence of the female over the male is contestable, since the Ultimate in the Sikh scripture, the *Adi Granth* is almost exclusively conceived in masculine terms, *Akal Purakh*, *Karta Purakh*, *Purakh* meaning 'man' in Punjabi. Singh continues that with regard to female imagery

¹⁴ To illustrate the lack of knowledge about the female leaders of the Khalsa, another writer depicts *Mata Sahib Devan*, another wife of the Guru as the leader of the Sikhs: "Punjabis venerate Mata Sahib Devan as the mother of the 'Khalsa'. She outlived her husband Guru Gobind Singh. She saved Sikhism from the schism into which it was about to fall after Banda's death. It was at her bidding that the martyr-saint, Bhai Mani Singh, was appointed the head priest of Harimander, now famous as the Golden Temple." Joginder Singh "The Illustrious Women of Punjab," in Yash Kohli, ed., *The Women of Punjab* Bombay: Chic Publications, 1983, p. 7.

¹⁵ Gill, *The Role and Status of Women in Sikhism*, p. 59.

¹⁶ Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh, *The feminine principle in the Sikh vision of the Transcendent* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 243-244.

¹⁷ Singh advocates the belief that the gurus, though male, understood their words, their message, to be female, in congruence with the feminine form of *bani*. "But the Sikh Word is not a masculine *logos*, it is the beautiful and formless *bani*. The Word proclaimed by the scriptures and secular writers of Sikhism is Woman." Ibid., p. 252.

Yet, this grammatically feminine form of the sacred word is very much in line with the Vedic understanding of sacred speech, deified as the goddess *Vac*. What is not clear is whether the male gurus in fact understood their enunciation to be feminine, or whether the representation of sacred speech in the feminine form is simply indicative of their surrounding social, cultural and religious surroundings. To move from a grammatically feminine form of speech to the theological underpinnings of the gurus' egalitarian ethos is conceivably more a reading *into* the term *bani* as opposed to the actual intent of the gurus.

within the Adi Granth, “[n]o negative associations belittle her.”¹⁸ Yet numerous passages in the scripture associate woman with *maya*, that which is sensual as opposed to spiritual:

Attachment to progeny, wife is poison
None of these at the end is of any avail.¹⁹

Maya attachment is like a loose woman,
A bad woman, given to casting spells.²⁰

Further, while women are exalted when obedient and subservient as wife to her divine husband, men are ridiculed for those same characteristics:

Men obedient to their womenfolk
Are impure, filthy, stupid,
Man lustful, impure, their womenfolk counsel follow.²¹

While the subject of women in the Guru tradition will be dealt with more extensively, suffice it to say that Singh’s assertions, despite contrary evidence fit neatly into the parameters of the principle of negation outlined above.²²

The Principle of Accommodation:

Another principle that was utilized particularly by the Singh Sabha reformers in the late-nineteenth century is that of *accommodation*. And here a comparison of the effects

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁹ The following quotations from Sikh sacred scriptures, the Adi Granth are from the English translation by Gurubachan Singh Talib. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* 4 Vols., Patiala: Punjabi University, 1987, hereafter cited as *AG*. See *AG*, p. 41.

²⁰ *AG*, p. 796.

²¹ *AG*, p. 304.

²² For a more detailed exploration of some of the issues raised here, see my “Gender Issues in Sikh Studies: Hermeneutics of Affirmation or Hermeneutics of Suspicion?” in Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald

of French colonialism in Muslim Algeria with the Singh Sabha reformers and British colonists is particularly helpful. Kay Boals writes about a reformist consciousness that developed among educated Muslim males after the colonization of Algeria. She notes that there is an attempt to accommodate the valuable aspects of the dominant culture, the colonial, and ground them in the tradition of Islam. What follows then is an endeavor to reform and reinterpret the religion and culture of the time.

This process involves a reinterpretation of that tradition to read back into its past the genesis of ideas which in fact have been absorbed from the dominant culture...The reformists, however, must show that what they advocate has long been part of their own culture and is firmly rooted there, when in fact that is usually not the case. It is not hard to see that in such a dilemma one's desire to succeed would promote easy distortion of the tradition, distortion which is probably both conscious and unconscious.²³

Further, reformers typically were thoroughly educated in Islamic law, while at the same time highly exposed to Western influences. According to Boals, this type of education was characteristically only open to men. Thus it was men that were at the forefront of reform, including attitudes and changes to gender relations. And although the reformist consciousness cannot be considered 'feminist' in any very far-reaching sense, the theoretical arguments put forth to reform Muslim practices in the realm of gender relations were advanced by men. "[R]eformist consciousness, by wanting to purify the tradition, takes that tradition very seriously as something of value to be reinterpreted for modern life. It is thus concerned with male-female relations, not directly in themselves, but rather

Barrier, eds., *The Transmission of the Sikh Heritage in the Diaspora* New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 1996.

²³ Kay Boals, "The Politics of Cultural Liberation: Male-Female Relations in Algeria," in Berenice A. Carroll, ed., *Liberating Women's History. Theoretical and Critical Essays* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976, pp. 198-199.

as they reflect the Koranic prescriptions (rightly interpreted and purified) for relationships between the sexes.”²⁴

Turning to the time and context of the Singh Sabhas in the late nineteenth century Sikh history one is faced with a similar scenario. Imbued by a liberal western education, decrying undesirable aspects of the Sikh tradition yet unwilling to reject that tradition outright, these “new elites” tended to walk the often shaky line of accommodation within the two often opposing worldviews. Ultimately, their focus was the reformation and reinterpretation of the Sikh tradition, made possible by their ascendancy into positions of power and prestige. Harjot Oberoi maintains that it was the development of print culture in Punjab along with their western education that gave the Sabha reformers the necessary tools to reinterpret the Sikh tradition. Adoption from the European enlightenment, particularly a rationalistic worldview necessitated the “etching” out of “a novel cultural map for Punjab that would define their aspirations and reflect the changed environment in the province.”²⁵

As in Algeria, the role and status of women was an important platform upon which the Singh Sabhas preached their reforms. There were a number of reasons for this focus. Christian missionary activities had begun an active campaign to reach both the outcastes of society as well as women, both groups relegated to the bottom of the Sikh and Hindu societal hierarchy. Missionaries began going into the homes, attracting women from the very bastions of protection in attempts to convert the populace to Christianity.²⁶ Alarmed by these conversions, the reformers hastened to safeguard the Sikh tradition from the

²⁴ Ibid., p. 203.

²⁵ Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 277.

²⁶ Rajiv A. Kapur, *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith* London: Allen and Unwin, 1986, p. 15.

menacing activities of the missionaries. The emancipation of women, particularly through female education became a central issue for the Singh Sabha reformers.

So too was the development of female role models in literature. The prolific writer Bhai Vir Singh wrote numerous novels with female figures playing central roles. The novel *Sundri* is perhaps his most famous, depicting a young woman who is true to the faith, devout and pure, active in battle, elevated at times to the status of a goddess.²⁷ While the story is designed to advance the cause of Sikh women, it also attempts to glorify the status of Sikh women as compared to their Hindu and Muslim counterparts. And herein we find an important difference between the Algerian reformers whose main goal it was to accommodate positive aspects of colonial culture through the reinterpretation of those attitudes into their own tradition. In the Sikh case, reformers concurred with this aim yet had another equally important objective, namely, the need to show the complete separation of Sikhism from the dominant Hindu tradition.²⁸ Thus, we have Sundri pleading with her fellow Sikhs:

I entreat you to regard your women as equal partners and never ill-treat them with harshness and cruelty...In the Hindu Shastras...the woman as treated as Shudra - an outcast. All the Gurus have praised and commended women. In Guru Granth Sahib, woman has been eulogized and she has been given equal right of worship and recitation of the Holy Name.²⁹

The need to show that this positive regard of women was integral to the Sikh tradition, as *opposed* to the oppressive Hindu religion and *similar* to the claims of the

²⁷ Bhai Vir Singh, *Sundri*, tr., Gobind Singh Mansukhani, New Delhi: Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, 1988.

²⁸ Kahan Singh Nabha's celebrated *Ham Hindu nahin* (We Are Not Hindus), is indicative of the Singh Sabha platform with regard to their absolute insistence on the separation of Sikhs and Hindus. See Kahan Singh Nabha, *Ham Hindu nahin* Amritsar, 4th edition, 1914, (first published by Khalsa Press, 1899).

²⁹ Bhai Vir Singh, *Sundri*, p. 114.

Christian missionaries/colonizers was of utmost importance for the Singh Sabha reformers. Further, particularly in the novel *Sundri*, the context is the oppressive Muslim regime that is responsible for the plight of the valiant Sikhs. Much of the revitalization efforts must be seen in light of these anti-Hindu, anti-Muslim, anti-Christian sentiments. This was particularly the case with regard to Sikh scripture, for only thus could it be 'proven' that the elevated position of women was a long-standing tradition within Sikhism. Given Guru Nanak's absorption in the Bhakti worldview of the fifteenth century, there was indeed evidence to support reformers' claims. J.S. Grewal, in describing the multi-faceted world of Bhakti during the time of Guru Nanak purports that while there was a good deal of rivalry between the various religious groups "many of the contestants had come to believe that salvation was the birthright of every human being irrespective of his [sic] caste, creed or sex. On the whole it was a rich and lively religious atmosphere. And it was this atmosphere that Guru Nanak breathed."³⁰ Thus, armed with hymns supporting their claims the reformers insisted that what they were advocating was very much in line with the original designs of the Sikh Gurus. Further, they increasingly presented the degradation of the Sikh tradition as a direct result of the derogatory influence of Hinduism, upon which the blame for all ills within Sikh society was heaped.

It is the principle of accommodation that has characterized almost all subsequent engagement with regard to women and the Sikh tradition. Passages from the Granth which show positive regard for women as integral to the very core of the Sikh tradition are quoted and re-quoted, as are a few choice anecdotes from the lives of the Gurus with regard to the condemnation of *sati*, pollution, purdah and female infanticide. This

³⁰ J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History* Chandigarh: Publication Bureau, Panjab University, 1979, pp.

interpretation of Sikh history can perhaps best be captured by Eric Hobsbawm's understanding of 'invented tradition'. He notes that "insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the continuity with it is largely factitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations..."³¹ In the case of the Sikh reformers, historical and theological 'inventions' with regard to the status of women must invariably be understood as innovative responses to the rapidly changing cultural and socio-economic world within which they had achieved hegemony.

Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh is also very much in line with this principle of accommodation in her analysis of the goddess Durga in the writings of Guru Gobind Singh.³² She critiques the way many Sikh historians and writers have attempted to distance the Guru from passages celebrating the goddess Durga, striving to show that they were not actually written by Gobind Singh but by 'Hindu' elements within his entourage.

139-140.

³¹ Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Tradition," Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 2.

Hobsbawm adds that "[m]ore interesting, from our point of view, is the use of ancient materials to construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes. A large store of such materials is accumulated in the past of any society, and an elaborate language of symbolic practice and communications is always available. Sometimes new traditions could be grafted on old ones, sometimes they could be devised by borrowing from the well-supplied warehouses of official ritual, symbolism and moral exhortation..." Ibid., p. 6.

³² The writings of Guru Gobind Singh, including his odes to the Goddess Durga were by popular account compiled by Bhai Mani Singh, the celebrated head of Harimandir in 1712-34. There is a great deal of controversy regarding this anthology, given the fact that Sikh theology is avowedly monotheistic, whereas in the Dasam Granth there is an unabashed celebration of the goddess as well as the erotic. Khushwant Singh, the noted Sikh writer states that "the lofty character and the value [Gobind Singh] set on spartan living do not go with prurience of the kind found in some of the passages of the Dasam Granth." Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs, Volume I: 1469-1839* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991, Appendix 4, pp. 314-316.

Yet Harjot Oberoi has shown that the Dasam Granth was held on par with the Adi Granth during the nineteenth century, its displacement as sacred scripture being a fairly recent development. See Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 99.

Nikki Singh decries this as a “not fully conscious fear of ‘female power’ ...”³³ Instead she insists that Guru Gobind Singh’s incorporation of the deity is indicative of the positive Sikh attitude towards the feminine, though these instances cannot be understood as goddess *worship*. Accentuating the continuity of the Gurus within the Sikh tradition Singh attempts to accommodate the writings of the tenth Guru and the clear rejection of the earlier Gurus of the goddess within the Sikh sacred scripture, particularly with regard to the following verse:

Whoever worships the Great Mother
Shall though man, be incarnate as woman.³⁴

Singh maintains that Durga’s great literary merit was upheld by Guru Gobind Singh who utilized the symbolism to “renovate and regenerate an effete society.”³⁵ Contrary to being a devotee of the great goddess Guru Gobind Singh is posited as an insightful artist. Yet one must wonder where literary license ends and veneration begins. In what appears to be an uncompromising tribute to Durga, the *Dasam Granth* states:

The sovereign deity on earth
Enwrapped in all the regal pomp
To you be the victory,
O you of mighty arms.³⁶

Historical research has indicated that remnants of the feminine, the goddess, are present in all traditions that are indubitably monotheistic and androcentric. According to one such historian, the question that needs to be answered is: “Why did monotheism attempt to get rid of the goddess? Could it have anything to do with androcentrism and

³³ Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh, *The feminine principle*, p. 123.

³⁴ AG, p. 874.

³⁵ Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh, *The feminine principle*, p. 131.

³⁶ Akal Ustati, *Dasam Granth Sahib*, Vol. I, p. 44.

patriarchy? Feminist studies of the Ancient Near East make it overwhelmingly obvious that such is the case.”³⁷ In the Durga mythology of the *Dasam Granth*, Sikhs have the goddess in their midst. To draw an unrealistically rigid line between the recognition of Durga’s literary merit and actual homage to the goddess is to miss an opportunity to explore how and why a system did away with the feminine which was so obviously and critically integrated into early Sikh society. Indeed, Singh’s selective endorsement of the writings of Guru Gobind Singh adheres well to the principle of accommodation outlined above. She attempts to reinterpret aspects of the female goddess tradition in a manner reflecting its emancipatory qualities for women, while not fully exploring the implications of Durga mythology for the Sikh tradition.

The Principle of Idealization:

The fourth principle utilized in Sikh history with regard to women is that of *idealization*. Similar to the principle of accommodation, idealization is an extension of the former, with important differences. Namely, while the positive strains of scripture too are upheld as normative and of ultimate authority, the dominant need is not so much to *reform* the tradition as to *idealize* aspects of history and scripture as they pertain to women.

Glorified examples of Sikh women who lived exceptional lives, mainly as warrior-figures - Mai Bhago in Guru Gobind Singh’s retinue,³⁸ Sada Kaur, the mother-in-law of Maharajah

³⁷ Rita M. Gross, “Studying Women and Religion: Conclusions Twenty-Five Years Later,” in Arvind Sharma, ed., *Today’s Woman in World Religions* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, p. 355.

³⁸ Mai Bhago is a much celebrated woman warrior who is held up by Sikhs as an example of the honour and bravery of Sikh women. Tradition tells of forty Sikh men who had staunchly remained with the Guru

Ranjit Singh³⁹ and Bibi Sahib Kaur,⁴⁰ are presented as women whose illustrious deeds are the result of the "transformation...of Guru Nanak's philosophy in action that preaches equality among the human beings irrespective of caste, creed, or sex."⁴¹

Similarly, M.K. Gill in her treatment of the Guru Mahals notes with regard to a particular gurdwara bearing Mata Sundri's name:

[It] is not merely a historical monument...It is rather, a cherished haven of refuge where the devotee finds inner peace and his sense of emptiness is washed away...Mata Sundri has a place among the few who are immortal, ever living. For hundreds of people today it is a matter of a daily relationship with her memory.⁴²

Given that Gill remonstrates earlier that few Sikhs are even knowledgeable about the basic facts of Mata Sundri's life, this effort to uplift the name and contributions of Mata Sundri must be understood in light of the principle of idealization.

through the last days at Anandpur, yet finally fearing for their lives, left the battlefield and returned home. Mai Bhago is presented as taunting them for their cowardice, and then taking them under her command to return to fight at the side of Guru Gobind Singh in the battle of Muktsar. Macauliffe adds that she donned male attire and "fought heroically in their ranks, disposed of several of her Muhammadan opponents, and transmitted her name as an Indian heroine for the admiration of future generations." Max Arthur Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion. It's Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors*, Volume V, Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1990, p. 213.

³⁹ Sada Kaur is distinguished as the chief architect of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's remarkable rise to power, as well as having considerable influence over the young Maharaja in ruling the rather volatile region. Upon her husband Gurbakhsh Singh's demise, she masterminded the alliance of her own Kanhaya Misl with that of the Sukerchukias Misl, that of young Ranjit, through his union with her infant daughter Mehtab. After the death of his father this alliance left Ranjit in a potentially powerful position. Furthermore, Sada Kaur was not about to give up her predominant position with the maturing of Ranjit Singh. It was she who ventured against the Afghans in battle, alongside Ranjit Singh. "She is remembered as one of the greatest generals of her time even in the Afghan records." Joginder Singh, "The Illustrious Women of Punjab," in Yash Kohli, ed., *The Women of Punjab*, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Bibi Sahib Kaur has been memorialized through the words of General George Thomas, who noted that "she was a better man than her brother," in defending the capital city of Patiala during Thomas' expedition of 1798. On another occasion this "woman of masculine and intrepid spirit" again defied the wishes of her brother [Raja Sahib Singh] and countered George Thomas in the invasion of Jind. With Kaur's rallying of the previously beleaguered Sikh troops, the historian Gupta notes that "this proved to be a turning point in the course of the siege." Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, Volume 3, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1980, pp. 293, 300, 301.

⁴¹ Gulcharan Singh, "Women's Lib in Sikh Scriptures & Sociology," *The Sikh Review* Vol. XXXVI (Mar. 1988), No. 411, p. 43.

Rita Gross maintains that in traditional historical accounts, when women *are* mentioned in the annals of history it is only because they deviate from the norm. In other words, exceptional women are uplifted when they play a part in what is considered to be 'normative history'.

[A]ndrocentric thinking deals with them [exceptional women] only as objects exterior to humankind, needing to be explained and fitted in somewhere, having the same epistemological and ontological status as trees, unicorns, deities, and other objects that must be discussed to make experience intelligible.⁴³

In the paradigms representing Sikh women's history outlined above, specifically that of the principle of idealization, but accommodation as well, unicorns are presented as normative and indicative of the romanticizing tendencies of the Singh Sabhas and those who unquestioningly follow in their footsteps. Further, the occasional woman of note was generally situated in the uppermost echelon of society. As wives and sisters of Rajas they certainly did not lead lives which were very much akin to their contemporaries. In many ways then, they conjure up false images as to the roles and status of women in Sikh society. Returning once again to Clarence McMullen's observations, there is a vast divide between that which is normative and that which is operative in traditional Sikh history as it pertains to women.

In the examples noted above, it is specifically Nikki Singh who situates herself squarely within western feminist theological traditions. And yet, many feminist scholars within the study of religion insist that the central challenge in religious studies, as in other fields, is its delineation and critique of androcentrism. This is something Singh has not

⁴² Gill, *The Role and Status of Women*, pp. 51-52.

done. In other words, she has not delved into the ambiguous aspects within the tradition in relation to scripture. As pointed out earlier, while there *are* women-affirming tendencies within the Adi Granth, there are also those which support the subordination of women. The feminist theologians that Nikki Singh pays tribute to in her volume insist that to expose androcentrism within religious traditions includes a move beyond sheer affirmation, which in Singh's case is achieved through the unearthing of female principles within Sikh scripture and literature. It involves, ultimately, invoking a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' following the model of Paul Ricoeur;⁴⁴ for there is a complex interplay between religion and social change. Nancy Falk has noted that "religion is among the foremost of institutions which conserve society, encoding stabilizing worldviews and values, and transmitting these from generation to generation."⁴⁵ It is only upon a process of unmasking the androcentric presumptions of writers and their writings, including sacred scripture, only upon a suspicious reading entailing a thorough evaluation of the *inherent* sexist attitudes and practices within religious and historical works that one is enabled to understand the sources and symbols within the tradition which sustain the subordination of women throughout history.

⁴³ Gross, "Studying Women and Religion: Conclusions Twenty-Five Years Later," Arvind Sharma, ed., *Today's Woman in World Religions*, p. 333.

⁴⁴ Paul Ricoeur defines the hermeneutic of suspicion as "sett[ing] out from an original negation, advanc[ing] through a work of deciphering and ...struggl[ing] against masks, and finally...put in the quest of a new affirmation." Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart, eds., *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur. An Anthology of His Work* Boston: Beacon Press, 1978, p. 217.

⁴⁵ Nancy Falk, "Introduction," in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly, eds., *Women, Religion, and Social Change* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985, p. xv.

Conclusion: Moving Beyond Description

Much of what has been presented as the construction of women within Sikh history and religion fits largely into what feminist historians have characterized as a descriptive approach, or 'her-story' approach to the history of women.⁴⁶ This first wave of feminist history, namely, the resurrection of lost women, as well as a reassessment of activities which have traditionally been deemed as unworthy of fulfilling the requirements of important or 'real' history has been a critical aspect of the rewriting of history. Yet, while 'her-story' is fundamental in addressing the paucity of historical knowledge about women, it does not confront the issue of *how* the hierarchy of male/female, dominant/subordinate are constructed and legitimated throughout history. As historian Joan Wallach Scott insists, a more radical feminist epistemology is necessary in the study of history.⁴⁷

The emphasis on "how" suggests a study of processes, not of origins, of multiple rather than single causes, of rhetoric rather than ideology or consciousness. It does not abandon attention to structures and institutions, but it does insist that we need to understand what these organizations mean in order to understand how they work.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Joan Wallach Scott notes with regard to the 'her-story' approach to feminist history: "As the play on the word 'history' implied, the point was to give value to an experience that had been ignored (hence devalued) and to insist on female agency in the making of history. Men were but one group of actors; whether their experiences were similar or different, women had to be taken explicitly into account by historians." *Gender and the Politics of History* Gender and Culture Series, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, p. 18.

⁴⁷ Scott advocates a post-structuralist approach to history. She purports that "[p]recisely because it addresses questions of epistemology, relativizes the status of all knowledge, links knowledge and power, and theorizes these in terms of the operations of difference, I think post-structuralism (or at least some of the approaches generally associated with Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida) can offer feminism a powerful analytic perspective. I am not suggesting the dogmatic application of any particular philosopher's teachings and I am aware of feminist critiques of them...[yet] the openings they provide to new intellectual directions have proved not only promising but fruitful." *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Michel Foucault's analysis of the domain of the private, and by implication, the feminine is based on an understanding of power as dispersed constellations of unequal relationships discursively constituted in social 'fields of force.' His understanding is particularly useful in coming to an understanding of how unequal relations are created and sustained.⁴⁹

Advocating a different perspective, Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes another source of power that he defines as "symbolic relations of power," which "tend to reproduce and to reinforce the power relations that constitute the structure of social space."⁵⁰ These go beyond, though they are not exclusive of economic and political spheres but include power located within language, religion, education, art, and ideology, areas where women's participation is more readily accessible.⁵¹

Ultimately, it is imperative that historical research move beyond descriptions of Sikh history as it pertains exclusively to women. Without doubt, historical records have traditionally been written within the patriarchal framework; 'man' is normative, the object of study, his habits, his contributions, his worldview. 'Woman' is generally the contradiction, the outsider, the passive onlooker in the process of history. In attempting to construct a truer, more encompassing perspective of history, one inclusive of both male and female realities, feminist historians have necessarily re-written and reinterpreted many events covered in the annals of history from the perspective of women. This has also involved a transformation of the notions of time and space to include not only those within which women act, but has also shifted to domains normatively considered exclusively

⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. I: *An Introduction* New York: Vintage, 1980, pp. 97-98.

⁵⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory* 7/1 (Spring 1989), p. 21.

'male space' to include a new, wider range of activity. It has called for a rethinking of historiography as a whole, often necessitating a pushing against the well-established boundaries of disciplines.⁵² This process has been characterized by Nita Kumar as finding the "fault-lines" in the larger patriarchal structures;⁵³ positioning a spot-light on areas where inconsistencies or surface cleavages with regard to gender activity occur. While this is a necessary aspect of this particular study, another equally important aspect necessitates movement beyond the unveiling of women's activity in history to understanding how gender is actually constructed throughout historical time. Thus views of gender identity as 'natural' and primordial are challenged. Scott for instance, advocates an understanding that gender as constructed for *both* women and men has significant consequences. She notes:

The term "gender" suggests that relations between the sexes are a primary aspect of social organization (rather than following from, say, economic or demographic pressures); that the terms of male and female identities are in large part culturally determined (not produced by individuals or collectivities entirely on their own); and that differences between the sexes constitute and are constituted by hierarchical social structures.⁵⁴

⁵¹ See Fatma Müge Göçek and Shiva Balaghi, "Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East Through Voice and Experience," in Fatma Müge Göçek and Shiva Balaghi, eds., *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East. Tradition, Identity, and Power* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, pp. 8-9.

⁵² Nita Kumar summarizes the process as such: "At the broadest level, our latest concerns included unveiling the covered, listening to the muted, looking for hidden meanings - all discovering a separate, parallel discourse for women within the larger context of a normative, more familiar male-centred discourse...The goal...was to move forward from the previous discussion of women as 'paradox' - the benevolent-malevolent model - to see latent models in the parallel, subversive use of symbols by actors in hidden ways; indeed, to see actors where none had been acknowledged as existing." "Introduction," *Women as Subjects. South Asian Histories* Nita Kumar, ed., Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994, p. 2-3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵⁴ Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, p. 25.

Cautiously supportive of the understanding of gender as opposed to 'women', Ruth Behar notes that "[a]cademic feminism has reached an interesting crossroads...Now 'gender' is the burning issue. Have we lost the courage to speak of women, plain and simple? I hope not. I want to think that studying gender is part of the new feminist desire to understand how the construction of identity, for women *and* men, has crucial consequences. At last, we are realizing that we all are in this together. On the female side...there is a lingering fear of betrayal. But gender embodies hope: the hope that opening up feminism

This then inexorably involves an understanding that each aspect of reality is gendered and that the historical process invites a deliberate investigation into the ways and means of gender construction.

In speaking specifically about Sikh history, what is the process whereby the category of woman, the category of man is constructed? How have these categories changed over time? Were there specific instances, moments in history where this construction process assumed vital importance to the self-understanding of the developing Sikh community? This study attempts to pursue questions regarding the correlation between historical knowledge and gender relations on a broader scale, particularly during the era of colonization when the Singh Sabha movement came to the fore. While the object of this study focuses on the construction of gender in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a more substantial understanding of those events also necessitates an overview of gender in the early and later guru periods. Further, what role did gender constructs play in the milieu of colonialism, both on the part of the colonizers and in the corresponding responses of the indigenous elites leading the reform endeavours of the nineteenth and early twentieth century in Punjab? As opposed to a detailing of the roles and status of specific players of the colonial realm, this study will attempt an analysis of the political, social, and religious *structures* of the colonial realm from the perspective of gender construction.

To move from a descriptive approach in an attempt to resolve these and other questions will necessarily result in moving beyond existing histories and engender the *rewriting* of history. With regard to the construction of women in Sikh history and

to include men will not, once again, make women invisible." Ruth Behar, "Gender, Identity, and

religion, alternative approaches are more likely to scrutinize *all* aspects of past, without the need to idealize on one hand, or relegate to silence on the other.

Chapter Two:

The Development of the Early Sikh Tradition: A Gendered Perspective

How does one acquire a story? The culture in which one is born already has an image of time, of the self, of heroism, of ambition, of fulfillment. It burns its heroes and archetypes deeply into one's psyche.¹

The Milieu:

While examining traditional historical accounts of the Sikhs, there is little evidence that women were in any way active participants in the developing community. Born in the fifteenth century in northern India with the birth of Guru Nanak, a Hindu from the Khatri caste, sources have inevitably focused on the exploits of this first guru. In the milieu surrounding Guru Nanak, Islam had become the dominant religion with the conquering of India by the Mughals. And yet, Islam in fifteenth century India had a very different constitution than the Islam in many other parts of the world. Few could go on pilgrimage to Mecca; instead, local shrines became the focus of pilgrimage and devotion. J.S. Grewal has pointed out that the mental culture of the average Muslim was filled with magic, folklore and superstition. In the Punjab, the most important forms of Muslim life were represented by various sects within Sufism. Sufism was increasingly chronicled in the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries as having penetrated all echelons of Indo-Muslim society. Within the Sufi worldview, both women and men were called into a life of mystical devotion to God.² Alongside the Muslim religious culture, and perhaps more importantly in terms of numbers and religious forms, the indigenous orders of medieval Hinduism flourished. These were largely regional outgrowths of the Bhakti movement (devotion toward a divine being) which started in Tamil country in the 7th century. Three

¹ Michael Novak, *Ascent of the Mountain, Flight of the Dove. An Invitation to Religious Studies* New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1971, p. 49.

major sects of the time were the Shaivites, Vaishnavites, and Shaktas. In all three sects, gender and caste affiliation did not stand in the way of discipleship. Furthermore, varied forms of popular religion were practiced in combination with 'higher' forms of religion. For the common villager, worship of the sun, moon, rivers, godlings, and ancestors was customary; the appeasement of malevolent spirits was part of daily ritual activity.³ Given the multiplicity of religious forms in medieval India, it is hardly surprising that ideas, rituals and practices were often adopted from the prevailing milieu, their meanings merging into one another adding to the richness of the religious culture. More importantly for the purposes of this study, caste and gender were on the whole no longer considered valid obstacles to the attainment of liberation.⁴ And significantly, this was the atmosphere that Guru Nanak, born in 1469, lived and breathed.

The Early Guru Period:

Guru Nanak has been characterized as fitting squarely within the *sant* tradition of Northern India, the *sant parampara* which rejected all worship of incarnations and Hindu forms of professional asceticism, discarded the authority of the Vedas and other scriptures and opposed the ritual barriers between high and low castes. Further, the *sants* stressed the use of vernacular languages in their rejection of orthodoxy. Central to their doctrines and binding them were their ethical ideals and the notion of interiority - rituals, pilgrimages and idols were worthless in the quest for liberation. Loving adoration to the Ultimate was

² J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History* Chandigarh: Publication Bureau, Panjab University, 1979, p. 103.

³ Ibid., p.136.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 139-140.

what mattered. The overwhelming similarities between the various sects who lived by these ideals has been characterized by W. H. McLeod as the *sant* synthesis, a combination of the Vaisnava tradition and the Nath tradition, with possible elements of Sufism as well.⁵ What the *sants* also had in common was a stress on the necessity of devotion and practice, repetition of the Divine Name, devotion to the divine Guru (*satguru*) and the need for the company of the *sants* (*satsang*).

To understand Guru Nanak's attitude toward women and gender in general, it is useful to compare his theological underpinnings with that of Kabir, the "fountainhead" of the *sant* synthesis.⁶ Particularly with regard to Kabir's attitude toward women, there appears to be a subtle break in the similarities between the two. J. S. Grewal explains this in terms of their relative standing in the *sant* tradition of northern India. It would appear that one of the strands of the *sant* synthesis, *hathyoga*, was much less important to Guru Nanak than to Kabir.

The woman in *hathyoga* is the tigress of the night, the great temptress in the path of the *yogi* who aims at subduing and sublimating all sexual desire. She is the greatest obstacle in his path. His denunciation of the woman is in direct proportion to the perceived threat. Kabir goes a long way with the *yogis* in sharing this attitude. Guru Nanak, by contrast, denounces the *yogis* for their strict renunciation, including their ideal of subduing sexual desire. He has great appreciation for the house-holder.⁷

⁵ W.H. McLeod, *The Sikhs. History, Religion, and Society* New York: Columbia University Press, 1098. p. 25.

⁶ Karine Schomer characterizes Kabir as the "fountainhead" of the *sant* synthesis. Though living 150 years earlier than Guru Nanak, the similarity of their teaching is striking, and as Schomer points out, it is precisely this aspect as opposed to historical connection or institutional foci that closely binds Guru Nanak and Kabir. Certainly, in the sacred scriptures of the Sikhs, the *Adi Granth*, the compositions of Kabir figure largely. Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod, eds., *The Sants. Studies in a Devotional Tradition in India* Berkeley and Delhi: Berkeley Religious Studies Series and Motilal Banarsidass, 1987, p. 5.

⁷ J.S. Grewal, "A gender perspective of Guru Nanak," in Kiran Pawar, ed., *Women in Indian History. Social, Economic, Political and Cultural Perspectives* New Delhi: Vision & Venture, 1996, p. 150. Karine Schomer has pointed out that one basic difference between the writings of Kabir selected and compiled in the *Adi Granth* and the *Kabir Granthavali* lies in their treatment of the feminine. Kabir's tirades against women, found in the *Kabir Granthavali*, are totally absent in the *Adi Granth*. Schomer notes, "This absence must be related to the fact that the GG [Guru Granth] was compiled for a religious

In Guru Nanak's writings and for subsequent gurus, "there is a range of views - positive, negative, and ambivalent - suggesting a tension between an inward psychological struggle and an outward social decorum."⁸ Clearly, the message of Nanak maintains that women and members of the lower castes were not in any way barred from attaining enlightenment, the highest purpose of human life.⁹ However, procreation and specifically the procreation of sons is an important element of Nanak's vision for the ideal woman. An oft quoted verse, supposedly indicative of Guru Nanak's positive evaluation of womanhood, points instead to an appreciation of woman given their pivotal role in the procreative process.

We are conceived in the woman's womb and we grow in it. We are engaged to women and we wed them. Through the woman's cooperation new generations are born. If one woman dies, we seek another; without the woman there can be no bond. Why call her bad who gives birth to *rajas*? The woman herself is born of the woman, and none comes into this world without the woman; Nanak, the true one alone is independent of the woman.¹⁰

community of householders rather than solitary spiritual seekers." Karine Schomer, "Kabir in the *Guru Granth Sahib*: An Exploratory Essay," Mark Juergensmeyer and N. Gerald Barrier, eds., *Sikh Studies. Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Tradition* Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1979, p. 83-84.

⁸ Rajkumari Shanker, "Women in Sikhism," in , Arvind Sharma, ed., *Religion and Women* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, p. 191.

⁹ Unless indicated, the following quotations of Sikh sacred scriptures are from the English translation by Gurubachan Singh Talib. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* 4 Vols., Patiala: Punjabi University, 1987, hereafter cited as *Adi Granth*.

God created both man and woman. *Adi Granth*, p. 223.

God's light is in every heart. *Adi Granth*, p. 9.

¹⁰ *Adi Granth*, 473, quoted in J. S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak and Patriarchy* Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1993, p. 5.

Guru Nanak's stance toward women as manifested in this verse is strikingly similar to that of the writer of the *Brhaspatismṛti* written in the 4th century, C.E., albeit from an alternative perspective. The writer questions the inconsistencies in the inheritance rights of a daughter and a son based precisely upon the same notion advocated by Nanak, that children regardless of gender originate from the same body, namely that of a woman. "A daughter is born from [the same] human bodies as does a son. Why then should the father's wealth be taken by another person." See K.V.R. Aiyanger, ed., *Brhaspatismṛti* Baroda: Gaekwad Oriental Series (G.O.S.), No. lxxxv, 1941, pp. 217-218, cited in Mandakranta Bose, ed., *Visions of Virtue: Women in the Hindu Tradition* Vancouver: Mandakranta Bose, 1996, p. 3.

I am grateful to Dr. Bose for pointing out the similarities between the above noted sources.

Further, while this passage has been lauded as the slogan of emancipation for women in the Sikh tradition, it has more to say about prevailing notions of ritual purity and hierarchy. It is she who gives birth to sons, especially those of noble birth, the most prized of all possessions, the avenue to fulfillment and constant wish of any woman during medieval times.¹¹ It also gives an indication of Nanak's support of the dominant social and political order.¹² Nonetheless, it does give an important insight into Guru Nanak's *rejection* of the purity laws that reigned supreme in the worldview of his time. Yet, more often than not, one senses Guru Nanak's apprehension of the female. Women are often associated with *maya*, the feminine principle that deludes the seeker, she that acts as a barrier to the attainment of emancipation.¹³ While woman is only one of the various attachments specified, she is mentioned time and time again; as an attraction to the male, woman thus becomes part of *maya*.

Further, negative images of women that are compounded with ambivalent messages toward the outcasts of the time are frequent: "Evil mindedness is a low woman, cruelty a butcher's wife, a slanderous heart a sweeper woman, wrath which ruineth the world a pariah woman."¹⁴ While Guru Nanak grieves the rape of women

¹¹ Grewal, paraphrasing the sacred scriptures adds: "Procreation is so vital to domesticity that Guru Nanak can ask at one place 'what is a home to a woman who has forgotten that she is but a guest here. Dirty with demerit, she cannot acquire virtue without the *guru*. Alien to virtue, she has wasted her youth in delusion. The spouse is at the door of her home but she is not aware of the beloved spouse. She does not go to the true *guru* to follow the right path, and she has wasted the night in sleep. Nanak, she has become a widow in girlhood, and her body is withering." Grewal, *Guru Nanak and Patriarchy*, 11-12.

¹² See also Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*, p. 153.

¹³ "There is pleasure in gold, pleasure in silver, pleasure in women, pleasure in scents, pleasure in horses, pleasure in the conjugal bed, pleasure in sweets, pleasure in the flesh - there are so many pleasures of the body that there is no room for the name." *Adi Granth*, cited in *ibid.*, p. 3.

Further, pearls, diamonds, thrones, armies, power and beautiful women induce men to forget God. See *Adi Granth*, p. 14.

¹⁴ *Adi Granth*, Sri Rag ki War, translated by Max Arthur Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. I, p. 52.

during the time of Babur, he does not censure the social order on the whole.¹⁵ Power structures that maintained the hierarchies of the caste system and the inferior position of women stayed firmly in place. Guru Nanak believes firmly in God's omnipotence, and the will of God behind these events.¹⁶ Further, the widow's plight is not remonstrated against;¹⁷ *sati* is not condemned,¹⁸ nor is the institution of marriage practices reevaluated in terms of becoming more equitable for women. In the final analysis, when it comes to the social status of women, Nanak seems content to leave the prevailing social milieu in place. In the patriarchal world view, women are assigned a position of inferiority, but that inferiority in no way detracts from their ability to attain salvation; salvation, regardless of station or gender is pronounced open to anyone who devotes themselves wholeheartedly to the Ultimate.

Nikki Singh has pointed to the *bani* of Nanak in the feminine form and his taking on of the feminine voice as indicative of the high regard the Guru had for women.¹⁹ However, it is precisely the feminine pleading with her Beloved that fits Guru Nanak squarely into the Bhakti tradition of North India. Moreover, addressing the Divine through the feminine voice leads one to conclude that there is a concerted effort to maintain the masculine identity of God; the female overcome with love for the Bridegroom, her Lover, can thus only be male. As Katherine Young has aptly noted,

¹⁵ *Adi Granth*, p. 722.

¹⁶ Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*, pp. 162, 176.

¹⁷ *Adi Granth*, p. 226.

Here the widow is portrayed as one who is willing to submit her body to a stranger to gratify her lust and to obtain money. See Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*, p. 193.

¹⁸ The silence of Guru Nanak regarding the rite of *sati* is indeed surprising, given that *sati* was primarily confined to the caste group to which he belonged, namely the Khatri along with the Brahman and the Rajput caste families. *Ibid.*, note 89, p. 56.

Guru Nanak would have been well aware of the persistence of the practice.

The Hindu woman was to focus on her husband, he was to be her 'god'...The apotheosis of the husband...was not a simple exaggeration of androcentrism, but part of Hinduism. The Brahmins considered themselves as gods and so did the gurus and kings upon occasion...Hindu theism became increasingly monotheistic in the sense of involving a primary if not exclusive devotion to either Visnu or Siva as supreme deities, a similar tendency may have developed in the domestic sphere so that the husband too became the 'supreme and only' one.²⁰

The Janam-sakhis:

While the sacred writings of Guru Nanak offer some information with regard to attitudes towards women in particular, the *janam-sakhi* literature of the Sikhs, hagiographic material written well after the time of Guru Nanak further adds to the

¹⁹ Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh, *The feminine principle in the Sikh vision of the Transcendent* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 252.

²⁰ Katherine K. Young, "Hinduism," Arvind Sharma, ed., *Women in World Religions* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. 73-74.

David Lorenzen posits a fascinating perspective of the phenomenon of male saints taking on a feminine voice. Speaking about the upper caste saints of the bhakti tradition he notes a number of reversals "when compared with normative Hindu views such as those represented in Manu's *Darmasastra*. According to Manu the female is subordinate to the male and the outcaste to the upper caste, but in the lives of the *bhakti* saints "the last shall be first": men wish to renounce their masculinity and to become as women; upper-caste males wish to renounce pride, privilege, and wealth, seek dishonor and self-abasement, and learn from the untouchable devotee." Lorenzen adds however, when looking to female saints and devotees and men is that men "engage temporarily 'playing the role' of female and low-caste persons, whereas the latter commit themselves to a permanent change of social status. When the psychological role-playing is over, the upper-caste male saints can safely return to their original social identities...If female and low-caste devotees were to dare to engage in any analogous 'king for the day' role-playing behavior - this would inevitably lead to their permanent social and economic ostracism and even put them in direct physical danger." *The Lives of Nirguni Saints*," in David N. Lorenzen, ed., *Bhakti Religion in North India. Community Identity and Political Action* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, p. 190, 191.

Certainly this would ring true for Guru Nanak and subsequent Sikh gurus as well. This becomes especially true as the notion of guruship changes over time, whereas the Guru and the Ultimate are virtually indistinguishable.

picture.²¹ Given the nature of *janam-sakhi* sources they cannot be understood as necessarily biographical but rather as answering the needs of the later community within which this genre is written.²² While claiming full authority on the life and works of Guru Nanak the *janam-sakhis* give rather meager information regarding the female members of his family. While giving minimal insight into Guru Nanak's familial relationships, they do however speak volumes about the insignificance awarded the women of his family by their very incongruity with regard to these women. The *Puratan Janam-sakhi* refers to Nanak's mother but does not name her; neither is his sister named. The *Miharban janam-sakhi* names Guru Nanak's mother as Tipara but does not name his sister. The *Bala janam-sakhi* names Tripata as his mother and Nanaki as his sister. Similarly, Nanak's wife is referred to but not named in the *Puratan Janam-sakhi*. Further, she is named Ghumi in the *Miharban Janam-sakhi* and Sulakhani in the *Bala Janam-sakhi*.²³

Moreover, while utterly denouncing notions that members of the lower castes had no avenue open to them in terms of enlightenment, Guru Nanak's earliest following and his marital arrangements were made strictly in accordance with Khatri caste regulations.²⁴

²¹ W. H. McLeod has done extensive analysis of the *janam-sakhi* literature and maintains that the *Puratan Janam-sakhi* was most likely written during the first half of the seventeenth century. See *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 17.

The B40 manuscript is a much later compilation, and is dated as 1733. See W. H. McLeod, *The B40 Janam-sakhi* Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1980, fn # 47, p. 19.

²² For a brief overview of the historical contributions and problems of the *janam-sakhis*, see W.H. McLeod, *Who is a Sikh? The Problems of Sikh Identity*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, pp. 15-22.

²³ See W.H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, pp. 101-103.

While there is evidence that these women played important roles in the fledgling Sikh community, the inconsistencies regarding their names also points to a decisive lack of interest and knowledge about them. It is perhaps also indicative of the status of women during the time of the Guru and subsequent times within which the *janam-sakhis* were compiled.

²⁴ McLeod has given a most persuasive discussion with regard to the rejection of caste in the attainment of enlightenment and the Sikh Guru's obvious acceptance of caste regulations in terms of their marriages within the Khatri lineage. McLeod notes, "a reasonable conclusion appears to be that whereas they were vigorously opposed to the vertical distinctions of caste they were content to accept it in terms of its horizontal linkages... We can affirm once again their apparent acceptance of the horizontal relationship,

Further, though strongly espousing the status of the householder and highly critical of the ascetic, Guru Nanak was absent for a good deal of his own family responsibilities. Whilst on his missionary journeys, he left the running of the household and the raising of his children to his wife and extended family. Again, Guru Nanak was a man of his time and there are nuanced implications that he perceived his conjugal relationship as a burden, an obstacle that needed to be overcome. Speculating about these recurring undercurrents of discontent in the popular literature, the celebrated historian of the Sikhs, Max Arthur Macauliffe wrote in the early twentieth century: "If Nanak had been left to his own discretion, and if his marriage had not been made for him by his parents, it is most probable that he would not have turned his attention to that part of a man's duties after entering the service of the government in Sultanpur."²⁵ Certainly, sources point to a scenario that often portrays his spouse as unhappy with their marital situation.²⁶ However, the *Janam-sakhis* also depict the women of Guru Nanak's family as playing an important role in the acknowledgment and development of his Guru status. In the *Bala Janam-sakhi*, a more human, less idealistic picture is painted of the Guru, particularly with

an acceptance unmistakably demonstrated by their willingness to observe customary marriage conventions. What they were apparently concerned to deny was the justice of privilege or deprivation based upon notions of status and hierarchy. They were, in other words, opposed to the discriminatory aspects of the vertical relationship while continuing to accept the socially beneficial pattern of horizontal connections." W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community. Five Essays*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, pp. 88-91.

²⁵ Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. I., p. 29.

²⁶ The *B40 Janam-sakhi* portrays Guru Nanak's wife as pleading with him upon his decision to move to Sultanpur. "When he was about to leave his wife began to weep, saying, "You showed me no affection when you were with me. Once you have gone to another place you will never return..." Baba Nanak chided her for her insistence but subsequently promised he would send for her. W.H. McLeod, *The B40 Janam-sakhi*, p. 18.

Further, the *Bala Janam-sakhi* presents his wife as regretting her marriage. The compiler however puts the blame squarely on the woman; she is hot tempered and full of anger. Surjit Singh Hans, *A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature* Jalandhar: ABS Publications, 1988, p. 204, quoting and translating Kirpal Singh, ed. *Janam-sakhi Parmpra* Patiala: Punjabi University Press, 1969, p. 238, 139.

regard to Guru Nanak's family life and relationships; his sister Nanaki is portrayed as playing a central role in furthering the cause of the Guru. Moreover, Bebe Nanaki is presented as having an upper hand over him; her brother, according to the *Bala Janam-sakhi* cannot deny her wishes. Further, the author believes that she is in fact so aligned with the Guru that they must be considered as identical.²⁷ While the historical elements of this literature must be questioned, it does point to later understandings of the Guru, and indeed, the role of women reflected in the ensuing society. Certainly, the presence of the female, though almost exclusively those within the Guru's family, points to an understanding of women as active agents in the wider sphere of the later developed Sikh *panth* as well.

Undoubtedly, Guru Nanak was a visionary who lived squarely within the patriarchal framework surrounding him. His genius and his appeal lay in his assertion that salvation was open to all, regardless of gender, regardless of their station in life. Criticism of the society he lived in with regard to the status of women is difficult to find beyond his abrupt disagreement with established religion and religious mores. His is a message of interior religion, a vision of love and devotion to the Almighty, who in grace and promise of emancipation made no distinction between men and women, high caste or low.

It is with the third guru, Guru Amar Das who succeeded Guru Angad in 1552, that both scriptural and popular sources attribute a shift towards inclusion of women in the Sikh *panth*. It is to Guru Amar Das that tradition credits a definitive criticism of society beyond religious ineptitude; interestingly, much of this criticism is directed towards the

²⁷ Surjit Singh Hans, 'Historical Analysis of Sikh Literature, A.D. 1500-1850,' Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Amritsar: Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, 1980, p. 325, quoting and translating Kirpal Singh, ed., *Janam-sakhi Parmpra* Patiala: Punjabi University Press, 1969, pp. 245, 250.

situation of the female gender in society. With regard to *sati* the third Guru states:

"They are not *satis* who are burnt alive on the pyres; Rather *satis* are they who die of the blow of separation (from their husbands);²⁸ female infanticide is vehemently condemned by the Guru.²⁹ Also, later accounts continue the tradition of Guru Amar Das' criticism of the societal norms surrounding women in that he is presented as having denounced the custom of purdah in the form of not allowing visiting queens to remain veiled in his presence.³⁰ Further, the *Mehma Parkash* of Sarup Das Balla, a descendent of Guru Amar Das that was written in 1776 chronicles that it was through a woman that Amar Das first became acquainted with the Sikh community. Bibi Amro, the daughter of Guru Angad the second guru, who was living in the home of Amar Das' brother was reciting Guru Angad's composition, the *Japji*. Tradition has it that Amar Das was so moved by her singing that he insisted that she immediately introduce him to the source of the composition, namely, Guru Angad. Amar Das eventually succeeded Guru Angad as the third Guru of the Sikh community.³¹

²⁸ *Adi Granth*, p. 787.

²⁹ *Adi Granth*, p. 1413.

³⁰ Sarup Das Bhalla, *Mehma Parkash* (Punjab Bhasha Vibhag, 1971, p. 113, in Fauja Singh, "Guru Amar Das: Life and Thought," *The Panjab Past and Present* Vol. XIII-II (October 1979), p. 324. M.A. Macauliffe recounts the story thus: Guru Amar Das "received the Raja in private audience on the top story of his house, next in order the Raja's prime minister, and lastly the Raja's queens. They were all gratified with a sight of the Guru. One of the queens lately married would not remove her veil. The Guru quietly said to her, 'Crazed lady, if thou art not pleased with the Guru's face, why hast thou come hither? On this she at once became insane, and casting aside her clothes ran naked into the forest.' Upon a long search for the Rani she was found by Sachansach, a simpleton in the woods. "She then for the first time discovered that she was naked, and sought to flee abashed from Sachansach's gaze. He promptly tore up his blanket and gave her half of it. She wrapped it round her, and thus clothed went and fell at the Guru's feet. He readily pardoned her offense." Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion* Vol. II, p. 61-63.

While the incident speaks volumes about women who dare insubordination, it is this story which has traditionally been pointed to as sufficient evidence of the Guru's radical stand against the system of purdah. Without further analysis of the incident, I am content to follow the tradition of viewing this as a statement against the customary veiling of women in the presence of the Guru.

³¹ Sarup Das Bhalla, *Mehma Parkash*, p. 49, in Fauja Singh, "Guru Amar Das: Life and Thought," *Panjab Past and Present*, p. 307.

Further, it was during the time of Guru Amar Das that missionaries were appointed to extend the message of the Sikh *panth* beyond the immediate surroundings of Goindwal, the seat of Guru Amar Das' leadership. The *panth* had obviously expanded, new congregations (*sangats*) had come into existence and with the swelling of numbers, immediate contact with the Guru became increasingly difficult. Thus the *manji* system was created, a word literally meaning 'string-bed' but referring to a 'seat of authority'. These were leaders of local gatherings who were directly responsible to the Guru and thus an extension of his influence.³² While sources conflict with regard to the actual number of *manjis* as well as their gender, there is evidence that of those sent out to preach the Guru's message of emancipation, two or three of them may have been women.³³ Certainly the appointment of *manjis* indicates an increasing institutionalization of the Sikh *panth* as well as an expansion in the actual numbers of the Guru's following. Given the esteemed place of the *manjis*, the very possibility of women included in this missionary venture speaks at least to a growing concern toward women, if not an active outreach

³² Fauja Singh has outlined the position of *manji* thus: "The word *manji* literally signifies cot or *charpoy*, a common Indian bedstead. But here it stands for a responsible religious position conferred by the Guru upon a pre-eminent devotee or a seat of delegated authority. The man thus honoured was authorized to act as a missionary of the Sikh faith. He was required to hold congregations regularly at his place and at time to move about in the countryside explaining the principles of Sikhism. He was given the power to administer *charan pahul* and thereby to bring new people into the Sikh fold. A *manji* was thus the greatest honour that could be bestowed upon a follower of the Guru. It was also the need of the hour and was intended to meet the requirements of the growing Sikh community...The *manjis* however, were not independent seats of authority. A regular liaison with the Guru at the centre, the fountain of all inspiration, was maintained through periodical visits to Goindwal...The total number of *manjis* created from time to time according to the long-standing Sikh tradition, was 22." Ibid., pp. 318-319.

Fauja Singh argues elsewhere that *manjis* were preachers without possessing territorial jurisdiction. With the transformation of the *manji* system into that of the *masands* during the time of the subsequent guru, Guru Ram Das, it included the element of territorial jurisdiction. *Guru Amar Das: Life and Teachings* New Delhi: 1979, pp. 116-29, quoted in W.H. McLeod, *Who is a Sikh?*, p. 12.

³³ Fauja Singh notes that there is little agreement as to the actual names of the *manjis* which originated with the third guru. He outlines three separate lists, the Bhai Khan Nabha List, Mehma Parkash Sri Guru Amar List, Gurdwara Haveli Sahib Goindwal List; two of the lists, namely the latter contain women's names. Ibid., p. 319.

toward women during the time of the third guru. Needless to say, women missionaries would have proven most effective in the recruitment of other women into the Sikh fold.³⁴

Another later source, Santokh Singh's *Suraj Prakash*, an extension of the *janam-sakhi* genre though inclusive of Guru Nanak's successors was completed in the mid-nineteenth century. Santokh Singh posits Bibi Bhani, Guru Amar Das' daughter as the deciding factor in the nomination of her husband Jetha, later renamed Ram Das as the fourth guru.³⁵ Further, the *Suraj Prakash* notes that when the Emperor Akbar in appreciation for the Guru and his *langar* wished to grant him lands, Guru Amar Das refused. The Emperor then gave a number of villages and their surroundings to his daughter Bhani instead.³⁶ The tradition is fascinating, given that Guru Amar Das had three other children, two of whom were male. Yet Bibi Bhani alone is singled out as the economic successor to Guru Amar Das. Bequeathing lands and villages to a female would have been inconceivable in even the later social and cultural milieu of ensuing chroniclers.

Another source reports that three women were given the leadership position of *manji*. Kanhiya Lal, *Tarikh-e-Panjab*, Lahore, 1881, p.19, cited in Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, pp. 120-121.

³⁴ McLeod notes that during the pontificate of Guru Amar Das, Jat constituents were increasing in numbers faster than any other caste group. Up to this time it would appear that the followers of the Gurus were mainly of the Khatri caste, in line with the caste lineage of the Gurus themselves. McLeod, *Evolution of the Sikh Community*, p. 9.

The possible effects of women missionaries on the transformation of the caste constituency of the *panth* will be discussed in greater detail in the discussion following discussion of the fourth guru, Guru Ram Das.

³⁵ In Bhai Jodh Singh, "Sri Guru Amar Das Ji," *Panjab Past and Present* Vol. XIII-II (October 1979), p. 298.

Macauliffe recounts the story as such. "One day as the Guru sat down after bathing, Bibi Bhani came and bowed to him. The Guru asked her what she would do if her husband were to die. She understood the Guru to mean that her husband was near his dissolution. She replied that she must accept her fate. She would either die with her husband, or do as her father ordered her. The Guru replied: 'There is no necessity for thee to die, I will bestow a favour on thee, which will be far more advantageous; I will grant thy husband the Guruship, and extended life.'" Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion* Vol. II, p.146.

Joseph Cunningham interprets the incident as a deliberate intervention by the ambitious Bhani to secure the succession of the guruship with her posterity. J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs* Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1990 (first published 1849), p. 45.

Regardless of the historical accuracy of this narrative, it is clear that thereafter the succession of Sikh Gurus continued on through the male line of the Sodhi family descending from Guru Ram Das.

Clearly, even the insinuation of Bibi Bhani as possible leader points to an imagination which, given the Guru's estimation of his daughter and the possible inclusion of females among the elite devotees, envisioned a central place of leadership for women in the Sikh worldview. Women and men, it would appear, were active agents at this stage of the development of the Sikh *panth*. Gender was not a defining factor in the possibility of full membership both in the following and the leadership of the Sikh community. Needless to say, Bibi Bhani was never given the status of the leader of the Sikh *panth*;³⁷ her husband Jetha, later known as Ram Das is however presented as benefiting from her intense devotion to Guru Amar Das. Certainly, popular tradition holds her up warmly as a model of devotion and piety.³⁸

If we turn to the writings of the fourth guru, Guru Ram Das, what has generally been pointed out in Sikh historical writings is an increasingly institutionalized community of followers.³⁹ Surjit Hans adds that there is also a noticeable increase of feminine

³⁶ Suraj Prakash, Ras. II, Chapter 10, recounted in M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. II, p. 97-98.

³⁷ Popular writings focusing on this time period in Sikh history are often at a loss to explain the significant place of Bibi Bhani (as well as the lack of recognition of her contributions) in the development of the early Guru period. Narenderpal Singh attempts to explain the situation thus. "Guru Amar Das was so impressed by the devotion and organizing ability of his young daughter, that he bestowed the prophethood upon her, which she bequeathed to her husband, Guru Ram Das." "Outstanding Women in Sikhism," *The Women of Punjab* Yash Kohli, ed., Bombay: Chic Publications, 1983, p. 12.

³⁸ The possibility of a woman being honoured as economic successor of the Guru is dealt with in fascinating ways by different historians. Hari Ram Gupta notes, "On learning that the Guru's son-in-law, Ram Das, was in search of some land in the heart of Majha, the Emperor granted a tract of land not far from Chubhal to Bibi Bhani. The Guru could not refuse a gift to a girl." Gupta, *History of the Sikhs* Vol. I, p. 122. Here, her husband is closely tied into the gift-giving, which, in actuality, deflects the magnitude of the entire incident, but makes the occurrence altogether more plausible and acceptable given the consequences of a literal reading of the narrative.

³⁹ This development had already started with Guru Amar Das in that Goindwal had become a pilgrimage place for followers. Further the institution of *langar* was also fully developed by Guru Amar Das. Whereas the tradition of compulsory commensality was a Sufi legacy, tradition insists that Guru Nanak instituted the institution of *langar* to combat caste restrictions and purity laws. Scripture also points to Mata Khiwi, the only Guru *Mahal* (wife) mentioned in the *Adi Granth* as feeding devotees, *Adi Granth*, p. 967.

While sources are obscure as to the exact time of its introduction of *langar*, it is clear that with Guru Amar Das the institution of *langar* either originated or acquired a new force. As already noted, the *manji* system

imagery in the writings of the fourth guru. He notes: "Lyricism in Guru Ram Das has a social counterpart. It points to the entry of women in appreciable numbers in the *sangat* in particular and in the community at large...It may be reasonable to suggest that a large scale entry of women into Sikhism contributed to the lyricism of Guru Ram Das."⁴⁰ As Hans points out, earlier Gurus had indeed addressed the Divine as in the female voice as a symbol of their submission, but with Guru Ram Das the symbol takes on a more palpable reality; indeed, love of the Divine is expressed in utterly profane language.⁴¹ Further, the female perspective toward the body of the Guru is conspicuously emphasised.⁴² According to Hans, "[t]he increased presence of women in the *sangat* and their greater participation in Sikh *panth* is very much in evidence in the compositions of Guru Ram Das. In retrospect one can see that a community cannot be built exclusively with males."⁴³ While Hans makes note of a possible influx of women, he does not acknowledge their actual agency in the changing constitution of the *panth*.

Historians of Sikhism have repeatedly questioned the cultural and caste-based makeup of the early Sikh *panth*. Clearly, the earliest followers were in accordance with the Guru lineage, the Khatri. At some point however, the composition of the Sikh *panth*

also originated during the guruship of Amar Das. With Guru Ram Das, the centre of activity moved to the village of Ramdaspur, later known as Amritsar. There Guru Ram Das excavated the pool that became the sacred place of pilgrimage for Sikhs.

For an in-depth analysis of the process of institutionalization of the Sikh *panth*, see W.H. McLeod, *Who is a Sikh?*, pp. 11-13.

⁴⁰ S.S. Hans, "Historical Analysis of Sikh Literature," p. 142.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 142.

Examples of this palpable connection in the writings of Guru Ram Das are as follows "God is my friend, love and king. I wish someone could bring the giver of life to me. I cannot help seeing Him, and tears well up in my eyes. The Guru is a childhood friend, I cannot help seeing him, O mother." *Adi Granth*, p. 94.

⁴² The corporeality of Guru Ram Das is pivotal in his writings. "Looking again and again at the body of the Guru has filled me with intense joy." *Adi Granth*, pp. 726 in S.S. Hans, "Historical Analysis of Sikh Literature," p. 142. And, "[h]ow can I meet my handsome Man? God accepts even wayward and squat women." *Adi Granth*, p. 527 in *ibid.*, p. 143.

changed radically as a new caste group, the Jats, became increasingly visible in their numbers. Certainly during the later Guru period and even to the present day Jats were and are the dominant caste group among the Sikhs. W.H. McLeod has analyzed this transformation of the caste constituency of the early Sikh period extensively. In his *Evolution of the Sikh Community* McLeod purports that the urban based Khatri commonly served as teachers to the illiterate masses; the Jats constituted a large percentage of the peasantry.⁴⁴ Irfan Habib also contemplating the inclusion of the Jats into the Sikh fold attributes this migration *en masse* to a disparity between the Jats' economic status and their caste status in the sixteenth century. Certainly, the earliest sources between the seventh and ninth centuries refer to the Jats as a pastoral community.⁴⁵ By the eleventh century they had attained *sudra* status and by the sixteenth century had moved to the status of *vaisya*, peasants par excellence, *zamindar* or land owners.⁴⁶ However Habib notes, in spite of this upward transformation, the older caste stigma as pastoral community would likely have persisted.⁴⁷ While this explanation of Jat migration into the Sikh fold is entirely plausible, it would appear that Jat women may well have been the instigators of this migration. Early sources of the pastoral Jats make specific mention of a disposition of equality between men and women.⁴⁸ A

⁴³ S.S. Hans, *A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature*, p. 95.

⁴⁴ W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, p. 11.

⁴⁵ Hiuen Tsang gives account of an unnamed pastoral community in the seventh century. Another account, written in the eighth century, the *Chachnama*, also describes this community but names them Jatt. See Irfan Habib, "Jatts of Punjab and Sind," in Harbans Singh and N. Gerald Barrier, eds., *Punjab Past and Present. Essays in Honour of Dr. Ganda Singh* Patiala: Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, 1996. p. 94.

⁴⁶ Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History. Towards a Marxist Perception* Delhi: Tulika, 1995, p. 175.

⁴⁷ Irfan Habib, "Jatts of Punjab and Sind," *Punjab Past and Present*, p. 99.

⁴⁸ "By the side of the river Sindh, along the flat marshy lowlands for some thousand *li*, there are several hundreds of thousands (*a very great many*) families settled...They give themselves to tending cattle and

northward migration of the Jats into the southern parts of Punjab would have taken place by the eleventh century, indicative of the social and economic changes that were taking place in Punjab during medieval times. From a pastoral community with an egalitarian social structure the Jats became by the sixteenth century a largely agricultural group, including having acquired zamindar status. Habib posits that the mechanism of Sanskritization, normatively utilized in an attempt to elevate the status of a group could not have been applied by the Jats because of their egalitarian or semi-egalitarian social structure. Thus the fledgling Sikh community, which theoretically rejected the entire system of caste could have been seen as an avenue for the recognition the Jats felt they deserved.⁴⁹

While the polemics of scholars have tended to hash and rehash the reasons behind this transformation, perhaps it is time to move the argument beyond these arguments and contemplate a different theory based on an analysis of gender composition. Undoubtedly the early Gurus lived within or near the Majha area of Punjab, a region that was and still is known for a strong Jat constituency.⁵⁰ Given the egalitarian nature of the Jats in the early medieval period, consideration must be given to the possibility that it was women in particular who were attracted to the emancipatory message of the Sikh Gurus, and consequently, to full participation within the developing Sikh community. There are a number of factors that point to this development.

from this derive their livelihood...*They have no masters, and whether men or women, have neither rich nor poor.*" Hiuen Tsang, cited in Habib, *ibid.*, p. 94, (italics mine).

This unnamed group claimed to be Buddhists. Later, the *Chachnama* notes in similar language that the people are given the name of Jatt. The chronicler notes that "There were no small or great among them. They were supposed to lack marital laws. The only tribute they could pay was in the form of firewood. They owed allegiance to the Buddhist *shramanas*." *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 99.

⁵⁰ W.H. McLeod, *Evolution of the Sikh Community*, p. 9.

- 1) the message of the Sikh gurus with regard to salvation being accessible to both women and men
- 2) strains (though typically barely audible) within sources which point to women being active participants in the developing community
- 3) criticism of society with regard to the situation of women by Guru Amar Das
- 4) the plausibility of missionary activities of women also during the time of Guru Amar Das, resulting most certainly in an active outreach towards women
- 5) scriptural indications of an influx of women into the Sikh *panth* during the time of the fourth guru, Guru Ram Das

From the perspective of traditional Sikh history, the notion of women being active agents in the process of constituent changes in the Sikh *panth* may well appear foreign.

Nonetheless, women would have had the most to gain from the egalitarian message of the early Sikh gurus, as well as from criticism of societal norms directed toward to situation of women by the third Guru.

It was during the time of the fourth guru, that the *manji* system was transformed into the order of *mahants* and tailored to suit both the missionary activities and the business of collecting the dues of the Guru's followers from far and wide.⁵¹ As with the *manjis*, they also had the authority to initiate new entrants into the Sikh *panth*.⁵²

According to all accounts, women were excluded from the new system of *mahants*.

Further, Guru Ram Das is highly critical of women in his canonical writings. Given the influx of women and men with a history of egalitarianism and a lack of marital laws, the

⁵¹ The *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*, an early seventeenth century Persian source notes that the *masands* had a dual responsibility; they were to preach the message of the Gurus, and they were to collect the voluntary tribute from the followers of the Gurus. "Dabistan-i-Mazahib," *Makhiz-i-Tawarikh-i-Sikhan*, Ganda Singh, ed. Amritsar: Sikh History Society, pp. 34-35.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 34-35.

Guru is prompted to write: "Sinful men, licentious and stupid, act as their women command. Lust abounds; thus do impure men take orders from their women and act accordingly."⁵³ Certainly, this new breed of constituents would have threatened the established patriarchal order of the Sikh *panth*; it became necessary to take action to stem the tide of an unwarranted egalitarian ethos. This may also account for the absence of women in the system of *mahant* administrators.

Needless to say, the *panth* was becoming increasingly molded to satisfy the needs of the growing numbers of followers. Places of pilgrimage were already in place, the words of the gurus were being collected for collation and places of ritual cleansing and worship were being constructed. What Weber refers to as "the routinization of charisma," or institutionalization of an earlier strictly interior tradition had increasingly become the order of the day.⁵⁴ With the increase in numbers and the lack of immediate personal contact with the Guru there came a need for something beyond a doctrine of interiority to bind the community. It was in the adaptability to changing circumstances that the Sikh *panth* remained vibrant and continued to grow. Still, with the process of

⁵³ *Adi Granth*, p. 304.

The focus here on societal inversions is not unique to Guru Ram Das. Linda Hess has pointed out that the "upside-down-language" of Kabir in particular has its roots in the Hindu and Buddhist Tantras and the texts of *hathyoga*. According to Hess, there are "tangled domestic relationships (incestuous sons and mothers, conspiring in-laws, one bride who becomes a widow during the marriage ceremony, another who ties her mother-in-law to the bed)." See Linda Hess and Shukdev Singh, trs., *The Bijak of Kabir* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986, Appendix A, p. 137.

Further, the apprehensive stance towards women in the verse of Guru Ram Das' noted above is indicative of *hathyogic* influences upon the Guru. From the perspective of the *hathyogas*, 'woman' was the supreme 'tempress' and thus overtly circumscribed with suspicion and dread. See Grewal, "A gender perspective of Guru Nanak," in Kiran Pawar, ed., *Women in Indian History*, p. 150.

I am grateful to Dr. Ken Bryant, Asian Studies, University of British Columbia for his comments regarding the correlation between *hathyoga* and the above noted verse by Guru Ram Das.

⁵⁴ Weber is delineating the process whereby individual appeal is transfigured into larger institutional structures and authority. See Max Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, trs. And eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* New York: Oxford University Press, 1946, pp. 297ff.

institutionalization, gender differences within the Sikh *panth* became increasingly pronounced. The viability of a religion based on interior devotion for women in sixteenth and seventeenth century India needs little explanation. Certainly, with increased institutionalization, traditional roles for men and women became more socially and materially feasible. The *mahants* were not only missionaries, they were administrators who traveled far and wide to collect the Guru's dues.

The Later Guru Period:

The move away from interiority continued with the fifth guru, Guru Arjan. Contemporary works certainly point to an augmented secularization and politicization of the Sikh *panth* in the late sixteenth century. Hari Ram Gupta explains: "To inspire the minds of his disciples with the grandeur and glory of the new religion, Guru Arjan began to live in an aristocratic style."⁵⁵ The *Dabistan* points to a leader who was increasingly viewed as not only a religious, but also a political leader. Impressive buildings were built at Amritsar; the Guru "wore rich clothes, kept fine horses procured from Central Asia and some elephants and maintained retainers as bodyguards in attendance."⁵⁶ The *Dabistan* chronicles that the Guru became known as "*Sachcha Padishah*," the king who "led human souls to salvation as opposed to worldly kings who controlled people's mundane deeds."⁵⁷ Given Guru Arjan's elevated visibility as regal leader of his following, the Sikhs were increasingly perceived as a separate state within the Mughal dominion. They thus began

⁵⁵ Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, p. 133.

⁵⁶ Mohsin Fani, *Dabistan-e-Mazahib*, 1654; Cawnpore, 1904, p. 234, cited in Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 133.

to attract the suspicion of Emperor Jahangir. Tradition insists that Guru Arjan was martyred at the hands of Jahangir in 1606, when he was in custody in Lahore. W.H. McLeod has questioned the element of martyrdom that has been maintained by the Sikh tradition given its obscurity and acquiesces simply that Guru Arjan died while imprisoned by the Mughals. He also points to Mughal mistrust of the growing power of the Guru as being not entirely unfounded: "The increasing influence of the Jats within the Sikh *panth* suggests that Jahangir and his subordinates may well have had good reason for their fears, and that these fears would not have related exclusively, nor even primarily, to the *religious* influence of the Guru."⁵⁸ What is important to this study is the question of gender construction during this time period. With the heightened politicization of the *panth*, women would increasingly have been relegated to positions more in line with traditional female roles. Business and political involvement could only restrict areas of involvement for women, as these were arenas within which women could not readily participate.

It was the sixth guru, Guru Hargobind who brought this development to a more readily recognizable political and theological level. Alarmed at the increased meddling of the government into Sikh affairs, and particularly with the death of his father whilst in custody, Guru Hargobind styled his guruship as a combination of the religious and political; not only did he represent the religious concerns of the Sikh *panth*, he also wore arms, a symbol of his temporal power. The by now almost complete transformation of caste constituency, from Khatri to Jat dominance, would also have been pivotal to this change. The Jats were known for their resistance to authority; this would have included armed resistance. Government intervention into the affairs of the *panth* could have

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 233, in Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 133.

stemmed from the increased suspicion on the part of the Mughals, alarmed at the direction the *panth* was taking. Furthermore, intervention from on high would have exacerbated a militant reaction from the Jats as well. Thus, Guru Hargobind's military stance may have originated with the armed Jat constituency, as opposed to stemming from the religious ideology of the young Guru Hargobind.⁵⁹ Regardless of the actual origin of the politicization of the Sikh leadership, sources indicate that the new direction taken by the young guru was not without its critics. The beloved scribe Bhai Gurdas questions this development, though ever faithful and loyal to the young Guru.⁶⁰ While Bhai Gurdas is firm in his support for Guru Hargobind the element of apprehension regarding the transformed role of the guruship is undeniable. Needless to say, a new phase of Sikh history had begun.

In light of the question of gender construction, the new developments augmented by Guru Hargobind's identity as both religious and political leader would most certainly have had a dramatic effect on the role and status of both women and men within the *panth*. Though initiation into the *panth* would still have been open to women, they would not have been part and parcel of the military retinue that accompanied the young guru's vision and understanding of his mission. More precisely, given the role of women in the

⁵⁸ W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, p. 12.

⁵⁹ See W.H. McLeod, *Who is a Sikh?*, p. 40.

⁶⁰ "People say the former Gurus used to sit in the temple; the present Guru remaineth not in any one place. The former Emperors used to visit the former Gurus; the present Guru was sent into the fortress by the Emperor. In former times the Guru's darbar could not contain the sect; the present Guru leadeth a roving life and feareth nobody. The former Gurus sitting on their thrones used to console the Sikhs; the present Guru keepeth dogs and hunteth. The former Gurus used to compose hymns, listen to them, and sing them; the present Guru composeth not hymns, or listeneth to them, or singeth them. He keepeth not his Sikh followers with him, but taketh enemies of his faith and wicked persons as his guides and familiars. I say, the truth within him cannot possibly be concealed; the true Sikhs like bumble-bees are enamoured of his lotus feet. He supporteth a burden intolerable to others and asserteth not himself." Var 26, in Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. IV, p. 76-77.

seventeenth century, they would most certainly not have accompanied the Guru into his skirmishes with the Mughals. The Sikh male thus also took on a new identity sanctioned by the order put in place by Guru Hargobind: protector of the faith, armed, and ready for battle. This role however was closed to women, who by process of elimination would have been relegated to a secondary position, possibly even viewed as impediments to the true calling of the Sikh community.⁶¹

Gender and the Theology of Difference:

The development of militancy among the Sikhs culminated with the ascendancy of the tenth and last guru, Gobind Rai to the seat of Sikh authority. It was during the Baisakhi festival of 1699 that the tenth Guru established the institution of the Khalsa, inviting all to follow his ordinances and thus leave the by this time clearly established authority and possibly the vested interests of the masands. The old term 'Sikh' meaning disciple, was replaced by the term 'Khalsa', which in the seventeenth century reflected its usage by the Mughals for revenue collection on lands that were directly supervised by the government.⁶² This was also done in order to consolidate his own position in the

⁶¹ Certainly the corresponding subordination of women to men in an environment of militancy is not confined to this period of Sikh history. I.K. Vig makes this connection in writing about the hierarchical relations between men and women during the later Vedic Age in Punjab, a time when militarism had become an established world view for the exalted Kshatriya caste group. He notes that there is a "corresponding fall in the position of the women in Punjab were indications of gradual withdrawal by the society of the concessions from the physically inferior class of women who either could not actively participate in war and were considered unnecessary impediments for a Kshatriya." "Punjab: The Sword Arm of India During the Ancient Period," *Punjab History Conference. Proceedings. Second Session, 1966*, p. 44.

⁶² The term 'Sikh' is derived from the Sanskrit *sisya* and 'Khalsa' from the Arabic-Persian word, *khalis*. In the seventeenth century Mughals denoted *khalis* as lands that were under direct government

increasingly crowded milieu of those of the Guru lineage who had, by virtue of their ancestry, established themselves as Sikh Gurus in their own right.⁶³ While the earliest sources are not at all clear as to what exactly took place on that Baisakhi day, traditional Sikh historiography has painted a graphic picture as to its precise events of 1699. Guru Gobind Singh is said to have given an invitation to five devotees to express their love and devotion to him in the laying down of their lives for him. Five followers responded, but instead of sacrificing them as he had forewarned, Guru Gobind Rai designated these men as the *panj piare* ('five beloved'), and baptized them by a rite of initiation that was entirely novel to the history of the Sikh tradition. The rite known as *khande ki pahul* refers to the administration of sweetened water (*amrit*), stirred with a two-edged sword (*khanda*) to the face and hair of a devoted follower of the Guru. While accounts vary as to which one of Guru Gobind Singh's wives participated in the events, various traditions also

supervision for revenue collection. See J.S. Grewal and S.S. Bal, *Guru Gobind Singh* Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1967, pp. 113-115.

The understanding of the 'Khalsa' as 'the pure' according to Harjot Oberoi is a popular and modern interpretation of the term. Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries. Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 59.

Either way, both denotations of 'the pure' and 'direct supervision' would apply to the newly established Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh, as there is the implicit notion that those who underwent the initiation rite were set apart from those who did not. Further, Guru Gobind Singh insisted that the Khalsa were to shun the *masands*, whose power and status had apparently increased since the time of Guru Ram Das and were to be accountable only to the Guru himself. Guru Gobind Singh having deemed the *masands* as corrupt now attempted to do away with the institution.

⁶³ There were a great number of dissenters who opposed the development of Guru succession in the Sikh tradition; namely, the legal descendants of the Gurus, who were overlooked in the nomination of the new successors. During the early years of the Guru succession, this would include the male heirs of the Guru; at later stages of the Guru succession the dissent was carried on by the elder male siblings of the nominated Guru. This trend began with the sons of Guru Nanak and continued to the time of Guru Gobind Singh. These individuals had legal control of the established religious centres developed by the various Gurus and often appealed to Mughal authorities to ensure that their proprietary rights were in order. By virtue of their birthright, they also presented themselves as the authentic leaders of the Sikh *panth*. For this reason, the Gurus' centres of activity shifted from place to place, as new establishments were constructed with each subsequent Guru. With the institution and subsequent consolidation of the Khalsa, the groups of dissenters became weaker and less of a direct threat to Guru Gobind Singh. However, the ancestors of the Gurus still to the present day occupy and exalted place in the imagination of

maintain that a female added sweets to the water. It has thus become an aspect of the narrative that is viewed as adding a feminine element to the decisively male dominated rite of initiation.⁶⁴ Further, tradition maintains that on this day, Baisakhi 1699 that the Guru called for all who were initiated into the Khalsa to take on the appellation 'Singh', to wear the five articles known as the *panj kakke* or 5 K's; *kes*, long hair; *kangha*, a comb; *kirpan*, a sword; *kachh*, a type of underwear; *kara*, a steel bracelet. They were also to ignore all the caste affiliations that to this point had caused divisions among them. According to popular tradition, the *rahit* or regulations governing the newly founded Khalsa order also originates with Guru Gobind Singh during this time.⁶⁵ According to sources nearer to

Sikh devotees. For an excellent exploration of this topic, see especially J.S. Grewal's "Dissent in Early Sikhism," *Punjab History Conference. Proceedings*. Fourteenth Session, 1980, pp. 109-120.

⁶⁴ Mata Jito, the second wife of Guru Gobind Singh is presented by Macauliffe as going to the site of the inauguration of the Khalsa out of curiosity, carrying with her Indian sweets. The Guru then instructed her to add the sweets to the water, and stirred the mixture with a two edged sword. Macauliffe, relying on popular accounts notes: "He had begun, he said, to beget the Khalsa as his sons, and without a woman no son could be produced. Now that the sweets were poured into the nectar the Sikhs would be at peace with one another, otherwise they would be at continual variance." *The Sikh Religion* Vol. V, p. 95.

An earlier source, the *Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*, emerging about fifty years after Guru Gobind Singh's death maintains that it was a man named Dharam Chand who suggested to the Guru that the water be sweetened, and Chaupa Singh himself who prepared the mixture. W.H. McLeod, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama* Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago Press, 1987, pp. 169-170, (#179).

A different version of the *Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama* is known as the *Piara Singh Padam* text (PSP), and is understood by W.H. McLeod as a later version of the *Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*. See *ibid.*, p. 24.

In this text, it is the third wife of Guru Gobind Singh, Mata Sahib Devi, who is responsible for the sweetened water. See Piara Singh Padam, ed., *Rahit-Name* Patiala, 1974, p. 10, quoted in W.H. McLeod, *Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*, pp. 230-231.

In another early twentieth century account, it is Mata Sundri, the first wife of the Guru who is said to be responsible for the addition of the sweets. See Bawa Chhajju Singh, *The Ten Gurus and Their Teachings* Lahore: Punjab Printing Works, 1903, p. 280.

As these variances indicate, the tradition is not at all clear. Perhaps the repeated references to the contribution of a woman has more to do with the notion that sweets are associated with traditional feminine attributes than to actual historical fact. It may also be attributed to the fact that the rite was a decisive 'male' act, and thus later traditions, attempting to construct a more egalitarian perspective on the event, added a feminine element to the occurrences of Baisakhi day, 1699. Nonetheless, traditional Sikh historiography is adamant that one of the Guru's wives did indeed take part in the initiation ceremonies introduced by Guru Gobind Singh, and that the impetus to her presence was the necessity of a feminine element into the proceedings.

⁶⁵ The 'Rahit' is commonly understood as the regulations defining how a Sikh is to live according to the principles of the Sikh religion and as having been bestowed by Guru Gobind Singh during the inauguration of the Khalsa in 1699. In reality, the *rahit* of the Sikhs must be understood as part of a

the late seventeenth century, however, the actual events are not nearly as concisely outlined. Certainly, a number of followers were initiated into the new order by the rite of the double-edged sword; many however rejected the Guru's invitation, *brahmans* and *khattris* in particular. The appellation Singh too was adopted by a large number of Khalsa initiates, as well as by Guru Gobind Rai, henceforth known as Guru Gobind Singh. Many however were content to stay with other established forms of nomenclature. Further, a number of customs either associated with those outside of the Sikh community, or prevalent among them given their repeated condemnation were firmly rejected; the killing of female infants, hookah smoking, intercourse with Muslim women, and meat from animals slaughtered in the Muslim fashion, the *halal* process. The anti-Muslim proscriptions would understandably have stemmed from the increasingly troublesome relations between the Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh and the government of the day. For increasingly the Sikhs were viewed as irritations to their Mughal rulers. The prohibition on female infanticide would most likely have stemmed from concerns within the community itself.⁶⁶ While the evolving *rahit* will further be discussed in greater detail

developmental process, one which in all likelihood was given a rudimentary inception with the vision and worldview of Guru Gobind Singh, but, which since that time abundantly reflects the needs of a much later community. There are nine works dealing with the rules and regulations that govern the Sikhs all of which are at some variance with one another, and that are believed to stem from the nineteenth century. It was only as recently as 1950 that an acceptable version was compiled and published as the *Sikh Rahit Maryada*. See W.H. McLeod, *Who is a Sikh?*, pp. 23-42.

An example of this process is regarding the details of the essential *rahit* of the five K's. While popular sources insist that these injunctions stem directly from the sermon delivered by Guru Gobind Singh during his inaugural address, J.S. Grewal has argued that this understanding is simply not grounded in actual evidence. Certainly, there is evidence that initiated members of the Khalsa were required to wear arms and grow their hair (*kes*) but that this in reality is the *extent* of these elementary injunctions stemming from that particular time period. Grewal notes that if anything, there are references to 'five weapons' rather than 'five K's', seemingly reflective of the concerns of Guru Gobind Singh in the assemblage of a tight-knit following of warrior-saints. See J.S. Grewal, "Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh - A Problem in Historiography," *Punjab History Conference. Proceedings*, Second Session, 1966, pp. 83-84.

⁶⁶ J.S. Grewal points to female infanticide as most likely stemming from the Jat constituents of the Sikh *panth* as early as the sixteenth century. As noted earlier, Guru Amar Das condemned the practice and it

suffice it to say that with regards to the actual proclamations and events of that Baisakhi Day there is a good deal of uncertainty. What is clear is that the identity of the followers of Guru Gobind Singh underwent a profound transformation. Through their distinct names, the ritualized call to arms, and the suspicious and increasingly malevolent rulers a new version of devotee came into being; the warrior-saint had fully developed as the new ideal of the Khalsa identity. Sainapati, a near contemporary, eighteenth century spokesperson characterizes the new identity as such: The Khalsa Sikhs were supreme warriors who were to reform the world and take care of it. This new breed of men stemmed from the injunctions of Guru Gobind Singh.⁶⁷ *Liberation* now came to be associated with those who heeded his call and styled themselves according to the new

can be understood as another indication of an increased Jat presence in the evolving community. Guru Gobind Singh's harsh prohibition of the killing of female babies points to a practice which had most likely gone on unchecked since the guruship of Amar Das. *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, The New Cambridge History of India Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 51.

Writing about the practice of female infanticide Satish K. Bajaj notes: "Not much actuated by economic motives, as by the feeling of honour and pride of belonging to the elite of the society, the high castes and dominant communities in the rural society of Punjab particularly a section of the Khatri, Jats and Rajputs adopted this practice..." "Status of Women in the Pre-Modern Punjab," *Punjab History Conference. Proceedings*. Eighth Session, 1983, p. 138.

Jats, more than the other two caste groups mentioned by Bajaj, would have followed the examples of the others in this practice, and most likely, given their desire to move up the social ladder, have overtaken the Khatri and Rajput castes in the measure of carrying out infanticide. As will be pointed out in a subsequent chapter, in later periods of Sikh history, female infanticide came to be closely tied to the rural Jat community. The association between Jats and female infanticide can also be seen in the famous Punjabi saga of Hir and Ranjha. In its most illustrious version associated with the bard Waris Shah, the various methods utilized in the killing of infant daughters is spelled out. These include strangulation, poisoning, drowning and suffocation. See Waris Shah, *The Love of Hir and Ranjha Sant*, Singh Sekhon, translator Ludhiana: Old Boys' Association, 1978, p. 44.

Waris Shah was born in 1738 in West Punjab, though the story of Hir and Ranjha is believed to be at least two hundred years older than his rendering of the tale. Undoubtedly the story was well known during the times of the Sikh Gurus; it finds explicit mention in the *Triya Charitra*, the 'wiles of women' stories generally ascribed to Guru Gobind Singh. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶⁷ Sainapati, *Sri Gur Sobha* Ganda Singh, ed. Patiala: Punjabi University Press, 1967, p. 31, in S.S. Hans, *A Reconstruction of Sikh History*, p. 249.

identity constructed by the Guru.⁶⁸ As Surjit Hans in his analysis of *Gur Sobha* has pointed out,

[t]hose who fail to come into the Khalsa fold are *manmukhs*. The word *manmukh* has been widening itself in Sikh theology. At the beginning it meant 'man oriented towards his empirical ego'; it began to cover the 'rivals' and 'those failing to become Sikhs of the Guru's. The author [Sainapati] theologically invokes 'death' and 'hukm' in the tradition of the Gurus to condemn those who do not join the Khalsa."⁶⁹

The Khalsa were to be prepared to follow their Guru into the throes of war-time. This translated into skirmishes with the surrounding Hill Chiefs as well as altercations with the Mughal rulers.

According to Carrol Smith-Rosenberg, '[i]mages of the body and rules regulating its treatment and behaviour...correlate closely to social categories and the distribution of power."⁷⁰ What is of great importance in terms of Khalsa identity construction and gender analysis is that it is solely the *male* devotee, reborn in the order of the Khalsa, the new warrior-saint that becomes the focus of all ritual and symbolic construction. Exterior symbols, weaponry, steel, and uncut hair become the signifiers constituting what it means to be a 'real' Sikh. The *khanda* for instance utilized by the Guru to stir the sweetened water is in symbolic terms a direct contrast to the *karad*, a one-edged utensil which would normatively have been utilized for domestic purposes. The significance of the *khanda*, a military implement associated with definite 'masculine' characteristics as opposed to the *karad*, a utensil which would have been utilized almost exclusively by women in their

⁶⁸ Sainapati, *Sri Gur Sobha*, p. 27, in *ibid.*, p. 249.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁷⁰ Carrol Smith-Rosenberg, "Writing History: Language, Class, and Gender," Theresa de Lauretis, ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* Theories of Contemporary Culture Series, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, p. 49.

domestic duties is indicative of the process of masculinization central to the new order of the Khalsa. The interiority of the early gurus, that aspect of the developing Sikh tradition which invited *all* to a profound relationship with the divine, regardless of gender simply did not fit into the masculine, soldier-saint following of the tenth guru. Caste on the other hand proved to be of little consequence for the new order. The Jat component of the Khalsa as well as other lower caste groups increased radically; many Khatris, on the other hand, refused to follow the new injunctions put in place by the Guru, preferring instead to maintain their identity as followers of Nanak whose message appeared inconsistent with the aims and regulatory symbols of the Khalsa order.⁷¹

Given the fervour of the newly founded order, it was this group which became the normative signifier of what it meant to be a Sikh; followers of the older ordinances became relegated to a secondary status within Sikhism. Women, given their definitive exclusion from the Khalsa brotherhood too were inadvertently depreciated as full-fledged followers of the Sikh tradition. The new boundaries put in place by Guru Gobind Singh essentially divided the insider from the outsider. An ethos developed which consistently widened the gulf between the 'true' Khalsa Sikh and those who were either not invited to join, namely women, or those who did not heed the Guru's call. Females by virtue of their gender and their association with the old order lost the right to be considered authentic and full-fledged members of the new world-order of the Khalsa. Whereas the rite of initiation known as *charan ki pahul* invited all to full participation in the earlier Sikh

⁷¹ Grewal and Bal denote the situation thus: "Instead of the devout disciples well-grounded in Sikh philosophy and the learned Sikhs with their lives spent in the Guru's service, there would now be sitting before him idealistic youth and hardened soldiers, saintly figures and clever rogues along with the devout, but by no means a learned audience. The Guru's problem was to train this mixed and heterogeneous

panth, with the creation of the Khalsa and the newly mandated rite of *khande ki pahul* as normative, women were relegated to marginal standing and held in that place given their symbolic and ritual exclusion from the Khalsa brotherhood. According to an early source however, women did maintain an alternate identity through the older initiation ceremony of *charan ki pahul*.⁷² As such, the gulf between males as possible adherents of the Khalsa military order, and females, as inadvertent adherents of the older Sikh *panth* widened significantly.

Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of 'symbolic capital' and 'symbolic power' is useful in coming to an understanding of the increased symbolic and ritual distances between male and female Sikhs. He notes that symbolic capital is a site of fundamental power relations. For symbolic capital to be legitimate, however, it must first be recognized as such:

Symbolic power is a power of consecration of revelation ...[it].begins to exist only when it is selected and designated as such, a group, a class, a gender, a region, or a nation begins to exist as such, for those who belong to it as well as for the others, only when it is distinguished according to one principle or another, from other groups, that is, through knowledge and recognition (*connaissance et reconnaissance*).⁷³

Without doubt, the patriarchal value system was firmly established during the developing Sikh community. Men, furbished with the cultural and social capital traditionally associated with their gender were already placed in a powerful hierarchical position. Particularly in the later developments of the Sikh community the key players of the

assembly to a social conduct that should give Anandpur a decent look and inspire his fresh followers to do great things." Grewal and Bal, *Guru Gobind Singh*, p. 93.

⁷² The *Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama* strongly prohibits the administration of *khande ki pahul* to a woman [506]. Elsewhere however, the *rahit-nama* does speak of women being initiated, though in the context of a rite other than that of the double-edged sword known as *charan ki pahul*. Here however, given the ending of the living Guru lineage the lectern supporting the scriptural Guru, the *Adi Granth* is touched as opposed to the foot of the living Guru. [15,16]. See McLeod, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama*, pp. 186, 151, and note #39, pp. 213-214.

movement, the Gurus and *masands* were all men. Further, traditional male roles became increasingly valued with the institutionalization and politicization of the Sikh *panth*.

Women who were normatively inactive in the roles accompanying this development were fortuitously relegated to a lesser status in the wider picture of the development of the *panth*. In Bourdieu's terms, cultural and social capital was already firmly entrenched in the milieu of the male gender. While there were exceptions to the rule, the ethos dominating the developing Sikh community was clearly patriarchal, hierarchical, and masculine. However, symbolic and ritual capital had not accompanied this transformation. Devotion to the Guru, initiation into the Sikh *panth*, visiting the established places of worship (*dharamsalas*), ritual bathing and pilgrimage, these were open to all members regardless of gender. Most importantly, the initiation rite was uniform and admissible to all. Thus the importance of gender as definitive signifier for the rewards of emancipation was non-existent. This of course changed drastically with the institution of the Khalsa as the male initiate assumed novel symbolic status and increased ritual signification. The stage was now definitively set for a 'theology of difference' based on gender, both ritually and symbolically, along with the established cultural and social gender hierarchy. Thus was enacted a novel construct of gender difference in the development of Sikhism. The transformation from masculine to hyper-masculine ethos was now complete.

⁷³ Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory* 7/1 (Spring 1989), p. 23.

'The Wiles of Women':

If we look to the writings of Guru Gobind Singh which have been incorporated into the *Dasam Granth*, the *Pakhyan Chairtra* forms the bulk of the volume and is a collection of four hundred and four tales about the wiles of women.⁷⁴ As Ashta notes, "[t]he chief merit of these tales is moral suggestiveness. While indirectly they instruct men in good moral behaviour, they warn the unwary against womanly enticements."⁷⁵ John Campbell Oman recounts a story where a beautiful widow attempted to seduce the Guru by disguising herself as a young sadhu who would reveal the goddess Devi to him at a specific spot at midnight. The Guru, caught in an embarrassing situation, was shocked at her intrigue, and managed to flee from the area.⁷⁶ This was the reputed occasion that prompted Guru Gobind Singh to write and collect these four hundred and four tales on the guile of women. However, the collection also contains stories within which women play no part at all as well as tales of heroic and honourable women. 'Woman' is portrayed as the victim as well as having power over 'man'. The goddess Chandi also figures centrally in these stories. Yet, most of the themes are of love, sexual intrigue and violence. In the depiction of sexual debauchery, women are often the seducers. One verse sums up their intrigues as such: "There is no end to the fancies of these women, Even the Creator after

⁷⁴ The sentiment toward women under girding the *Pakhyan Chairtra* closely resembles that of the *Manusmṛti*. In this authoritative work stemming from the second century Manu warns: "Men must make their women dependent day and night, and keep under their own control those who are attached to sensory objects." Manu, *Manusmṛti*, 9. 2. With the *Manubhasya* of Medhatithi. Ganganath Jha, ed., Delhi: Parmal Publications, 1992. Vols. 1-2, cited in M. Bose, *Visions of Virtue: Women in the Hindu Tradition*, p. 36.

⁷⁵ Dharam Pal Ashta, *Poetry of the Dasam Granth* New Delhi: Arun Prakashan, 1959, p. 156.

⁷⁶ John Campbell Oman, *The Mystics, Ascetics, and Saints of India* London, 1903, pp. 196-198.

having created them repented. Even he who has created the whole Universe accepted defeat, after he had probed into the secrets of women.”⁷⁷

Many historians have downplayed the importance of this work; its actual authorship has also been a point of heated controversy. Given its somewhat dubitable contents it has been posited as unlikely to stem from the tenth Guru.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, it was undoubtedly essential to the very compilation of the *Dasam Granth* as a letter from Bhai Mani Singh to Mata Sundri attests.⁷⁹ More importantly, Sikhs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries held the *Dasam Granth* at par with the *Adi Granth*.⁸⁰ One of the first European accounts of the Sikhs indicates clearly that the *Dasam Granth* “is considered in every respect, as holy as the *Adi Granth*.”⁸¹ Thus its contents were well known to Sikh devotees in the post-Guru period. Given the *Pakhyān Charitra*’s stark condemnation of what is understood to be implicit in womanhood, the ‘Wiles of Women’ narratives are essential in configuring the construction of gender during the time period of the tenth guru. This is particularly the case in light of the specific male construct initiated

⁷⁷ “Pakhyān Charitra,” *Dasam Granth*, p. 312, in Ashta, *Poetry of the Dasam Granth*, p. 154.

Further, the *Dasam Granth* enjoins: “Whatsoever calamities befall a shrewd man, he will endure facing countless tribulations. But in spite of all this he will not disclose his secrets to women,” p. 19, in *ibid.*, p. 156.

“Do not disclose your secrets to a woman. On the other hand try to get at her secrets. This is the advice of Smritis and the Vedas and even Kokshastra has reiterated the same advice,” *Dasam Granth*, p. 13, in *ibid.*, p. 156.

⁷⁸ M.A. Macauliffe notes: “Several intelligent Sikhs were of the opinion that the tales and translations in the volume, as at present found, ought not to have been included in it, for many of them are of Hindu origin, others not fit for perusal and none comparable with hymns contained in *Adi Granth*. The Sikhs, therefore, maintained that the *Hikayats* or Persian Tales, and the whole of the *Triya Charitra* or stories illustrating the deceits of women, should be omitted and included in a separate volume which might be read not for religious purposes but for the entertainment and delectation of the public.” Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. V., p. 260.

⁷⁹ In this letter, Bhai Mani Singh writes that he is sending Mata Sundri a manuscript containing the bulk of the “Charitra Upakhians” or “Pakhyān Charitra,” by the Lord, Guru Gobind Singh. Translated in *ibid.*, p. 8.

by the Guru through the Khalsa order. Woman here symbolizes the ultimate antithesis of the warrior-saint norm the Guru is attempting to construct. It is she who has the power to turn the warrior-saint away from his true calling.⁸² The work is also of considerable importance in understanding gender construction in the immediate post-Guru period; remnants of these attitudes toward women can be traced directly to the early Rahit-namas.

The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama:

If we turn to the earliest Sikh Rahit-nama, the code(s) of conduct that evolved from the time of Guru Gobind Singh to the present time, there is an extensive amount of information pointing to an increased differentiation between men and women in the Sikh community. The *Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama* is the earliest of all the extant rahits available. Though held suspect given its overt deference towards the Brahmanical caste and other 'anti-Sikh' interests and involvements, it is of considerable importance given its proximity in terms of chronological time: fifty years after the death of Guru Gobind Singh.⁸³ Further it originates, at least in theory with an esteemed member of the Guru's retinue,

⁸⁰ For a fascinating analysis of the role of the *Dasam Granth* in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, especially the chapter entitled, "Sanatan Tradition and its Transmission: Gurus, Saints, Ascetics, and Scholars," pp. 92-138.

⁸¹ John Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs* London, John Murray, 1812, p. 173.

⁸² Ashta summarizes the "Pakhyan Charitra" as such: "In most of the tales...the themes are love, sex debauchery, violence, crime or poison. They are extremely racy and frankly licentious. In the sexual intrigues women are often the seducers...Such stories may not be a pleasant reading, but they do imply lessons of warning to the reader against feminine wiles," Ashta, *Poetry of the Dasam Granth*, p. 153.

⁸³ For arguments for and against the *Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama* as a legitimate source documenting the Sikh panth in the early eighteenth century, see McLeod, "Introduction," *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama*, pp. 9-16.

Chaupa Singh Chhibbar.⁸⁴ According to McLeod, the extant text is recorded around the middle of the eighteenth century: "This does not necessarily identify the actual origin of the rahit sections, but it does demonstrate that for one section of the *panth* they were regarded as authoritative during the middle years of the eighteenth century."⁸⁵

Through the rules outlined for the Guru's Sikhs, it becomes increasingly clear that women simply were not included in the 'regular' discipline outlined for the Khalsa. When women are addressed, it is specifically as '*Gursikhni*,' not as customary Sikhs. Many of the injunctions dealing with women relate to their associations with male Sikhs, especially male family members.⁸⁶ Further, while a *Gursikhni* should visit the *dharamsala* twice a day, she should never read the Granth Sahib in a *Sikh* assembly. However, in a gathering of *Gursikhnis*, women may read the scriptures.⁸⁷ Most specifically *khande ki pahul* should never be administered to a woman.⁸⁸ The widening gulf between the male and female Sikhs becomes apparent in other subtle ways. A true Sikh it is noted, does not wear red.⁸⁹ A Sikh does not dye his hands with henna or apply collyrium to his eyes.⁹⁰

Again, as these practices were associated with feminine customs, this was obviously meant

⁸⁴ McLeod has analyzed and translated the work in its entirety. For a basic background to the origins and authenticity of this work see his "Origins," *ibid.*, pp. 23-31.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁸⁶ "A *Gursikhni* should sustain a placid and dutiful disposition. She should regard her husband as her lord. Other [male relatives] should be treated in accordance with their actual status - whether father, brother or son," [556]. "A *Gursikhni* should never abuse or berate a man, nor should she fight with a man," [552]. McLeod, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama*, pp. 189, 188.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, [559], p. 189, [538], p. 187, [539], p. 188.

⁸⁸ Penance must be offered by "[h]e who administers baptism of the sword to a Sikh woman." *Ibid.*, [506], p. 186. As McLeod points out, a later text known as the Piara Singh Padam text reverses this prohibition, thus reflecting the concerns of a later period of Khalsa identity. See *ibid.*, note # 396, p. 240.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, [381], p. 180.

Kahn Singh notes, in *Gurumat Maratand*, that because it is a colour associated with women's clothing, red is "inappropriate for the manly," Amritsar, 1962, p. 805, in McLeod, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama*, note # 334, p. 236.

⁹⁰ McLeod, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama*, [490], p. 185, [382], p. 180.

for male members of the Khalsa.⁹¹ Notions of impurity, which the earliest Guru had strictly censured are also associated with women, as is a circumscribed skepticism with regard to the creditability of women.⁹²

Conclusion:

Accompanying the militarization of the Khalsa was a polarization of gender; increasingly attention came to be given to 'true' manliness, true warrior-saintliness. If we turn again to Joan Wallach Scott's analysis of gender polarity, that which is dominant needs the secondary for its very identity.⁹³ The dominant, normative pole can only stand on that which is subordinate, by which it can be compared with favourably. The primary concentration on true Sikh identity open only to the male, demands that women subsidize that equation by being the negative or the opposite of that identity. In other words, when one gender is predominately fostered, here the male, it can only be to the detriment of the

⁹¹ Joan Acker notes that in the process of 'gendering' in organizational development, certain interactive courses must be taken to ensure that men retain the highest positions of organizational power. The nascent aim is the construction of divisions along lines of gender. Secondly, and most intricately linked to the demarcation of men and women in the Sikh tradition, "is the construction of symbols and images that explain, express, reinforce...those divisions. These have many sources or forms in language, ideology, popular and high culture, [and] dress." Joan Acker, "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations," in Judith Lorber, Susan A. Farrell, eds., *The Social Construction of Gender* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1991, p. 167.

⁹² Penance is required of a man who "eats a woman's leftover food." McLeod, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama*, [342], p. 178.

Further, quoting the above mentioned verse from Guru Ram Das, "Sinful men, licentious and stupid, act as their women command. Lust abounds; thus do impure men take orders from their women and act accordingly" (*Adi Granth* , p. 304), the *Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama* exhorts: "A Gursikh should never trust a woman, neither his own nor another's. Never entrust them with a secret. Regard them as the embodiment of deceit." [100], p. 158.

The ambivalence toward women that the earlier Gurus had enunciated through their writings became radically accentuated through the process of polarization between the sexes, brought about through the construction of the warrior-saint ideal which applied only to the male Sikh.

opposite gender, the female. Thus to be a true Sikh in the eighteenth century required one's initiation into the Khalsa, the wearing the external signifiers, arms in particular and the taking on of the appellation of Singh.⁹⁴ To be a 'secondary' Sikh thus meant that one did *not* undergo initiation of *khande ki pahul*, did *not* wear arms and was *not* called Singh. More precisely, the secondary Sikh in this equation was not a true man; he or she was either womanly (those who refused to heed the Guru's call) or was a woman.

Popular sources offer an interesting and practical perspective on this phenomenon. According to tradition, during the desperate situation following the battle of Anandpur, forty men resolved to abandon their Guru and return to their homes. Mai Bhago, the former wet nurse of Guru Gobind Singh's son Zorawar Singh, taunted the deserters and led them back into the battlefield in search of Guru Gobind Singh.⁹⁵ The men once again joined in the battle alongside Mai Bhago and fought to their death in the 'Battle of Muktsar'. The only survivor was Mai Bhago who was honoured for her bravery by becoming a bodyguard of the Guru. Central to this account is that tradition presents Mai Bhago as being dressed in male attire, having donned the *kachh*, or breeches. Needless to say, it is also indicative of Guru Gobind Singh's estimation of the woman Bhago.⁹⁶

⁹³ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, p. 8.

⁹⁴ Those initiated by the two-edged sword are to take on the appellation 'Singh'. Ibid., [182], p. 171. Further, the *rahit-nama* maintains that a Sikh should never be called by half of his name, or, without the appellation 'Singh'. Ibid., [408], p. 181.

Women by virtue of their exclusion from the naming ritual were not included in this injunction.

⁹⁵ Gian Singh, *Tavarih Guru Khalsa I*, Patiala, 1987, p. 1027, in Louis E. Fenech, "The Taunt in Popular Martyrologies," Pashaura Singh, N. Gerald Barrier, eds., *The Transmission of Sikh Heritage in the Diaspora* Delhi: Manohar, 1996, p. 184.

⁹⁶ Mai Bhago has been used as an example of the inherent equality of men and women in the Sikh tradition; the Guru it is said, welcomed all into his military brotherhood. And yet, given the information, one is left with an ambiguous aftertaste. Certainly the notion of equality is not as clear as many proponents would have us believe. Mai Bhago certainly holds an elevated position in Sikh history, but one must question whether it points to the equality between the sexes or to distorted notions of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality. By the very fact that she is a notable historical figure *because* she

Only upon appropriation of male attire, only in the suppression of her femaleness is she recognized fully as one worthy of honour. This speaks loudly about his appraisal of women in general who do not conform to the male identity markers.⁹⁷ More importantly are traditional understandings of the taunt offered by Mai Bhago to the deserting males. As Louis Fenech has pointed out in his study of the taunt in Sikh tales of heroism and martyrdom, women's taunt is often accompanied or replaced by the giving of a glass bangle to a male, *churian paunian*. The purpose of the bangle or the taunt is to present that particular male as effeminate. According to Fenech,

In essence such displays demonstrate that the male has been deprived of the force and vigour with which he is characteristically associated in Punjabi culture. He is in other words emasculated...Within Punjabi culture referring to men as women, particularly by women, is a grave insult and is meant to persuade the males to demonstrate the contrary.⁹⁸

The incident of Mai Bhago donning male garb and her taunting of the forty deserters becomes all the more intelligible given the pronounced emphasis on male gender construction through the creation of the Khalsa during the late seventeenth century. Femaleness had thus become the direct antithesis of manliness; no greater insult could be offered to a male of the Khalsa than to compare him or his actions to those associated with the female gender.

is understood at the most basic level as a man embodied in female form, women are implicitly defined as marginal to society. As a woman, it could only be upon the suppression of her sexuality, in her exchange of female for male attire that she could continue on as an acceptable member of Sikh society.

⁹⁷ Macauliffe adds an interesting perspective to the incident. "The woman Bhago who remained with the Guru after the battle of Muktsar, in a fit of devotional abstraction tore off her clothes and wandered half naked in the forest. The Guru restrained her, gave her the *kachh* or Sikh drawers, and allowed her again to wear man's costume. She attained a good old age, and died in Abchalangar (Nandar) revered by the Sikhs as a saint." Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. V, p. 220.

⁹⁸ Fenech, "The Taunt in Popular Martyrologies," Pashaura Singh, N. Gerald Barrier, eds., *The Transmission of Sikh Heritage in the Diaspora*, p. 183.

The equations of dominance and subordinate, 'true' and 'secondary' membership within the developing Sikh community outlined above are of central importance when discussing subsequent constructions of gender. The era ushered in by Punjab's annexation into British territory became an important 'moment in history' for the process of identity construction for the Sikhs. Assumptions of gender proved to be central to this process, for the Imperial rulers and for the newly conquered Sikhs.

Chapter Three:

Of Colony and Gender: The Politics of Difference and Similarity

We can write the history of the process only if we recognize that 'man' and 'woman' are at once empty and overflowing categories. Empty because they have no ultimate, transcendent meaning. Overflowing because even when they appear to be fixed, they still contain within them alternative, denied, or suppressed definitions.¹

To understand the developments of nineteenth century British attitudes and interactions with the Sikhs, it is necessary to come to an understanding of the inter-relatedness between developments in India and those within the social, cultural and religious milieu in Britain before and after the conquest of India. Significantly, British attitudes and gender constructs played a central role in policies developed by them in India. Further, deeply ingrained assumptions of gender, especially the hyper-masculinist ethos that under girded the institution of the Khalsa corresponded well with the prevailing British Victorian sexual ethos. As we shall see, these constructions furthered both the British and the Sikh cause admirably.

According to Thomas Metcalf, notions of the British as an imperial people needing to govern others originated with the discoveries and military victories of the Tudor state in the sixteenth century. Viewing the Irish as little more than pagans and barbarians, the British set out in the 1560s and 1570s to impose their rule upon Ireland. For the first time, though not the last, the British perceived themselves as 'new Romans' with a mandate to civilize unenlightened peoples.² British patriotism gained momentum during the eighteenth century with the uniting of the English, the Scots and the Welsh into "one

¹ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, p. 49.

² Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* The New Cambridge History of India, Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 3.

community set apart," especially in a united participation of British expansion across the seas.³ Moreover, the Enlightenment ethos conferred the indisputable notion of European superiority over all other peoples. Antithetical to assumptions of 'progressive' and 'modern' underlying European self-perception came a corresponding understanding of those who were primitive, savages, *not* 'enlightened'; essentially, non-Europeans. "Such alterity, what one might call the creation of doubleness, was an integral part of the Enlightenment project."⁴

Religious developments in Britain also added an important element to notions of British imperialism. Reacting largely to Roman and Anglican Catholicism, the evangelical revivalist movement of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries sought to foster a notion of 'Christian manliness' or "muscular Christianity."⁵ This understanding was in direct opposition to evangelical characterizations of Catholic tendencies believed by the revivalists to encourage effeminacy in men. Catholic advocacy of clerical celibacy, as well as conventions such as incense, flowers and cassocks were perceived as striking at the very heart of manliness.⁶ Further, women more than men were far more likely to be involved in church or chapel activities in the eighteenth century.⁷ To combat the notion that Christianity was only for the feminine (women) and the effeminate (Catholics), new

³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵ The phenomenon known as 'muscular Christianity' can be traced to the works of Charles Kingsley, Thomas Hughes, Oliver Wendell Holmes and Thomas Wentworth Higginson of the nineteenth century. See J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, "Introduction," *Manliness and Morality. Middle-class masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940* Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp 3-4.

⁶ See F. Knight, "'Male and Female He Created Them': Men, Women and the Question of Gender," John Wolfe, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain* Volume V, Culture and Empire, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997, p. 34.

See also, John Wolfe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain, 1829-1860*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, especially the chapter entitled, "The Anti-Catholic Frame of Mind," pp. 107-144.

ways of presenting the gospel to men were fostered in the nineteenth century. Underlying this trend was the notion that a reinterpreted gospel would make men more 'manly'. In the mid-nineteenth century this translated into a tradition of Christian militarism that combined elements of the armed fighter with evangelical Christian fervour. Martial imagery in hymns and the foundation of Christian military groups like the Salvation Army, complete with uniforms, titles and military ranks were a part of the evangelical ardency of the time.⁸ However, it was not only Christianity that was militarized; attitudes toward the military itself underwent a profound transformation. As John MacKenzie has pointed out, contrary to earlier notions of the "rapacious and licentious soldiery," the soldier was transfigured into the hero, the dauntless champion of the imperialist cause.⁹

Undoubtedly, positive attitudes towards war went beyond their religious underpinnings and were deeply seated aspects of the intellectual, philosophical and cultural trends of the age. As one popular dictum asserted: "Man is created to fight; he is perhaps best of all definable as a born soldier; his life 'a battle and a march' under the right General."¹⁰

Along with the 'christianization' of the army and the divine right of imperial rule came what Ronald Hyam has called the "cult of manliness," a development grounded on the evangelical focus on manliness which by the late nineteenth-century had become a

⁷ H. McLeod, *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian England: How Secular Was the Working Class?*, Bangor: Headstart History, 1993, p. 28.

⁸ Jeffrey Richards, "Popular Imperialism and the image of the army in juvenile literature," John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Popular Imperialism and the military. 1850-1950* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992, p. 87.

Popular military hymns like 'Onward Christian Soldiers' were indicative of the Christianized imperialist thrust of the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

⁹ John M. MacKenzie, "Introduction. Popular imperialism and the military," *ibid.*, p. 1

¹⁰ Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* London, 1905, p. 163-164, cited in *ibid.*, p. 2.

powerful middle-class moral code.¹¹ Needless to say, notions of masculinity were intricately tied in with patriotism and imperial destiny. Sir Robert Baden-Powell was instrumental in the development of this sentiment; to make the up-coming generation "into good citizens or useful colonists" was the rousing call of the Boy Scout movement.¹² It translated into a preoccupation with competitive sports; football, cricket, and boxing came to be viewed as moral agents, capable of molding the young boy into an upright combatant in preparation for the higher calling of imperial expansion. It was, as Hyam has outlined

a shift from the ideals of moral strenuousness, a Christian manliness, to a cult of the emphatically physical (what later generations would call 'machismo'); a shift from serious earnestness to robust virility, from integrity to hardness, from the ideals of godliness and good learning to those of clean manliness and good form. Manliness, it has been said, moved first from chapel to changing-room.¹³

That which did not fit into this Victorian construct of masculinity was labeled as "effeminate, unEnglish and excessively intellectual."¹⁴ Britain, more than any other nation in the world was felt to be at its apex in terms of its ideals of manliness and its correct understanding of imperial destiny.

Needless to say, the late Victorian emphasis on manliness also had its feminine counterpart. Here too evangelical notions of womanhood had far-reaching effects on the expectations and ideals of women. Based on 'scientifically' resolved biological determinants, women were understood as fragile, passive and emotional. "Men were to

¹¹ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality. The British Experience* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990, pp. 72-73.

¹² R.S.S. Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship*, London, 1908, p. 309-315.

¹³ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality*, p. 72.

¹⁴ D. Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning: Four Studies on a Victorian Ideal* London: 1961, p. 216, cited in *ibid.*, p. 72.

be active in the public world, competing against each other for power and wealth; while women, from the sanctuary of the home were to nurture their husbands and children and so uphold society's values."¹⁵ It became the 'manly' Christian's duty to render the framework within which to protect and provide for both his wife and children. This led to what Knight has labeled the "excessive adulation of domesticity" that was based not only on religious sentiments but also on Britain's rapid transformation from rural to predominantly urban and industrial society.¹⁶ The processes of both industrialization and urbanization combined to "produce a rootless proletariat, disorientated by the breakdown of traditional community in an unfamiliar urban environment,"¹⁷ for the first time in British and European society at large, people were quite likely to find themselves living among virtual strangers. Thus the enlarging of the middle-class environment led to a novel signification of home and family. By implication, woman came to be the central focus of this novel social construct. Females were viewed as guardians of the faith who were more naturally spiritual than men; they were the anchors that maintained the stability of home as the world changed rapidly around them. Thus life became divided into public and private spheres. The public domain was where men conducted their duties; the home conversely was the place where women carried out their responsibilities. Along with this division and the elevation of domesticity and family came notions of the purity, gentleness, and frailty of women.¹⁸ Ultimately, this mentality became the legacy of Victorian

¹⁵ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p. 93.

¹⁶ Knight, "Male and Female He Created Them," John Wolfe, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain*, pp. 26, 27.

¹⁷ Mark Smith, *Religion in Industrial Society. Oldham and Saddleworth, 1740-1865* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 32.

¹⁸ Deborah Valenze has argued persuasively that a move from popular religion or 'cottage religion' before the nineteenth century, a religion based in the home rather than the chapel, which accompanied the popularization of Evangelicalism, played an important role in the increased separation between men and

Britain. It had not been present in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries where men, women and children worked together in family groups, living on a joint income procured from the contributions of all. As shall be further pointed out, this nineteenth century construction of femininity, as well as transformed understandings of masculinity had profound ramifications on the imperial project as it progressed in India.

Colonization and the Politics of Difference:

The religious, economic and social developments in Britain played themselves out in complex and manifest ways. With the inauguration of the Indian empire in the middle of the eighteenth century, British colonists were prompted to ask and answer certain questions about their own identity as Britons, about the essence of the newly conquered Indians and about their relationship to their Indian subjects. "Conquest provoked the questions, and it also provided the means for a more intimate knowledge of India by which they could be answered."¹⁹ The questions asked, and the answers found took dramatic turns during the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. What Thomas Trautman describes as 'Indomania' began in the eighteenth century with educated European gentlemen unreservedly enthused by the study of Sanskrit, seeing in the similarities of Sanskrit, Greek and Latin an intimate kinship between British and Indian

women in Victorian England. Preindustrial religion allowed women to take an active role in preaching activities, where the public and private converged in everyday domestic duties. With the sanctification of the home came a conservative domesticity. Significantly, female assertiveness became inadmissible. Instead of women's grievances reaching the pulpit, they were instead redefined in private and personal terms. D.M. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 11.

¹⁹ Thomas R. Trautman, *Aryans and British India* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, p. 3.

civilization. The earliest Orientalists, most notably Friedrich Max Müller, looked to India's most ancient times as portrayed by the Vedas as the keys to understand the origin of this intimate kinship. Through their analysis of Vedic scriptural sources Orientalists concluded that India's civilization was older and more original than that of Greece; the authority of its scripture stemmed from its independence and vast age in comparison to the Bible. It followed then that enthusiasm for India was ultimately an ardency for Hinduism.²⁰ But it was a long forgotten Hinduism of yore that the Sanskritists mainly looked to for inspiration. Scrutinizing the Vedas, these inquirers deduced that at its archaic core Hinduism was basically monotheistic; the pantheon of images which were so distasteful in their Protestant Christian evaluation was understood as a later, more vulgar interpretation for the purposes of the masses and as a lapse of the Brahminical value system. Still, Hinduism in its contemporary context was the enigmatic link to the wisdom of Vedic antiquity and was thus was a domain worthy of dutiful attention.²¹

With the advent of the nineteenth century came the radically diverging Evangelical and Utilitarian movements. In India they came to be represented chiefly by Charles Grant and James Mill. In conjunction the two movements comprised the Anglicist policy which prevailed during the nineteenth century. Trautman characterizes the profound change in British attitudes in the early nineteenth century as a move from 'Indomania' to 'Indophobia'. "British Indomania did not die of natural causes; it was killed off. The Indophobia that became the norm in early-nineteenth century Britain was constructed by Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism."²² Challenging the untrammelled enthusiasm of the

²⁰ Ibid., p. 64.

²¹ Ibid., p. 64.

²² Ibid., p. 99.

early Sanskritists for Indian language, religion, laws and culture, Charles Grant insisted with equal evangelical fervour that it was only through aggressive Anglicization and Christianizing policies that India could be lifted up from its profound level of moral corruption. The cure according to Grant, especially with regard to Hinduism as the crux of this degeneracy was through education in British arts, philosophy, and religion in the English language.²³ Comparing Indian and European morality, Grant ascertained that “there is a difference analogous to the difference of the natural colour of the two races.”²⁴ And it is this dual focus, moral depravity and issues of race that became the calling cards of the reformist zeal of Charles Grant and subsequent Anglicists. James Mill advocated a secularized version of Charles Grant’s thesis, a call to progress that was based on an aggressive policy of modernization; it could however only be accomplished through education in the arts and sciences of Europe. Needless to say, both groups were committed to the amelioration of the Indian condition. But the reformation of India based on Anglicist policy was to be a strictly one-way assimilation process as opposed to the early Sanskritist position that advocated a thorough immersion into the cultures, the languages, and the religions of India. Thomas Babington Macaulay, summed up the Anglicist policy when he promoted the formation of an elite native class that was “Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.”²⁵

²³ In his hugely influential report to the East India Company, Grant refuted the earliest Sanskritists and their followers, insisting that despite the representations of the Indian people as “amiable and respectable,” in reality “they are a people exceedingly depraved.” Charles Grant, “Observations on the state of society among the Asiatic subjects of Great Britain, particularly with respect to morals; and on the means of improving it, written chiefly in the year 1792,” 1796, Printed as Appendix 1 in *Report from the select committee on the affairs of the East India Company 1831-32*, p. 20, cited in *ibid.*, pp. 102-103.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁵ Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Minute on Indian Education*, 1835, Reprinted in W. Theodore de Bary, *Sources of Indian Tradition* New York: Columbia University Press, 1964, p. 601.

One of the cornerstones under girding these new developments was the rise of social Darwinism in Europe in the 1860s and the subsequent collapse of the six-thousand-year Biblical chronology for human history. With these developments it became clear that contrary to what had previously been known the racial differences among human beings had progressed over a time scale of vast proportions. In India this translated into a new perspective with regard to the formation of the Indo-European languages; namely, these were fairly recent developments and were therefore less consequential. The focus thus moved from philological exploration of human history to 'indubitable' scientific rigor in the form of biological inquiry, newly understood to be the new master key to unlocking the mysteries of ancient history. Thus in essence the argument moved from the propagators of linguistic kinship to a focus on physical anthropology, with an eye to distinct race differences based on biological determinants.

The 'Aryan Race Theory' or 'Aryan Invasion Theory' was an ingenious development of the nineteenth century in envisioning ancient Indian history as well as in coming to an understanding of the contemporary conditions in India. There was a corresponding change in British attitude from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries with the notion of the Aryan race transformed dramatically to fit into the even more dramatic expansion of the human time frame. Biology became the newest tool for unearthing ethnological questions, philology becoming increasingly viewed as supplying only auxiliary information about only the most recent of human history.²⁶ The change in focus had enormous repercussions on the relationship between the colonizers and Indians in the nineteenth century. Max Müller, the chief spokesperson for the early Sanskritists

²⁶ Ibid., p. 183.

had earlier utilized the Aryan Invasion Theory to show that the civilizing process of the Aryans had culminated in the south of India with the peaceful colonization by the brahmins. Müller suggested that they “followed the wiser policy of adopting [for] themselves the language of the aboriginal people and of conveying through its medium their knowledge and instruction to the minds of uncivilized tribes” as opposed to the vanquishing, destroying and subjection which took place in the north of India from whence the invaders came.²⁷ Müller’s understanding of the events of history was subsequently contradicted with the novel interpretations of the Aryan Invasion Theory in the nineteenth century. Essentially, the “higher civilization and the superior physique” of the Aryan invaders became “soiled” as they advanced further south and eastward though their intermingling with the uncivilized; their creeds corrupted by “foul Dravidian worships of Siva and Kali, and the adoration of the lingam and the snake.”²⁸

The divine right to rule the ‘loathsome’ Dravidians in their contemporary condition, increasingly characterised as a weakened, morally corrupt and effete race of peoples was not difficult for the nineteenth-century imperialist mind-set to justify. Yet with the final annexation of Punjab and subsequent encounter with the frontier people, the colonial project was necessitated to restructure its attitudes and practices regarding the vast differences between their subjects and themselves. Through a complex interplay of the aforementioned British Victorian ideals of masculinity, biological understandings of race and colour, British perceptions of the weak and beleaguered Indian, and

²⁷ Friedrich Max Müller, “On the relation of the Bengali to the Arian and aboriginal languages of India,” *Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, 1847, p. 349, in *ibid.*, p. 176.

²⁸ Isaac Taylor, *The Origin of the Aryans; An Account of the Prehistorical Ethnology and Civilization of Europe* London: Walter Scott, c. 1889, p. 212, cited in Trautman, *Aryans and British India*, p. 185.

antithetically, the hardy, masculine and 'martial' Indian races of the north, the colonizers sought for theories which would better explain the Indian condition.²⁹ The anthropologist Sir Herbert Risley developed an elaborate scheme to prove scientifically that definite differences between the conquered peoples of India existed. Based on indices such as head size, stature and colour he analyses the inhabitants of North-West India:

We are concerned merely with the fact that there exists in the Punjab and Rajputana at the present day, a definite type, represented by the Jats and Rajputs, which is marked by a relatively long (dolicho-cephalic) head; a straight, finely cut (leptorrhine) nose; a long, symmetrically narrow face; a well-developed forehead, regular features, and a high facial angle. The stature is high and the general build of the figure is well proportioned, being relatively massive in the Jats and relatively slender in the Rajputs. Throughout the group the predominant colour of the skin is a very light transparent brown, with a tendency towards darker shades in the lower social strata....In respect of their social characters the Indo-Aryans, as I have ventured to call them, are equally wholly distinct from the bulk of the Indian people. They have not wholly escaped the contagion of caste, but its bonds are less rigid among them than with any other Indian races, and

See also Sir John Strachey, *India. Its Administration & Progress* Fourth Edition, revised by Sir Thomas W. Holderness, London: Macmilland and Co., Ltd, 1911 (first published in 1888), pp. 312-313.

²⁹ The British, claiming simply to be maintaining an ancient Indian tradition, made rigid distinctions between the so-called 'martial' and 'non-martial' Indian castes. The 'martial' races were correspondingly represented as 'masculine' and the 'non-martial races' as rather 'soft' and 'effeminate'. Yet as Mrinalini Sinha has pointed out, this distinction had less to do with an indigenous Indian tradition or "traditional Indian organization of masculinity" than with a "colonial understanding of the ways in which certain attributes of masculinity were supposedly distributed in traditional Indian society." Essentially, "nineteenth century British masculinity was itself implicated in the history of British imperialism." Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity. The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995, p. 8. In essence, this notion drew sustenance from the colonizers, as the 'martial races' were those who most closely matched British perceptions of themselves.

The benefits and rewards inherent in being classified by the British as belonging to the 'martial races' were obviously widely known by those who were not included in this rubric. The Khatri of Punjab, classified as *Vaisyas* in an earlier draft of the Census of 1901, held great protest meetings, claiming direct descendents from the Kshatriyas of ancient Hindu mythology, the great warrior caste lineage. Census superintendents were accordingly instructed to include the Khatri under the Kshatriya warrior caste in their classification project. Risley continues with not a small degree of imperialistic self-satisfaction that the decision "served to illustrate the practical working of the principle that the sole test of social precedence prescribed was Indian public opinion, and that this test was to be applied with due consideration for the susceptibilities of the persons concerned." Sir Herbert Risley, *The People of India* Second Edition, W. Crooke ed., London: Thacker & Co., 1915, p. 113.

the social system retains features which recall the more fluid organization of the tribe.”³⁰

While in the nineteenth century milieu of ‘Indophobia’ any intimations of possible kinship between Indians at large and the British were loudly refuted, in the newly conquered people of Punjab the colonizers found remnants of ancient ties which bound them inextricably to them. More than with any other group they found elements of kinship with the Jat Sikhs.³¹

Manliness, Morality and the Politics of Similarity:

Early accounts of the people of Punjab focus largely on what the British considered a new breed of men, “handsome...resembling Hindoos in general, but with a finer muscular development, and a more robust appearance” who were skilled in martial arts and unsurpassed as agriculturalists.³² The British had begrudgingly admired the Sikh

³⁰ Risley, *The People of India*, p. 49.

³¹ The British saw in the Sikhs a reflection of themselves in an earlier, less civilized age. See J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs* Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1990, p. 114, (first published in 1849). The remnants of ancient ties went beyond colour, race, or notions of gender. The village community, largely prevalent given Punjab’s predominate peasant population caught the British imagination, seeing in the village recognizable strains of their own medieval society. George Campbell compared the eighteenth century Sikh rulers in the Punjab to the princes of medieval Germany. He was amazed that the Sikh Jats who had never seen anything other than their village communities could create a “complete and fully organized feudal system.” The only explanation Campbell could offer was the “feudal system which prevailed in Europe is a sort of natural instinctive habit of the Aryan race when they go forth to conquer.” George Campbell, *Memoirs of My Indian Career*, Vol. I, London, 1893, pp. 46-47, quoted in Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, pp. 70-75.

See also Clive Dewey, “Images of the Village Community: A Study in Anglo-Indian Ideology,” *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 6 (1972), pp. 296-297.

³² Colonel Steinbach, *The History of the Sikhs Together with a Concise Account of the Punjaub and Cashmere* Calcutta: D’Rozario and Co., 1846, p. 212.

ruler Ranjit Singh who for years had meritoriously withstood the advances of the British.³³ Upon his demise, his successors lacking Maharajah Ranjit Singh's administrative and political skills simply could not hold off the ever-advancing army of the British. After two Anglo-Sikh wars in the 1830s and 1840s the development of the area described as 'The Land of the Five Rivers' became the locus of British activities. Even before the establishment of British rule concerted efforts were made to understand the rather unruly inhabitants of Punjab. Given the legacy of the ten Sikh Gurus, purity laws and Brahmanic influences were downplayed by the Sikhs; the baffling elements of Hinduism scorned by the British had a weakened hold over the inhabitants of Punjab.³⁴ Martial aptitude, which was especially honoured by the British had been fostered by Guru Gobind Singh with the creation of the Khalsa. In this regard the Sikhs, at least in terms of the Khalsa ideology were perceived as vastly different and superior to their Hindu co-religionists.³⁵ The Jat Sikh in British perception also reigned supreme as an example of a caste grouping that had overturned rigid Brahmanical codes of hierarchy and had raised its stature through its embrace of the tenets of Sikhism.³⁶ Further, the Jat as peasant *par excellence* was acclaimed for his agricultural competence. Most importantly, in the area of cultivation

³³ W.G. Osborne wrote of Ranjit Singh: "He was one of that order of minds which seem destined by nature to win their way to distinction and achieve greatness...He rules with a rod of iron, it is true, but in justice to him it must be stated that, except in actual open warfare, he has never been known to take life, and his reign will be found freer from any striking acts of cruelty and oppression than those of many more civilized monarchs." W.G. Osborne, *The Court and Camp of Ranjit Singh*, 1840, cited in Fakir Syed Waheeduddin, *The Real Ranjit Singh* Karachi, Pakistan: Lion Art Press, 1965, p. 209.

³⁴ British aversion to Hinduism in the nineteenth century is adroitly summed up in Risley's characterization of Hinduism as having "an unedifying mythology, a grotesque Pantheon, a burdensome ritual, a corrupt priesthood, and above...taint[ed by a]... palpable idolatry." *The People of India*, p. 252.

³⁵ Lieutenant-Colonel Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs* London: John Murray, 1812, p. 189.

³⁶ Barstow notes that "[t]he position of the Jat Sikh, however is considerably higher than that of his Hindu confrere. This may be attributed partly to the fact that he is a soldier as well as an agriculturalist, and partly to the freedom and boldness which he has inherited from the traditions of the Khalsa." A.E. Barstow, *Handbook on the Sikhs* New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1984 (1928, 1899), p. 168.

Punjab represented for the British a rich mine field of revenue acquisition for the interminable Imperial coffers.

Similar to the early Orientalist enterprise that endeavoured to understand the core of Hinduism through a thorough study of the Vedas, British administrators turned to Sikh sacred scriptures in an attempt to understand the *true* nature of Sikhism. Given their own Christian framework they responded warmly to the Sikh scriptural vision of the One, True, Ineffable, and Ever-lasting and contrasted this with the baffling array of the Hindu pantheon. An early army account notes in 1846: "There is no branch of this sketch which is more curious and important, or that offers more difficulties to the enquirer, than the religion of the Sikhs. We meet with a creed of pure deism, grounded on the most sublime general truths."³⁷ Early missionary descriptions further this identification, once again contrasting Sikhism favourably with Hinduism. The Reverend E. Guilford, a missionary who settled in Punjab in the nineteenth century purported that a study of Sikhism yields not a few points of contact with the great truths revealed in Jesus Christ.

The *Shabd* of the Granth is in truth no other than the Eternal Logos - 'The true Light that lighteth every man coming into the world', who has not left Himself without witness in any age or nation...[However] [t]he mass of Nanak's followers have not risen to his ideals, for they are still bound by the grave-clothes of Hindu superstition...yet the influence of his teaching has been such as to mark the Sikhs, as a nation, as being far in advance of any other people of India in spiritual conceptions, and in moral ideals and aspirations.³⁸

Christian missionaries believed that the reforming spirit inaugurated by Guru Nanak was now to be fulfilled by the truths of Christianity; the theological contributions of the Sikh

³⁷ Colonal Steinbach, *The History of the Sikhs*, p. 119.

³⁸ E. Guilford, *Non-Christian Religions. Sikhism* Westminster: The Lay Reader Headquarters, 1915, pp. 28-29.

Gurus were not in themselves enough to reform Sikhs to their fullest potential.

Nonetheless, the very recognition of analogies between Christianity and Sikhism paved the way for further points of relationality.³⁹

For the British mindset, the martial overtones of the Sikh religion was particularly engaging given the persuasiveness of 'muscular Christianity' and the corresponding 'christianization' of warfare in Britain in the nineteenth century. The militarized/masculinized enterprise of Protestant Christianity corresponded readily to Sikh delineation of the Ultimate as *Sarab Loh* or 'All-Steel', depictions of God that had assumed significance through the increased militarization of the Sikh community during the later Guru period. Earlier the Ultimate had most commonly been referred to as *Akal Purakh* the 'Timeless Being', a term reflective of the mystical and elusive understanding of the Supreme Being stemming from the north Indian Bhakti milieu. The change

³⁹ Valedictory instructions given to the first missionaries of the Church of England, T.H. Fitzpatrick and Robert Clark who were appointed to Punjab in 1851 were indicative of the high hopes the missionaries had for the Sikhs: "Though the Brahman religion still sways the minds of a large proportion of the population of the Punjab, and the Mohammedan of another, the dominant religion and power for the last century has been the Sikh religion, a species of pure theism, formed in the first instance by a dissenting sect from Hinduism. A few hopeful instances lead us to believe that the Sikhs may prove more accessible to scriptural truths than the Hindus and Mohammedans. *Historical Sketches of the Indian Missions* Allahabad, 1886, cited in Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh, "Poetics as a Hermeneutic Technique in Sikhism," Jeffrey R. Timm, ed., *Texts in Context. Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 246.

See also Kripal Chandra Yadav, "British Policy Towards Sikhs, 1849-57," *Punjab History Conference. Second Session. Proceedings.* October, 1966, p. 179.

The conversion of Maharajah Dalip Singh to Christianity in 1853 came to be viewed by the missionaries as an important turning point for the task at hand. Among the Sikhs, however, the conversion of Sikh royalty to Christianity was met with alarm and distrust, eventually inaugurating the Singh Sabha reform movement among elite urban Sikhs in order to contend with the perceived threat of the missionary enterprise.

Sadhu Sunder Singh was a Sikh convert to Christianity who became a renowned missionary both in India and in Western countries. He was seen as an apostle both to the lands of the East and to the West. The inability of Sikhism to fully satisfy the spiritual search of Sunder Singh, something which Christianity was able to fulfill with its 'higher' truths was pointed out repeatedly in a fascinating and widely published book by Friedrich Heiler, *The Gospel of Sadhu Sunder Singh* Olive Wyon, tr. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1927, p. 36, first published in German under the title, *Sadhu Sundar Singh. Ein Apostel des Ostens und Westens* Fourth German Edition, 1926.

“significantly affected the subsequent understanding and promulgation of Sikh doctrine.” In the transformation to *Sarab Loh*, “divinity [was] made manifest in the burnished steel of the unsheathed sword.”⁴⁰ Martial imagery had thus become central to Sikh doctrine and most specifically to the initiation rite whereby the sweetened water was to be stirred by a double-edged sword, *khande*. In its highly masculine and martial imagery, orthodox Sikhism compared favourably with what was perceived to be highly feminized Hindu devotional practices, specifically the veneration of female deities and a corrupt and abusive priesthood.⁴¹ The lack of a formalized priesthood in Sikhism also corresponded well to Protestant notions of a ‘priesthood of believers’, especially given the highly disparaged clerical order of Catholicism that was deemed as most responsible for the ‘feminization’ of Christianity. In essence, Sikh religious symbols, martial implements of highly masculine nature, religious administration and their uniform, militarized dress code complemented the nineteenth century’s evangelical ethos in Britain. Certainly, there was little that could be construed as effeminate in the religious imagery, practices and rites of the Khalsa Sikhs. These were perceived as another aspect of affinity with the Sikhs as well as being in sharp contrast to the enigmatic, feminine religious milieu of the Hindus.

However, the earliest accounts of the British denote intrigue and even dismay with regard to the variance present in the classification ‘Sikh’. In many cases this translated into censure when the variance did not fit into British attempts to create a powerful Sikh military machine. British administrators interpreted the tenets of Guru Gobind Singh as

⁴⁰ W.H. McLeod, *The Sikhs. History, Religion, and Society* New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, p. 52.

⁴¹ Metcalf has aptly summed up British conception of the ‘femininity’ of Hinduism thus: Lacking the coherent belief and principled convictions that was taken to mark Christianity, Hinduism was of necessity

responsible for the creation of a new breed of martially astute men.⁴² Thus the British turned to the Sikhs of the Khalsa, the 'true' Sikhs, describing them as "generally speaking, brave, active and cheerful, without polish, but neither destitute of sincerity nor attachment."⁴³ Those Sikhs who were not of the Khalsa brotherhood Steinbach describes, misnaming as 'Khalasa Sikhs' aside, as such: "Full of intrigue, pliant, versatile, and insinuating, they have all the art of the lower classes of Hindus, who are usually employed in transacting business: from whom, indeed, as they have no distinction of dress, it is very difficult to distinguish them."⁴⁴ The Sikhs who were signified as Nanak Pautra or descendents of Guru Nanak he depicts as having the "character of being a mild, inoffensive race... They do not carry arms; and profess, agreeably to the doctrine of Nanak, to be at peace with all mankind."⁴⁵

The descriptions of the various 'types' of Sikhs are remarkable for the way in which much of the burden is carried by the adjectives. The Khalsa Sikh is perceived as interchangeable with the Jat Sikh who formed the bulk of the Khalsa brotherhood.⁴⁶ He is admirably described in terms of his manliness, "generally tall and muscular, with...erect

effeminate because it was degraded, and degraded because it was effeminate." Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p. 101.

⁴² Falcon purports that "Gobind Singh having noticed that the study of the Adi Granth made his followers more inclined to peace than to war, sent for the books from its custodians, with intent to add to it, but being refused it by them, owing to his innovations, he made a Granth of his own, composed so as to rouse the military valour and inflame the hearts of his followers to deeds of courage. His first great aim was to exercise his Sikhs in the use of arms...The followers of Guru Govind Singh, that is to say Singhs, the members of the Khalsa; these are the only Sikhs who are reckoned as true Sikhs now-a-days, R. W. Falcon, *Handbook on Sikhs for the use of Regimental Officers* Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1896, pp. 14-15.

⁴³ Steinbach, *The History of the Sikhs*, p. 113.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 114.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 114-115.

⁴⁶ Falcon notes: "The back-bone of the Sikh people is the great Jat caste...who, descendents of Rajputs, emigrated to the Punjab from Central India...The virtues of the Jats are identical with those of the Sikhs, who have come out of this caste, and the new creed has added a more ardent military spirit, which is the principal tradition of the creed." See Falcon, *Handbook on Sikhs*, p. 65 and William Franklin, Compiler, *Military Memoirs of Mr. George Thomas* Calcutta: Hurkaru Press, 1803, p. 74.

carriage...They make admirable soldiers...inferior to no native race in India."⁴⁷ The descriptions of those other than the Jat Khalsa Sikh are derogatory, namely they are 'insinuating', 'full of intrigue', 'pliant' and 'mild' and "of somewhat *soft* material (italics mine)."⁴⁸ Given British contentions of true masculinity, Khalsa Sikhs characterized as *not* 'mild', and *not* 'soft' represented points of similarity between the British the epitome of masculinity. In light of colonial interpretations of the inbred religious militancy of the Sikhs they foresaw the inhabitant as fitting into their own interests in the fortification and peace-keeping efforts in Punjab and the whole of India. It was believed that under the firm guidance of the British, the rather lawless and turbulent Punjabis could be molded into an efficient fighting machine. The Khalsa Sikh was identified as a natural soldier, one who under genteel British influence and authority could stand among the finest of native soldiery. It was thus to the Khalsa Sikhs that the British turned their attention and efforts. However, the British noted with some alarm that these 'true' Sikhs were on the decline. As early as 1853 Sir Richard Temple prophesized that "the Sikh faith and

⁴⁷ A.E. Barstow, *Handbook on the Sikhs*, p. 166.

⁴⁸ Falcon is describing the Khatri trader class. See Falcon, *Handbook on Sikhs*, p. 26.

It is significant that the same Khatri trader class is also described by Falcon as "an intelligent, fine race," while the Jat Sikh is not in any way devaluated though characterized as "too slow to understand when he is beaten," "impatient of education, as slow witted, as simple in his habits and ideas as when Ranjit Singh formed him into a semblance of a nation." Ibid., pp. 26, 65, 68.

Undoubtedly, British ideals of masculinity, sportsmanship and militarism form the parameters of the discourse of gender in the nineteenth century. These values are reflected in the descriptions outlined above. As G.A. Henty, the nineteenth century boys' fiction writer stated in his *Through the Sikh Wars*: "Give me a lad with pluck and spirit, and I don't care a snap of the fingers whether he can construe Euripides or solve a problem in higher mathematics. What we want for India are men who can ride and shoot, who are ready at any moment to start on a hundren mile journey on horseback, who will scale a hill fort with a handful of men, or with a half a dozen sowars tackle a dacoit and his band." Cited in Jeffrey Richards, "Popular Imperialism and the image of the army in juvenile literature," John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Popular imperialism and the military*, p. 93.

Over-intellectual men had little place in the British imperial ethos of the nineteenth century. Moreover, it was the educated Bengali babu, repeatedly characterized as 'effeminate', weak and 'bookish' who became the object of a hatred and derision for the British.

ecclesiastical polity is rapidly going where the Sikh political ascendancy has already gone... They rejoin the ranks of Hinduism whence they originally came.”⁴⁹ Given their penchant for census classifications, the British administration noted that the ‘lions’ or true Sikhs would soon be crushed by the long and tenuous arm of Hinduism. The Census of 1881 confirmed their suspicions as a significantly smaller Sikh population was enumerated than in 1868.⁵⁰

Harjot Oberoi has analysed the oft-touted decline in the number of Sikhs in the nineteenth century through available demographic sources. According to Oberoi, the 1868 Census suffered severe limitations as not all districts in the province of Punjab were included in British numeration efforts. Further, there was no indication as to what was meant by the classification ‘Sikh’. Punjabis in the first census of 1855 were delineated as either Hindus or Muslims. By 1868 Sikhs were included in the enumeration but the definition of ‘Sikh’ remained unclear. By 1881, only the ‘true’ Sikhs who maintained the external indicators of the Khalsa identity were classified under the rubric ‘Sikh’. All others, including Sikhs who cut their hair as well as the numerous Sikh sects of the nineteenth century, the Nanakpanthis, Ramdasis, Nirmalas, Udasis and other groups were classified as Hindus.⁵¹ Oberoi has aptly shown that Sikh cosmology of the eighteenth

See also Sinha, especially chapter three, “Competing masculinities: the Public Service Commission, 1886-87,” *Colonial masculinity*, pp. 100-137.

⁴⁹ Sir Richard Temple, in Denzil Ibbetson, *Census of India, 1881*, vol. 1, cited in Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab. Culture in the Making* Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1990, p. 8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵¹ Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries. Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp.208-213.

In the 1891 Census of India, Mr. Baines notes that “peace has relaxed the bonds of discipline, and the distinction between Sikhs and the rest of the Brahmanic community is mainly ritualistic. For example, it was found by experience that at the census, the only trustworthy method of distinguishing this creed was to ask if the person in question repudiated the services of the barber and the tobacconist, for the precepts most strictly enforced nowadays are that the hair of the head and face must never be cut, and that smoking

and early nineteenth centuries embraced a wide variety religious experience and expression.

As a result of not belonging to a monolithic Panth, individual Sikhs enjoyed a wide religious freedoms. Most importantly, they had a vast terrain from which to choose their rites, rituals and beliefs. This is reflected, for instance, in the fact that if a Sikh so desired, he or she could in the same year go to a khanaqah of a Muslim pir like Sakhi Sarvar in western Punjab, undertake a pilgrimage to the Golden Temple in central Punjab, and visit Hardwar to take a dip in the holy Ganges. This sort of ritual exercise caused no ripples within the Sikh sacred hierarchy.”⁵²

For the British mindset however, religion could only be understood within the boundaries of the Judeo-Christian and Islamic notions of scriptural authority, one that could be easily classified as binding for all. The religions of India were anomalies to British sensibilities with their indulgent collaborations of popular traditions, scriptural persuasions and the intermingling of rites and rituals of the various religious traditions. Thus the constrained religious sensibilities of the colonists, given their tightly boundaried Christian world view, necessitated a highly powerful, dual-pronged project of privileging scripture and equating tradition with scripture over the every day realities of Indian society. According to Lata Mani, this project must be understood as a significant aspect of colonial discourse in India.

It meant that officials could insist, for instance, that brahmanic and Islamic scriptures were prescriptive texts containing rules of social behaviour, even when the evidence for this assertion was problematic. Further, they could insitutionalize their assumptions...by making these texts the basis of personal law. Official discourse thus had palpable consequences.⁵³

is a habit to be absolutely avoided.” *General Report on the Census of India*, 1891, p. 164, cited in Strachey, *India*, p. 344.

⁵² Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, pp. 255-256.

⁵³ Lata Mani, “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India,” Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990, pp. 90-91. Mani delineated ‘colonial discourse’ as a “mode of understanding Indian society that emerged alongside colonial rule and over time was shared to a greater or lesser extent by officials, missionaries and the indigenous elite, although deployed by these various groups to different, often ideologically opposite ends.” *Ibid.*, p. 90.

The British who admired the martial resonance of the Khalsa ideology turned to the tenets of Guru Gobind Singh for guidance and took it upon themselves to stem the tide of the 'hinduization' of Sikhism. Sikhs who were not of the Khalsa were characterised as already desecrated by the 'menacing' arm of Hinduism. Thus through their recruitment tactics the British overtly nurtured what they considered the orthodox, 'true' and martial variety of Sikhism. Recruits into the army were required to undergo Sikh initiation rites before becoming members of the Indian Army.⁵⁴ Initiation into the Khalsa brotherhood was viewed as the deciding factor in the making of the true Sikh soldier. Macauliffe portrays the baptized Sikh thus: "A true Sikh will let his body be cut to pieces when fighting for his master. The Sikh considers dying in battle a means of salvation. No superiority of the enemies in number, no shot, no shell can make his heart quail, since his Amrit (baptism) binds him to fight single-handed against millions."⁵⁵ In insisting that recruits undergo initiation rites before entering the British military system, the British considered themselves to be the protectors of the faith, single handedly responsible for the continuance of the true martial Sikh spirit in Punjab.⁵⁶ It was the hyper-masculine, militarized Khalsa Sikh that the British related to and who more than any other Indian 'grouping', fit into British designs of maintaining imperial stability in India.

⁵⁴ Lepel Griffin, Charles Francis Massey, W.L. Conran, H.D. Craig, *Chiefs and Families of Note in the Punjab*, Vol I Lahore: Government Printing, 1940, p. 208, cited in Fox, *Lions of the Punjab*, p. 241.

⁵⁵ Max Arthur Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion. Its Gurus, Sacred Writing and Authors*, Vol. I, Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1990, (first published in 1909), pp. xix-xx.

⁵⁶ With regard to the contagion of Hinduism on the Sikh population Macauliffe notes: "In our time one of the principal agencies for the preservation of the Sikh religion has been the practice of military officers commanding Sikh regiments to send Sikh recruits to receive baptism according to the rites prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh, and endeavour to preserve them in their subsequent career from the contagion of idolatry. The military...have practically become the main hierophants and guardians of the Sikh religion." Ibid, p. xxv.

Needless to say, the timing of Punjab's annexation into the British Empire is central in the discussion of gender construction in the nineteenth century. Gender and racial ideology had become a powerful binary yardstick in helping to delineate the contrast between the ruler and the ruled. The developments in Britain and attitudes of the British toward their Indian subjects underwent significant changes within the time frame that Britain began to extend its long, authoritative arm over Punjab. The new breed of Indian, the Punjabi Sikh in particular was conspicuously contrasted with the Bengali. According to British estimation, the Bengali more than any other group in British India had responded to imperial educational schemes but had fallen short of the accompanying objective of cultural and religious assimilation and unceasing loyalty to the British. English-educated Indians who in the nineteenth century were predominately from Bengal were particularly detested by the colonists. They were known collectively as '*babus*', a former term of respect among Indians but used by the British as a epithet of degradation. With scant memory of Macaulay's foremost design of anglicizing the Indian, Bengalis were ridiculed for 'aping' British ways. Highly primed in the thought of English liberalism, the *babu*'s very essence posed a challenge to the authority of the Raj.⁵⁷ Turning their attention instead to the unpolished though 'manly' frontiersman of the north, they formed an alliance based largely on perceived differences between the northerner and the Bengali.⁵⁸ Whether through their diet, which included the eating of meat as opposed

⁵⁷ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p. 106.

⁵⁸ The British army in particular strove to maintain the image of the 'manly' unpolished Sikh. Falcon insists that 'dandyism' of any sort was to be discouraged among the Sikh soldiery. Falcon, *Handbook on the Sikhs*, p. 106.

to the stringent vegetarianism of Bengali Vaisnava Hindus,⁵⁹ the climatic differences between that of Bengal and Punjab in the north (a more rigorous climate producing a more rigorous breed of men),⁶⁰ or the Sikh and British affinity in terms of their love of games, horsemanship and sports, the British were inextricably drawn to the Punjabi Sikhs.⁶¹ Further, the Sikhs had little use for stringent purity laws, which allowed for untrammelled British and Sikh fraternizing.⁶² Perhaps most importantly, it was in Bengal that the seeds of discontent toward British rule had been sowed in the nineteenth century. The sepoys of the Bengal Army in the Mutiny of 1857 had put into practice the build-up of Indian resentment. For the British, Bengali activity in the Mutiny was understood as indicative of their subversive nature and exceeding ungratefulness. The inhabitants of Bengal, close kin to the 'foul Dravidian' race which produced 'effeminate' males were increasingly contrasted with the representatives of the Aryans, the 'martial' races of the frontier.⁶³ Given their resolved notions of unmitigated difference between themselves and the Bengalis the British took solace in their semblance of similarity with the Punjabi Sikhs.

⁵⁹ Macauliffe in particular makes a connection between Sikh dietary habits and their bravery, loyalty and devotion to the Raj. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. I, p. xix.

In Bengal, it was only the Viasnavas who were rigid vegetarians; Shaktas and Shaivas were less strict in their dietary habits. I am indebted to Dr. Mandakranta Bose for this distinction.

⁶⁰ Steinbach, *The History of the Sikhs*, p. 212.

⁶¹ H.H. Risley, Officiating Deputy Commissioner of Manbhoom notes contemptuously that Bengalis had little use for the more 'masculine' tendencies of the British soldier. They "do not hunt, shoot, [and] play games," pursuits which the Sikhs were known to share with the British.. *Legislative Dept. Papers*, Paper No. 55, cited in Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p. 42.

Sinha aptly points out that Bengali failure in sportsmanship was conclusive proof of the crucial difference between the effeminate Bengali and the sport-loving Anglo ruler. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

R. E. Parry, in comparison admires the Sikhs for their "athletic prowess" and sportsmanship. R. E. Parry, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* Drane's, 1921, p. 36.

⁶² William Franklin, *Military Memoirs of Mr. George Thomas*, p. 74.

⁶³ A British newspaper sums up the contrast thus: "I fancy most of us would not object to being taking before a fine of Sikh *Hakim* for instance. Is it the Sikhs who are clamouring for our loss of liberty? or is it any of the warlike races of India?" *Englishman*, 2 Mar. 1883, p. 2, cited in Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p. 40.

Undoubtedly, gender constructions for both the Sikhs and the British were pivotal in the ensuing kinship ties between them. As noted above, with the creation of the Khalsa in 1699 an ethos of hyper masculinity among the Sikhs had become prevalent. This ethos had its counterpart in the 'cult of masculinity' fostered by the British in the nineteenth century. By contrast, the Bengali male was conspicuously cast as effeminate, weak and excessively intellectual.⁶⁴ Certainly, perceptions of natives as passive and effeminate were however not only a construct of the nineteenth century. Richard Orme writing in 1770 characterised all natives as somewhat effeminate, insisted that the Bengalis were "still of weaker frame and more enervated character."⁶⁵ Thomas Babington Macaulay, perhaps best known for his pronounced attacks on the Bengali character cited this well known decree in the early nineteenth century:

The physical organization of the Bengalee is feeble even to effeminacy. He lives in a constant vapour bath. His pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movements languid. During many ages he has been trampled upon by men of bolder and more hardy breeds...His mind bears a singular analogy to his body. It is weak even to helplessness for purposes of manly resistance; but its suppleness and tact move children of sterner climates to admiration not unmingled with contempt.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Mrinalini Sinha, in her fascinating study of the 'politics of masculinity' of the Raj in Bengal has noted that "the gendered constructs of the 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' were in fact 'overdetermined' by various intersecting late nineteenth-century ideologies of race, ethnicity, class, religion, and sexuality ...[G]ender was an important axis along which colonial power was constructed, and that, at the same time, the category of gender itself was never distinct from national, class/caste and racial categories." Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p. 11.

⁶⁵ Richard Orme, *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan, from year 1745, to which is prefixed a dissertation on the establishment made by Mahomedan conquerors in Hindustan* Vol 2, Madras: Pharaoh & Co., 1763, 1861, p. 5, in Singh, *Colonial Masculinity*, p. 15.

⁶⁶ Macaulay, "Warren Hastings," *Essays*, in Strachey, *India*, p. 450.

Sir John Strachey, writing almost a century later than Macaulay concurs: "It has often been said, and it is probably true, that Bengal is the only country in the world where you can find a great population among whom personal cowardice is looked upon as in no way disgraceful. This is no invention of their enemies; the Bengalis have themselves no shame or scruple in declaring it to be a fact...But for the presence of our power, Bengal would inevitably and immediately become the prey of the hardier races of other Indian countries." Strachey, *India*, p. 452.

The colonial focus increasingly attempted to distinguish the sexually enervated Bengali male from the sexually virile frontiersman in the newly annexed British colony of Punjab. Citing determinants such as diet, the hot and humid climate of Bengal and the social organisation of Hindu society - the Brahmanic hierarchy of the caste system in particular, property relations, marital arrangements - especially with regard to "marrying immature children, the great blot on the social system of the upper class of Bengal," British writers spared little effort to drive vast spikes of difference between their perceptions of 'the Bengali' and the 'martial races'.⁶⁷ For along with British compulsions to distinguish the differences between the various groupings of 'the Indian' came an overarching urgency to produce knowledge that would clarify the expansive differences between the 'natives' and the British.⁶⁸ Perhaps even more importantly for our purposes, one important outcome of this exercise led to what Metcalf has called the 'ordering of difference', which inadvertently proposed that some groups of Indians indeed were not *as* different from the British as others were.⁶⁹ The Sikhs of the Punjab fit into this classificatory system surprisingly well.⁷⁰ As already pointed out, the Aryan Race Theory

⁶⁷ Strachey, contemptuous of Bengali demands for self rule in the late nineteenth century, justifies British rule in India precisely because of the vast differences *between* Indians, particularly between the Bengalis and the Sikhs and Pathans. "I used no terms of exaggeration when I said that a native of Calcutta is more of a foreigner to the hardy races on the frontiers of northern India than an Englishman. To suppose that the manlier races of India could ever be governed through the feebler foreigners of another Indian country, however intellectually acute those foreigners may be - that Sikhs and Pathans, for instance, should submit to be ruled by Bengalis - is to suppose an absurdity." Ibid., p. 548.

⁶⁸ As already pointed out, the Enlightenment endeavour of ordering humanity as well as the political objectives of the British impelled the classification project in India.

⁶⁹ Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p. 113.

⁷⁰ Jeffrey Richards in his analysis of popular boys' fiction in the late nineteenth century has focussed on the writer G.A. Henty's novels to demonstrate British attitudes towards the natives of India, and British self-perceptions. In his novel of 1906, *A Soldier's Daughter*, Henty points to the similarities between the British and the martial races of India. Acknowledging that the Sikhs, Punjabis and Ghurkas count among the finest fighters in the world, Henty is impelled to prove that the British are still superior to all others. Given the prevailing Social Darwinist theories, Henty weighs the racial instinct of the British against other races. Ultimately, the British are superior for they possess this instinct more naturally, more

played an important role in this ordering of difference and similarity. The Punjabi Sikhs, particularly the Sikh Jat were representative Aryans with ties to the West; concerted efforts were made to substantiate this ancient kinship.⁷¹ Sir G. MacMunn writing in the early twentieth century made an explicit connection between Britons and the Sikh Jat. He recounted the story of Dalip Singh the son of Maharajah Ranjit Singh who was sent to England after Punjab's annexation with words of advice from a British officer: "You will be among your own people there, for you are a Jat and the men of Kent are Jats from Jutland."⁷²

The Mutiny of 1857 clinched the British association with the Punjabis. Revolting against rumours of East India Company stipulations to utilize pork and beef fat to grease soldiers' cartridges, the sepoys of the Bengal Army revolted throughout northern India. Mutinous soldiery seizing Delhi and raising anew the standard of the Mughal Empire were joined by other discontented groups throughout the countryside. Sikh royalty on the other hand sent in their troops to contain the unrestrained uprisings. To the Sikhs the British now owed allegiance, for they had stemmed the tide of insurrection and thus allowed the Imperial Army to tighten its hold over the mutinous

instinctively than other races. See G.A. Henty, cited in Jeffrey Richards, "Popular Imperialism and the image of the army in juvenile literature," *Popular Imperialism and the military*, MacKenzie, ed., pp. 98-100.

Contradicting British racial understanding of Aryan kinship, British observers instead purported that the martial prowess of the Sikhs stemmed from a religious impulse, as opposed to racial instincts, a direct outworking of the injunctions of Guru Gobind Singh. For this reason the British fostered the Khalsa identity over all others. Ultimately however, the British were necessitated to prove their own superiority over the Sikhs. Thus their more natural *racial* military instincts were required as the conclusive proof of British superiority.

⁷¹ Risley purports enthusiastically that "*Ex Occidente Imperium; the genius of Empire in India has come to her from the West; and can be maintained only by constant infusions of fresh blood from the same source*" (italics mine), Risley, *The People of India*, p. 53.

⁷² Sir George MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India* London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., Ltd., 1932, p. 14.

natives.⁷³ The revolt of 1857 was ruthlessly suppressed; sepoys even if only implicated by suspicion were blown from cannons; villagers were haphazardly shot; the former Mughal capital of Delhi was devastated. Native Indians were thoroughly demonized and presented as disloyal, depraved and most significantly, as violators of western women. As Metcalf has shown the brutal suppression of the revolt reflected the degree of vulnerability felt by the British in India. Magnification of events, particularly regarding the molestation of white women as well as utter demonization of Indians allowed the British to abscond from taking any responsibility for the uprising.⁷⁴ Needless to say, the Mutiny severely intensified the perceived chasm of difference between 'the Indian' and 'the Briton'. As the revolt was assessed, it took on a polarized characterization of those who were loyal to the British and those who were disloyal. The Sikhs, through their propitious display of loyalty moved into a position of privilege and honour. Sir John Strachey noted that "[t]he mutinies of 1857 showed conclusively that the native states are a source to us, not of weakness, but of strength. In the words of Lord Canning, 'these patches of native

Another British officer noted that the Sikhs, most especially the Sikh soldier, "maintain with honour the integrity of the British race." R.E. Parry, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* Drane's, 1921, p. 122.

⁷³ The British were enamoured by a prophesy conjectured to stem from the ninth Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and furthered by Guru Gobind Singh, which divinely ordained the combined efforts of the British and the Sikhs in their maintenance of power and peace in India. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, pp. xviii-xix.

⁷⁴ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, pp. 43-45.

British women, as wives or possible wives for the British started making the trip to India in large numbers in the nineteenth century. Improvements in steamships and especially the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 allowed for easier travel between Britain and India. Ballhatchet has written extensively about the effects of the white woman's presence in India. He notes: "As wives they hastened the disappearance of the Indian mistress. As hostesses they fostered the development of exclusive social groups in every civil station. As women they were thought by Englishmen to be in need of protection from lascivious Indians." Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj*, p. 5.

The Mutiny of 1857 under girded the fears for the white woman's honour in a way than no previous incident had done before.

government served as a breakwater to the storm which would otherwise have swept over us in one great wave'.⁷⁵

Notions of chivalry along with nineteenth century British understanding of true manliness and femininity played an important part in the characterization of the gallant Sikh soldier.⁷⁶ The Sikhs, as loyal British subjects managed to fit into this scheme as *true* men, chivalrous and loyal, maintaining the honour of British women by standing by the British in quelling the rebellion.⁷⁷ From a British perspective the real test of masculinity was in the chivalric protection of white women from Indian men, for the threat to the white woman's honour was understood as the ultimate affront to Britain itself.⁷⁸ MacKenzie proclaims the Mutiny as the "essential knightly moment," the critical event in which the British "went forth to slay the dragon and save the pure damsel immured in the tower."⁷⁹ Most importantly for the purposes at hand, through what has been characterized as the "great heroic myth" of the Indian Empire, the Sikhs, by way of implication became enmeshed in British notions of chivalry and loyalty. This led to an intensification of British political strategies of difference and similarity that were already in place.⁸⁰ The Bengali regiments as the instigators of the Mutiny were disbanded after the suppression of the revolt; the East India Company was abolished and the Queen Victoria proclaimed the

⁷⁵ Sir John Strachey, *India*, pp. 509-510.

⁷⁶ Risley, *The People of India*, p. 174.

⁷⁷ The widely held notion of the native threat to the white woman's honour was refuted by Britons themselves after the quelling of the rebellion. Lady Canning, the wife of the Viceroy of India had assured Queen Victoria that there was no credible evidence of mutineers sexually molesting white women in 1857. See Margaret Macmillan, *Women of the Raj* New York: Thames & Hudson, 1988, p. 102.

⁷⁸ Mrinalini Sinha posits another example of this overwhelming British notion of the need to protect white women from Indian men. She refers to the outcry of the British against the Ilbert Bill of 1883-84 which proposed to give native officials in the colonial administrative service limited criminal jurisdiction over European British subjects living in the towns of India. Sinha maintains that protection of British women from Indian officials was at the heart of the 'white mutiny' against the Bill. See Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p. 57.

sovereign of India. The relatively few British troops in India since the middle of the nineteenth century were augmented while Indian troops decreased in number.⁸¹ In the wake of these changes, the British administration initiated a cautious recruitment process of potential Indian soldiery. Those who fit under the classification of the 'martial races' were systematically chosen to join the ranks of the Indian army. The Sikhs, characterized as the pinnacle of the 'martial races' reaped the benefits of their propitious display of loyalty to the British for years to come.⁸² Sikhs came to hold a coveted place in the Indian army and their numbers in the army came to be highly disproportionate to their actual minority status in India.⁸³

Constructions of Womanhood: The British in India:

Once what can be summed up as the 'politics of similarity' between the Sikhs and the British were established colonists spared little effort to expand and strengthen these convictions. Assuredly, points of similarity were extended to include female constructs as well as the masculine constructions outlined above. In comparing the earliest British

⁷⁹ John M. MacKenzie, "Heroic myths of empire," *Popular Imperialism and the military*, p. 118.

⁸⁰ Jeffrey Richards, "Popular imperialism and the image of the army in juvenile literature," in *ibid.*, p. 97.

⁸¹ By the mid-nineteenth century there were about forty thousand British troops, with six times as many Indian sepoys. After the Mutiny the proportion of British soldiers were adjusted to sixty thousand, with only two times as many Indian troops. Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj*, p. 3.

⁸² The British gave immediate monetary and territorial rewards to the Punjab chiefs who had stood by them during the Mutiny. Further, Lord Canning, adopting the new title of viceroy, toured India in the years after 1858, making manifest the new relationship proclaimed by the Queen. Indian titles such as Raja, Nawab and Rai Bahadur were meted out to loyal princes and officials. In return those elevated in return for their loyalty to the Crown were henceforth bound to render civil and military service to the British. See Syad Muhammad Latif, *History of the Panjab. From the Remotest Antiquity to the Present Time* New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers, 1994, (first published in 1889), pp. 582-583.

⁸³ The process of recruitment culminated with the advent of the First World War where the proportion of Sikhs in the army was more than three times the ratio of Sikhs in Punjab; Sikh proportion in the army

accounts with later representations, one senses a marked difference in the tone of the descriptions. Malcolm, writing a half-century before Punjab's annexation notes:

The conduct of the Sikhs to their women differs in no material respect from that of the tribes of Hindus or Muhammedans... Their moral character with regard to women, and indeed in most other points, may, from the freedom of their habits, generally be considered as much more lax than that of their ancestors, who lived under the restraint of severe restrictions, and whose fear of excommunication from their cast, at least obliged them to cover their sins with the veil of decency. This the emancipated Sikhs despise: and there is hardly an infamy which this debauched and dissolute race are not accused (and I believe with justice) of committing in the most open and shameful manner.⁸⁴

The contrast of this description with that of the Superintendent of the Census of 1901 is remarkable: "No one who has seen the peasantry, especially the Jat peasantry, in their villages, at fairs and the like, could for a moment suggest that women and girls in this province are treated, generally, with cruelty or intentional neglect. Sikhs, especially, treat women well."⁸⁵ The change in the latter description is conspicuous and necessitates questions as to how and why this transformation came about. The positive evaluation of Sikhs and their treatment of women is particularly striking given consistent Census Reports depicting conspicuously fewer females than males in Punjabi Sikh society. Female infanticide, long associated with the Jat and Khatri Sikhs had not diminished by the nineteenth century.⁸⁶ Risley in particular was baffled by the connection between the

was nearly twenty times their representation in the Indian population. Richard Fox, *Lions of the Punjab*, p. 143.

⁸⁴ Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, pp. 139-140.

⁸⁵ *Census Report, India*, 1901, vol. I., p. 216, quoted in Risley, *The People of India*, p. 177.

⁸⁶ The Census Report of 1881 tabulates the number of females per 1,000 males for each religion. For girl children under the age of five, the Sikhs enumerated 839, Hindus, 941, Mussalmans, 962. This decreased significantly for all religions when all ages of females were compared to males: Again, the Sikhs - 765 fell well below the numbers for Hindus - 834, and Muslims - 864. See *Gazetteer of the Punjab. Provincial Volume, 1888-9* Calcutta: Central Press Company Ltd., 1889.

so-called 'martial races' and the high incidence of female infanticide and went to great lengths to justify the practice among the Sikh Jats and Rajputs.⁸⁷ Distinguishing the practice of infanticide among the martial races as different from the "savage type" as practiced by the Nagas and Khonds Risley noted that the more "refined" type of infanticide was associated with a sense of honour; daughters were made away with "in the belief that no one will be anxious to marry her, and that the family will be disgraced if she grows up an old maid."⁸⁸ With the element of honour, highly esteemed in the nineteenth century Victorian mentality, infanticide practiced by the martial races could be partially understood and apparently excused. Denzil Ibbetson, also concluding that while the life of a girl was undoubtedly less valued than that of boy among the Sikhs, pointed to "*the contagion of Hindu ideas, among all other classes of the Punjab people without distinction of race, religion, or locality* (italics mine)."⁸⁹ Ultimately, given the 'politics of similarity' fostered by the British with regard to the Sikhs, when blame for the incidence of female infanticide were conferred in any way, it came to be transferred away from the Sikhs to the preeminent nineteenth century scapegoat of all India's social problems, Hinduism. Others turned to Social Darwinism to explain the possible long-term benefits of female

In the Census Report of 1901 the proportion of girls to boys among children under the age of five ranged from 96 percent among Muslims, 92 percent among Hindus, to 76 percent among Sikhs, with some Sikh populated tracts falling as low as 62 percent. See *Census Report, India*, 1901, vol. I., p. 216, quoted in Risley, *The People of India*, p. 177.

In 1870 the Government passed a law which enabled them to register births and deaths among the classes most suspected of infanticide. While the numbers of females did increase over the next fifty years, the census reports continued to show lower numbers of Sikh females than among their co-religionists. By the end of the nineteenth century, satisfied that their intervention was successful, the British withdrew the act. Strachey, *India*, p. 346.

As the figures show however, infanticide was still associated with the Sikhs well into the early twentieth century.

See also Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, pp. 227-230, where the war on infanticide is outlined.

⁸⁷ Risley, *The People of India*, p. 174.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

infanticide. "The idea has been thrown out that the practice of killing female infants, if persevered in for many generations, might induce among the surviving women a hereditary tendency to bear more boys than girls."⁹⁰ Undoubtedly, once British kinship notions with the Punjabi Sikhs were established, they attempted to maintain a most positive portrayal of their Aryan kinfolk, establishing, and even fabricating convoluted explanations justifying even the most contradictory conduct.

Further, with regard to marriage and consummation practices the Sikhs and the Bengalis were conspicuously contrasted. The degeneracy and deterioration of Bengali society was readily traced to the early marriage practices of the Bengalis. Unlike the more 'purely Aryan' population of the north, Bengalis lacked 'manly self-control'; early, 'unnatural' sexual activity was responsible for the effeminacy of Bengali manhood and the enervation of Bengali society in general.⁹¹ The Sikhs it was argued, though espousing child marriage, extended the time of consummation until it was no longer harmful to the girl's health.⁹² Sir Denzil Ibbetson insisted that although there were exceptions, in the Punjab child-marriage was free from the harmful effects found in Bengal.⁹³

⁸⁹ Denzil Ibbetson, in *ibid.*, p. 176.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁹¹ Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p. 156.

See also Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, pp. 105-107.

⁹² Flora Ann Steele noted that although the Punjabis married their daughters off at puberty, they "would keep them from their husbands" as long as possible. *The Garden of Fidelity: Being the Autobiography of F.A. Steele, 1847-1929* London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1929, p. 161.

⁹³ "Wherever infant marriage is the custom, the bride and bridegroom do not come together till a second ceremony called *muklawā* has been performed, till when the bride lives as a virgin in her father's house. This second ceremony is separated from the actual wedding by an interval of three, five, seven, nine, or eleven years, and the girl's parents fix the time for it." Denzil Ibbetson, quoted in Herbert Risley, *The People of India*, p. 193.

There were exceptions to this rule. M. Martin noted in 1838: "Premature marriages among some tribes are, in Shahabad, on the same footing as in Bengal, that is, consummation takes place before the age of puberty...The Pamar Rajputs, among whom the custom of early consummation is adopted, form a striking proof of the evils of this custom; for among them I did not observe one good-looking man...most of them

Unquestionably, the high incidence of female infanticide among the Sikhs had resulted in a great demand for girls as wives. High bride price was perhaps the *most* important factor in the higher age of marriage for Sikh girls.⁹⁴ Still, the British largely chose to ignore the actual reasons for the higher ages of marriage and underscored only their benefits to the Jats. Risley concluded that “[n]o one who has seen a Punjabi regiment march past, or has watched the sturdy Jat women lift their heavy water-jars at the village well, is likely to have any misgivings as to the effect of their marriage system on the *physique* of the race.” Ultimately, the “healthy sense” of the warrior races was contrasted with the Bengali “demon of corrupt ceremonialism, ever ready to sacrifice helpless women and children to the tradition of a fancied orthodoxy.”⁹⁵ Another observer agreed emphatically, noting that delayed marriages offered positive results on the lives of Indian women. “The women who have made the most mark in Indian history have been Sikhs, Mahrattas or Mahommedans; and the reason is probably found in the fact that among these races the marriage of girls is generally deferred to a reasonable age.”⁹⁶ Undoubtedly, the Sikh custom of somewhat later consummation of marriage corresponded more closely to British sexual practices. Until the late nineteenth century the age of consent for female sexual activity was twelve; it was raised to thirteen in 1875.⁹⁷ As British self-perceptions

have the appearance of wanting vigour both of body and mind.” *Eastern India*, 1838, vol. I, p. 472, quoted in Risley, *The People of India*, pp. 194-195.

⁹⁴ Falcon, *Handbook on Sikhs*, p. 50.

⁹⁵ Risley, *The People of India*, p. 194.

⁹⁶ Lepel Griffin, “Introduction,” to John J. Poole, *Women's Influence in the East: As Shown in the Noble Lives of Past Queens and Princesses of India* London: Elliot Stock, 1892, p. viii.

⁹⁷ Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality*, p. 62. Hyam argues that prostitution was an acceptable “intermediate technology” devised to offset the unusually high marriage age for men in the eighteenth century. Child prostitution too was part and parcel of eighteenth century Britain. As late as 1857, two hundred child prostitutes under the age of twelve were recorded as working in Liverpool alone. *Ibid.*, p. 63. Certainly, the intense focus on the marriage practices of India stemmed partially from the psychological need to justify their own affairs in Britain, and to compensate for British moral laxity both in Britain and in India.

placed them at the pinnacle of social and physical development, their own achievements had to be understood as stemming from 'correct' social patterns. Again, with the Sikh Jats in particular the Britons found justification for their own societal norms and values.

Another aspect distinguishing Jat women from their Bengali counterparts was what the British viewed as their ability to contribute to larger society. Edward Pollard writing about the "Hindoo" woman, "unwelcomed at her arrival and often harassed and kept in subjection till her death, *she can contribute little to the welfare of her people* (italics mine)."⁹⁸ Pollard contrasts her conspicuously with the highly effectual "mother of the primitive Aryan or Indo-European stock."⁹⁹ According to the Aryan Race Theory, the Sikh Jats and the Rajputs of the Punjab were the closest remnants to the great Aryans that invaded India.¹⁰⁰ In the Sikh Jatni the British had the 'mother of the Aryan stock' in their midst and she in particular grasped their attention; particularly with regard to her physique, her stamina, her participation in agricultural labour. Barstow notes that Sikh Jatnis in helping in the fieldwork "form a marked contrast to Rajput and Mohamedan females, who, being secluded, are *lost* to agricultural labour (italics mine)."¹⁰¹ In terms

As Hyam aptly points out, in the eighteenth century, "going overseas to work as an official almost invariably meant an enlargement of sexual experience." Ibid., p. 5. The keeping of an Indian bibi or mistress was commonplace with most Britishers until the late 1700s. The age of Indian sexual partners was not of great concern to the sexual activity of British soldiers. Hyam points to the sudden increase of Evangelical missionaries as largely responsible for the change in British sexual practices. The Mutiny of 1857, as well as the appearance of British women in India with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 widened the distance between the ruling British and their subjects. See Ibid., pp. 115-120.

See also Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj*, 1990.

⁹⁸ Edward B. Pollard, *Women in all Ages in all Countries*. Oriental Women Philadelphia: The Ruttenhouse Press, 1907, 1908, p. 178.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁰⁰ "There is no doubt that these Jats, who appear to be the original race in the country, belong to the real Aryan Stock." E. Trumpp, "Das Sindhi in Vergleich zum Prakrit," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Gesellschaft* XV, p. 690, cited in John Beames, *Memoirs on the History, Folklore and Distribution of the Races of the Northwestern Provinces of India* London: Trubner & Co., 1869.

¹⁰¹ Barstow, *Handbook on the Sikhs*, p. 166.

of monetary gains inherent in the revenue-rich province of Punjab, the Jatni's contributions to the agrarian milieu procured her proclamation as an 'economic treasure', resulting in great benefits to British coffers.¹⁰² Another commentator, expanding on the actual status of Sikh women as opposed to her contributions to agricultural prosperity observed that her situation was little more than that of a servant. Nonetheless he insisted that "she is far better treated than her Mussalman or Hindu sister."¹⁰³ The fact that Sikh women were not 'lost' to the attainment of agricultural stability and development, in essence similar to the situation of lower class rural women in Britain contributed largely to this positive evaluation of Sikh women and traditional Sikh attitudes toward women.

Another aspect by which the Sikh Jatni compared favourably with her Bengali sister as well as Hindu women in general was in the fact that for the most part, Sikh women did not observe complete purdah restrictions. For the British purdah represented a fundamental and derogatory element separating English domestic ideology from that of India. Their position at the apex on the scale of civilization was intricately tied to the status of British women.¹⁰⁴ As a genteel race, they were at the forefront in the 'enobling' of English women. In stark contrast to the position of British womenfolk, Indian females were viewed as 'denobled', humiliated and degraded. Purdah and the *zenana* restrictions

Another administrative report noted that "[t]he women work as hard as the men do if not harder. The heavy tasks of bringing in wood and fuel and water fall them; they have to cook the food, and carry it daily to the fields; they have to watch the crops; to them the peeling of the sugarcane and picking of the cotton belongs; and when there is nothing else to do, they must always fill up the time by tasks with the spinning wheel." W.E. Purser and H.C. Fanshawe, *Report on the Revised Land Revenue Settlement: Rohtak District, 1873-79* Lahore, 1880, p. 96, cited in Prem Chowdhry, "Customs in a Peasant Economy: Women in Colonial Haryana," Sangari and Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women*, p. 307.

¹⁰² Malcolm Lyall Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* London: Oxford University Press, 1928, p. 35, (first published in 1925). Darling recounts an oft repeated proverb about the benefits of marrying a Jat woman: "A Jat wife for me, as all other women are a waste of money." Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁰³ Parry, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, p. 25.

were perceived as important indicators of this abasement and thus of consequential representation of the wider state of moral degeneration of India.¹⁰⁵ Victorian religious and social sensibilities spawned an understanding of woman as the helpmate of the male; the 'enobled' wife, at least for the educated upper class was to be the intelligent companion of her husband's daily life conferring upon him sympathy and encouragement within an atmosphere of relaxation. She was also to give gentle guidance to "stimulate him to a course of noble conduct."¹⁰⁶

The Bengali female, wholly separated from her husband's everyday life, was the direct antithesis to this ideal. One British Deputy Commissioner, referring to the Bengali custom of purdah spoke contemptuously of the "natives who practice polygamy, treat their wives as caged birds, kept in the dark chiefly for the creation of sons."¹⁰⁷ The seclusion of the Bengali female was perceived as inducing Indian women with an unhealthy preoccupation with sex and enfeebling passivity.¹⁰⁸ The Sikh Jatni, on the other hand, though veiled in public (something which British Victorian sensibilities would approve of), did not generally practice purdah and with some restrictions, could move about freely in her field duties.¹⁰⁹ Thus from a British utilitarian perspective she was in many ways a functional helpmate for her husband. Moreover, the Jatni was not only highly effectual as a contributor, her independence also allowed for exemplary

¹⁰⁴ n.a., *The Advantages of Female Education* Madras: The Christian Literature Society for India, 1892, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p. 94.

¹⁰⁶ *The Advantages of Female Education*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Leg. Dept. Papers*, Paper No. 51, quoted in Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁸ Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal. 1849-1905* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 228.

¹⁰⁹ Barstow, *Handbook on the Sikhs*, p. 160.

management of resources.¹¹⁰ While British observers repeatedly critiqued Hindu and Muslim practices, they were appreciative of the fact that the Sikh Jatni did not 'languish away' unproductively behind closed doors.¹¹¹

Once again, writers turned to Sikh religious history and scripture to find therein attitudes towards women which furthered their own identification with the Sikhs. Max Arthur Macauliffe in particular, spurred on by singular positive scriptural references towards women sought to present Sikhism in contrast to Hinduism, which sought to emancipate the plight of the Indian female. Particularly with regard to the "tyranny of purdah" Macauliffe went to great lengths to show conclusively that Sikhs stood outside the pale of Hinduism through "the high moral and enlightened teachings of the Gurus," and had much to offer women in Punjab.¹¹²

Nonetheless, in the higher caste families, the purdah system was observed. This however would have been a small minority in the Punjab (see *Ibid.*, p. 160). Roughly eighty percent of the Sikh population lived in rural villages as agricultural peasants.

¹¹⁰ *District Gazetteer of Amritsar*, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 166-167.

¹¹¹ British attitudes of moral superiority regarding *purdah* were expressed in popular stories for children. Michael MacMillan utilizes examples from the 'martial races' with regard to the freedom of womanhood to express his condemnation of the practice. The 'chivalrous' Indian women are described as "the goddess Diana come down from Olympus to save her votary from death." Pudmani, the 'Rajput Amazon's' "girlish beauty was enhanced by the brightness of her complexion, due to a healthy life in the open air, and if her soft cheek was slightly browned by exposure to the sun, that too...made her far more attractive than any of the pale-faced beauties of the zenana." Michael MacMillan, *Tales of Indian Chivalry* London: Blackie & Son Limited, n.d., p. 75.

As an inscription on this particular book attests, these tales of chivalry were not only read by British youth. It was also utilized as a conduit for exemplary behaviour in the form of a prize to a young Sikh boy in the Fifth standard in Gujranwala, 1907.

On the other hand, popular stories about 'noble' Indian maidens also served as a critique of the late nineteenth century liberalizing trends regarding women's activities in British society. Lepel Griffin, in his introduction to another popular volume cautions: "The women of the East are not so much *en evidence* as those of Europe...they do not try to do everything which men do, and conspicuously fail; they do not enjoy the delight of seeing their dresses and their looks recorded in the impertinent columns of society newspapers; they do not rush to the Divorce Court to listen to the latest unsavoury details of the latest fashionable scandal; and those who know most of this freedom of women in the West...may well doubt whether the Occidental or the Oriental method of treating the fair sex is more in accord with practical wisdom." See Griffin, "Introduction," John J. Poole, *Women's Influence in the East*, p. xi.

¹¹² Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion* Vol. I, p. xxii.

The plight of widows, primarily in the form of *sati* in India was for the British perhaps the most crucial indicator of moral, racial, cultural and religious difference, and ultimately, superiority. The image of the abject victim, thrown upon the raging flames of the pyre or entering the flames on her own accord, loyal, stoic and reserved, was one that caught the British imagination with fascinated abhorrence. More than any other aspect of Indian society the discourse of *sati* allowed for British notions of superiority to reign with certainty and purpose. The British took on the role of heroic knights sent to India, if for no other purpose, than for the saving of innocent Indian damsels in distress. In doing so, British notions of masculinity exerted themselves with renewed vigour; the rescuing of these unfortunate women was an apt indicator of their own moral and physical superiority over the Indian male who was ultimately responsible for this blight on Indian society. The abolition of *sati* in 1829 by the colonizers thus made manifest a prime objective of British ideology, namely, the reformation of overt Indian depravation. Women as weak, passive and helpless victims of *sati* became the focus of British efforts to uplift Indian society from its excessive degeneration.¹¹³ As with other issues, the British turned approvingly to the Sikhs of the Punjab to contrast the practices of the 'martial races' with

¹¹³ As recent studies have aptly shown, the debate on *sati* had more to do with the polar compulsions of British self-perceptions as superincumbent to Indian mores and values and an indigenous Indian elite pursuing a cohesive nationalist identity as 'keepers of tradition' than the actual status of Indian women. "Contrary to the popular notion that the British were compelled to outlaw *sati* because of its barbarity, the horror of the burning of women is...a distinctly minor theme." Women, as Lata Mani purports became the site on which tradition was debated and reformulated. "Indeed, as the nineteenth century progresses, at a symbolic level, the fate of women and the fate of the emerging nation become inextricably intertwined. Debates on women, whether in [the] context of *sati*, widow remarriage or *zenanas*...were not merely about women, but also instances in which the moral challenge of colonial rule was confronted and negotiated." Lata Mani, "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on *Sati* in Colonial India," in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* Kumkum Sangari, Sudesh Vaid, eds., New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990, pp. 90, 118.

the Bengalis, who were most closely allied to the utter debasement of widows.¹¹⁴ Similar to the early Orientalist preoccupations with Vedic scripture, colonists turned to the sacred writings of the Sikhs to understand the 'true' position of women in Sikh society. Responding to Sikh scriptural prohibitions of *sati*, colonial officials equipped themselves with yet another point of similarity between themselves and the Sikhs.¹¹⁵

Comparing the plight of widows in Bengal to what was construed as the favourable position of widows in Punjab, the British directed their attention to the tradition of *karewa* or levirate widow remarriage common among the Jats of Punjab. *Karewa* referred to a widow accepted as wife by one of the younger brothers of her deceased husband; failing him, the husband's elder brother, failing him his agnatic first cousin.¹¹⁶ The *karewa* form of marriage was characteristic of an extensive assemblage of customs that were widely upheld in Punjab, which by and large stood outside the realm of conventional Hindu law. The Lieutenant Governor Sir Robert Egerton observed in 1878:

The most fundamental basis for the division of the population in this part of India is tribal rather than religious, and should rest, not upon community of belief or ceremonial practice, but upon ancestral community of race, in

¹¹⁴ While there were exceptions to the rule, Sikh women did not generally practice *sati*. Prinsep, *Origin of the Sikh Power*, p. 214.

Yet, *Sati* was common practice among the earlier Sikh rulers of Punjab. A great number of Ranjit Singh's widows climbed on to the pyre upon his death. See Major Henry Court, *History of the Sikhs* New Delhi: Nirmal Publishers & Distributors, 1989, p. 74, (first published in 1888).

¹¹⁵ The scriptural critique of *sati* is attributed to Guru Amar Das, the third Guru of the Sikhs: "They are not *Satis* who are burnt alive on the pyres; Rather *Satis* are they who die of the blow of separation (from their husbands)." *AG*, p. 787.

¹¹⁶ See Prem Chowdhry, "Contesting claims and counter-claims: Questions of the inheritance and sexuality of widows in a colonial state," Patricia Uberoi, ed., *Social reform, sexuality and the state* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996, p. 69.

Henry Prinsep describes the ceremony as such: "The eldest surviving brother of the deceased places a white robe over, and the *neeth*, or ring in the nose of the widow, which ceremony constitutes her his wife." Prinsep, *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab. Political Life of Muha-Raja Runjeet Singh* Calcutta: G.H. Huttman, Military Orphan Press, 1834, p. 199.

which, whether it be genuine or only superstitious the claimants of a common origin equally believe.¹¹⁷

British administrators recognized early-on in their mandate that the preservation of 'tribal laws' in Punjab would not only justify their presence in Punjab, but would also lead to a conciliatory condition between British rulers and the populace at large; they also realized that many of these customs could be utilized to further British designs in Punjab. C. L. Tupper, the prominent British official who was responsible for compiling and outlining the fundamental principles of customary law noted in 1881: "Indeed...it necessarily happened that the view I had been led to form of the character of customary law in great part suggested to me the feasibility of using it for public or political ends."¹¹⁸ Thus the 'Punjab Laws Act of 1872' was passed, which gave 'tribal' or customary law precedence over the laws of Hinduism and Islam that formed the basis of legal authority in most other provinces in British India.¹¹⁹

Once again, the English discovered remnants of their own distant and not so distant cultural and religious past and norms in certain Punjabi conventions, particularly with regard to the practice of *karewa*. Turning to similar injunctions within Mosaic Law and to early customs of their European kin they enthusiastically maintained that *karewa* was a legitimate alternative to the beleaguered life of the widow in other parts of India.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Letter from Sec. To Govt., Punjab to Sec. To Govt. of India, Dept. of Revenue, Agriculture and Commerce, August 24, 1878, cited in David Gilmartin, "Kinship, Women and Politics in Twentieth Century Punjab," Gail Minault, ed., *The Extended Family. Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan* Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1981, p. 152.

¹¹⁸ C. L. Tupper, *Punjab Customary Law* Calcutta: Government of India, 1881, Volume I, p. 22, cited in Gilmartin, "Kinship, Women and Politics in Twentieth Century Punjab," Gail Minault, ed., *The Extended Family*, p. 156.

¹¹⁹ Gilmartin, "Kinship, Women and Politics in Twentieth Century Punjab," Gail Minault, ed., *The Extended Family*, p. 153.

¹²⁰ Deuteronomy XXV, v. 5-10, in Prinsep, *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*, p. 199.

Early British accounts praised the practice, particularly with regard to young female widows "in a society amongst tribes notorious for the laxity of their morals, and for the degeneracy of their conceptions."¹²¹ Certainly, the British purported to support the practice of *karewa* given their highly civilized and beneficent concerns for the status of widows in Punjab. Yet as early as the mid-nineteenth century Steinbach noted with the most telling of insights, that the custom of *karewa*

*acts as a counteractive to the many evils attendant on female rule. If the free will of the widow were consulted, it is scarcely to be doubted she would prefer the possession of power and the charms of liberty, to the alternative of sacrificing her claims to her brother-in-law, and taking her station amongst his rival wives (italics mine).*¹²²

While the British were aware of the adversity for widows which accompanied the custom, their enthusiastic endorsement of *karewa* had more to do with the 'evils attendant on female rule' and the maintenance of male dominated Punjabi patterns of inheritance.¹²³ And undoubtedly, the only effective way a widow's right of inheritance could be controlled was through remarriage.¹²⁴ The provision inherent in the custom of *karewa* of maintaining the stability of rural society was the crucial factor in their collaboration with this particular aspect of Punjabi society. For the Jats as the dominant land owning class of Punjab, ownership and maintenance of agricultural land was the most significant component of their prestige and power. The *karewa* form of widow remarriage in the

Risley compares the Jat practice of *karewa*, the practice of "fraternal polyandry, like the Venetian nobility of the early eighteenth century, as a measure of domestic economy, and a whole family are said to have one wife between them." *The People of India*, p. 133.

¹²¹ Steinbach, *The History of the Sikhs*, p. 222.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 215.

¹²³ Early reports correlated Sikh women with the custom in less than appreciative terms: "*Judging from the masculine disposition, want of modesty, and of delicate feeling, which form the characteristic feature of Sikh females, necessity and not choice, must have led them to yield to the adoption of a usage, which must often be repugnant to their natures, and disgusting to their thoughts (italics mine).*" *Ibid.*

British courts was thus favoured over the marriage of a widow with a "stranger who entices the widow away," for constancy in land inheritance patterns were perceived by the officials as advantageous to their peaceable dominion in Punjab.¹²⁵

Support for customs such as *karewa* are indicative of British attitudes toward the women of their newly conquered province. According to David Gilmartin, because women provided the cement that the entire kinship system was built upon, legal constraints defining women's place within the system were of central importance for the continuance of stability in the otherwise volatile region. Based upon observations of personal law in Punjab that inevitably denied landed inheritance to daughters, the foundation came to be laid for a far-reaching adaptation of popular practices "into a normative formula supporting the 'tribal' system of kinship underlying the British administration. *The exclusion of women from inheritance had become implicitly a political issue – a critical legal link in the maintenance of the British structure of authority*" (italics mine).¹²⁶ In an attempt to appease the landowning class of Punjab through the codification of male-oriented practices, inherently fluid and variegated conventions were standardized and forged into an essentially British construct known as the Punjab Customary Law Code. Needless to say, the situation did not bode well for the women of Punjab, particularly those of the rural tracts who had the most to lose from the tenacious nature of the newly authoritative code.

¹²⁴ Prem Chowdhry, "Contesting claims....," Patricia Uberoi, ed., *Social reform*, p. 69.

¹²⁵ India Office Records: MSS. Eur.D. 188. 'Gurgaon district general code of tribal custom', 1879, cited in *ibid.*, p. 73.

¹²⁶ Gilmartin, "Kinship, Women and Politics in Twentieth Century Punjab," Gail Minault, ed., *The Extended Family*, p. 156.

Ultimately however, the British administration was forced to recognize the inherent discrepancies between the newly codified 'customary' practices, particularly those associated with the custom of *karewa* and inheritance rights, and the negative consequences of the rigidity of their laws. Increasingly though reluctantly the new code came to be acknowledged as counterproductive to British claims of raising the status of women in India. According to the High Court Justice Sir Frederick Robertson in 1907, "'the rights of women' had, 'in the opinion of many...suffered unduly of late years under too universal application of the 'agnatic theory'.'" ¹²⁷ Nonetheless, the very legal system put in place by the new rulers brought with it novel ways and means for the rural women of Punjab in particular to contest the new laws; even though more often than not without success, the new legal system gave women a platform upon which to assert their legal rights. ¹²⁸ For to the chagrin of the British, the number of malcontent widows challenging the legality of their relinquished rights assumed such proportions that government intervention was necessary. ¹²⁹ Ultimately the issue revolved around the partition of land holdings upon a landowner's death, the possibility of which was held reprehensible to the rural Jat whose land accorded him honour and prestige. The break-up of land and resources was perceived as inevitable if the widow were allowed to have her way. ¹³⁰ Thus from the perspective of the British administrators *karewa* had to be safeguarded because stability in rural society and land holdings was pivotal to their continuing positive

¹²⁷ Note by the Hon'ble Mr. F. Robertson, "Suggestions Regarding Codification of Customary Law," April 11, 1907, in *Report on the Punjab Codification of Customary Law Conference (September 1915)* Lahore: Govt. Printing, 1915, p. 86, cited in *ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

¹²⁸ The various facets of Customary Law were put under the jurisdiction of Settlement officers, who were then responsible for the enactment of these newly circumscribed laws. See Prem Chowdhry, "Customs in a Peasant Economy," Sangari and Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women*, pp. 316-317.

¹²⁹ Prem Chowdhry, "Contesting claims and counter-claims," Patricia Uberoi, ed., *Social reform, sexuality and the state*, p. 69.

relations with the rural Punjabis. British apprehensions toward the widows of Punjab were clearly indicated in legal records: Accordingly "the widow will only waste the property when she obtains absolute control," thus taking the stand that "women are not qualified to manage their lands themselves."¹³¹ Though the courts did make some exceptions in cases involving cultivating castes where women were active in agricultural work, the general trend was to uphold the custom of *karewa* thus preserving an effective method of regulating a widow's right of inheritance and maintaining landholdings.¹³² As George Campbell, a British official in the 1870s attests, British officials were forced at times to go to great lengths to assert their authority over the provocative widows.

A special source of dispute was the obligation of widows (under the law, as understood by the men at least), to marry their deceased husband's brothers. They had a contrary way of asserting their independence by refusing to do so. I am afraid the law that I administered was rather judge made law; my doctrine was that if they refuse they must show reasonable cause. The parties used to come before me with much vociferation on the female side, and I decided whether the excuse was reasonable. But if the man seemed a decent man, and the woman could give no better reason than to say 'I don't like him', I said 'stuff and nonsense, I can't listen to that - the law must be respected', and I sometimes married them there and then by throwing a sheet over them after the native fashion for second marriages. So far as I could hear those marriages generally lived out very happily."¹³³

¹³⁰ Prem Chowdhry, "Customs in a Peasant Economy," Sangari and Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women*, p. 317.

¹³¹ A. Kensington, *Customary law of the Ambala district* Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette, 1893, p. 26, cited in Prem Chowdhry, "Contesting claims and counter-claims," Patricia Uberoi, ed., *Social Reform, sexuality and the state*, p. 68.

¹³² Chowdhry further points out that given the high demand for Punjabi males in the recruitment patterns for the British Indian army, it was imperative that the agricultural assets of the recruits' families not be jeopardized by the claims of widows. Chowdhry, "Customs in a Peasant Economy," Sangari and Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women*, p. 317.

¹³³ George Campbell, *Memoirs of my Indian Career* London: Macmillan and Co., 1893, p. 89, cited in Chowdhry, "Contesting claims and counter-claims," Patricia Uberoi, ed., *Social Reform, sexuality and the state*, p. 74.

British authorities, on the one hand well aware and appreciative of the hyper-masculine ethos of the Sikhs and equally apprehensive of the indomitable spirit of the Jatni, were solicitous in legally solidifying cultural conventions in favour of male prerogative. For the most part the ardency of British effort stemmed from a perceived need to ensure that women, widows in particular, contribute to the stability of agrarian society by maintaining the male dominated 'law of the land'.¹³⁴

The clear male defined posture taken by the Raj with regard to the suppression of female positions of authority, even toward women at the helm of land holdings can be traced to the history of Punjab prior to its annexation. The British were well aware of the record of successful female rule in Punjab upon the death of a woman's husband or son, particularly during the previous *misl* period of earlier Sikh rule. The very same 'masculine' qualities of these women were often held to be responsible for their confident procurement of these leadership roles.¹³⁵ Perhaps most importantly, the colonial regime

¹³⁴ Prinsep writes somewhat sympathetically of women's position in Punjabi society in the early nineteenth century with regard to occasional displays of resistance to male dominated societal norms: "From the moment she has quitted the paternal roof, she is considered to have been assigned as the property of another, and ceases to have a free will. Where the Hymeneal bond is so loosely and irrationally knit, it is not a matter of surprise, that the feeble tie and servile obligations, which unite the wife to the husband, should make but an insincere and heartless impression. Females are daily accused before Chiefs and their officers of breaches of conjugal virtue, and of having absconded to evade the claims of a father, or mother-in-law, or the established rights of a Jeth, or a *Daiwur*. When they have fled into the territory of another Chief, it is often difficult to obtain their restitution, but the solicitations of a Punchayt, and the more forcible argument of reprisals, are in the end efficacious, and the unfortunate woman, if she do not in a fit of desperation take opium, or cast herself into a well, is necessitated to submit to the law of the land, which she will again violate on the first opportune occasion. Sense of shame, or feelings of honour, have no place in the breast of a Jat...They will make strenuous exertions for recovery of their wives, after they have absconded, and will take them back as often as they can get them, bickering even for the children the woman may have had by her paramour, as some recompense for her temporary absence, and for the expense and trouble they may have incurred in the search for her." Prinsep, *Origin of the Sikh Power*, pp.208-209.

¹³⁵ George Thomas writes appreciatively of Bibi Sahib Kaur, a "woman of masculine and intrepid spirit" who bravely defended the capital city of Patiala during his expedition of 1798. He was sufficiently impressed by Sahib Kaur to assert that she was "a better man than her brother," the Raja Sahib Singh, who had fled the city during the siege. Cited in Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs* Vol. 3 New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1980, pp. 300, 293.

had come full force against Maharani Jindan, a powerful female leader characterised by Dalhousie as the only person of “*manly* understanding of the Punjab” who for a time successfully withstood the advances of the British army (*italics mine*).¹³⁶ Nonetheless, despite a begrudging admiration it was to Jindan, “whose evil passions...brought about [her] ruin and that of the State,” that British officials credited the first Sikh war and the “downfall of the monarchy which Ranjit Singh had so laboriously built up.” Explanations given by British authorities focused on her ‘evil influences’ through “unbridled passions and the intrigues of her lovers.”¹³⁷ Singularly trenchant in their associations with Jindan, she represented to the Victorian imperial mindset the ultimate antithesis of feminine purity and frailty.¹³⁸ The insights of Rajanikanta Gupta a nineteenth century Bengali writer bear repeating, given his insistence that British inimical estimation of Jindan had everything to do with the fact that she was a woman. Had Maharani Jindan

been satisfied with her normal feminine role away from the action, she would have been well received by English historians...The English, accustomed to universal admiration and respect for their bravery and

Rani Askour and Rani Rajinder were other noteworthy Sikh women rulers, and, according to Lepel Griffin, “it would appear that the Phulkian chiefs excluded by direct enactment all women from any share of power, from the suspicion that they were able to use it far more wisely than themselves.” Griffin, “Introduction,” John J. Poole, *Women's Influence in the East*, p. viii.

¹³⁶ Dalhousie to Birg. Mountain, January 31, 1849, cited in Kirpal Chandra Yadav, “British Policy Towards Sikhs, 1849-57,” *Punjab History Conference. Second Session. Proceedings* (October 1966), p. 167.

¹³⁷ Griffin, “Introduction,” John J. Poole, *Women's Influence in the East*, p. x.

¹³⁸ For obvious political reasons, as well as tightly boundaried Victorian gender constructions, Jindan was intensely maligned by British officials. Hardinge reprovingly observed in a dispatch to the Secret Committee that she reviewed her Sikh troops unveiled and dressed as a dancing woman. Further, Hardinge critiqued, she sent gifts to courtezans, and although attending to religious observances during the day, her nights were spent in the grossest of debaucheries. Hardinge to Hobhouse (Private) 19 September, 1845-Broughton (BM) 35475, fol. 25a, cited in Bikrama Jit Hasrat, *Life and Times of Ranjit Singh. A Saga of Benevolent Despotism* Hoshiarpur, Punjab: V.V. Resarch Institute Book Agency, 1977, p. 232.

Despite Hardinge's overt criticism of Jindan, he otherwise conceded that she possessed considerable energy and spirit, and a singular devotion to the affairs of the state. Governor-General to Secret Committee, 6 November, 1845 -BISL (I), cited in *ibid.*, p. 233.

See also B.S. Naggar, *Maharani Jind Kaur. The Mother-Queen of Maharajah Dalip Singh* Delhi: P.K.B. Publications, 1975.

political wisdom, found that she refused to be overawed by them...Her regular interference in the administration of the realm wounded the political ego of the English; they therefore reacted sharply to whatever the queen had intended to achieve in Punjab and made her into the villain of the piece.¹³⁹

Needless to say, British attitudes toward female jurisdiction were closely aligned with the already prevalent ethos of hyper-masculinity reigning supreme among the Sikhs as well as Sikh apprehensions toward female rule. During the complex settlement proceedings with Sikh Chiefs after the Mutiny of 1857, the issue of possible female incumbency played a considerable role in the very negotiation process. A petition to the British sent by the Phulkian Chief entitled 'Paper of Requests' insisted that "women should not be allowed to interfere in the affairs of the State either on the pretext of the Chief being young or upon any other plea, and that no complaint of any sort preferred by the women of the families of the Chief be received by the British Government."¹⁴⁰ The Commissioner responded warmly to this request, adding that

the exclusion of women from the Council or Regency or from any participation in public affairs was 'a wise and sensible provision', and that nothing but evil could accrue from the nominal supremacy of women, uneducated and secluded as they were in the country...He observed that as a rule the Government did not interfere in the matters of complaints from women but in extraordinary cases the Government might be compelled to interfere on humane grounds.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Rajanikanta Gupta, cited in Himadri Banerjee, "Maharani Jindan in Bengali Writings," *The Sikh Review* Vol. XXXVI (July 1988) No. 415, pp. 33-34.

¹⁴⁰ Commissioner Cis-Sutlej States to Chief Commissioner Punjab, 20 May 1858, Political Consultations, 27 May 1859, No. 85, par. 5, cited in A.C. Arora, *British Policy towards the Punjab States, 1858-1905* Jalandhar: Export India Publications, 1982, p. 41

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Not surprisingly given the government's previous altercations with the ever insubordinate Maharani Jindan, the Government of India accepted this request of the Phulkian Chiefs 'in principle'.

The Politics of Similarity and its Discontents:

Somewhat hesitantly, given the tenuous politics of similarity between the British and the 'manly' Sikhs, the latter were often portrayed by the British as intrinsically immoral, most particularly with regard to their sexual mores. British administrators steeped in a Victorian ethos with its exaggerated opposition of 'masculine' and 'feminine' and corresponding puritanical sexual codes were troubled by what they perceived of as sexual depravity among the Sikhs. Cunningham in the mid-nineteenth century noted:

[T]he sense of personal honour and of female purity is less high among the rude and ignorant of every age, than among the informed and the civilized; and when the whole peasantry of a country suddenly attain to power and wealth, and are freed from the many of the restraints of society, an unusual proportion will necessarily resign themselves to the seductions of pleasure, and freely give way to their most depraved appetites.¹⁴²

Besides commenting on the absence of honour among the Sikhs pertaining to their womenfolk, Cunningham was presumably referring to homosexual practices observed among the Sikhs, especially in the court of Maharajah Ranjit Singh. British propensity for masculine virility as opposed to their patent opprobrium of 'weakness' in men was pronounced because Victorian notions of masculinity compelled them to believe that

¹⁴² J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs* Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1990, (first published 1849), p. 159.

effeminacy led naturally to homosexual behaviour among men.¹⁴³ To the chagrin of the British however, homosexual practices were largely associated with the more 'manly' races as opposed to the 'effeminate' Bengalis. Lewis Wurgaft concludes in his analysis of Kipling's works that colonial officials were intrigued by the apparent paradox that homosexual behaviour existed among "the most resolute characters" especially among those who represented to them "the last words in daring and reckless courage" as opposed to the more 'effeminate' races.¹⁴⁴ According to Mrinalini Sinha, this apparent contradiction "exposed the contradictions of a discourse that attempted to link homosexual practices with a distinct homosexual personality defined in terms of effeminacy and lack of manly virility."¹⁴⁵ Further the incongruity of British self-perceptions of being a *truly* masculine race and their observations of the sexual 'depravity' among those most closely aligned to the British did not bode well for the colonists in light of the tenuous bonds of their affinity. Thus while Cunningham's rigid ethical sensibilities recoiled from the sexual customs of the Sikhs, he was quick to exonerate them noting that "those who vilify the Sikhs at one time, and describe their long and rapid marches at another, should remember the contradiction and reflect that what common-sense and the better feelings of our nature have always condemned, can never be the ordinary practice of a nation."¹⁴⁶ Fortuitously for British self-understanding, the formulaic boldness and

See also Prinsep, *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab* where he makes note of homosexual activities in the court of Maharajah Ranjit Singh and among the Sikhs in general, p. 85 and Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality*, p. 131.

¹⁴³ Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p. 19.

¹⁴⁴ Lewis D. Wurgaft, *The Imperial Imagination: Magic and Myth in Kipling's India* Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983, p. 50.

¹⁴⁵ Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p. 19.

¹⁴⁶ Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 159.

robustness characterizing the Sikh male could surpass any disturbing contradictions with regard to his sexuality.

Sikh women too, though admired when contrasted to Bengali women given their 'sturdiness' and procreative abilities in the development of the 'manly' races, could hardly be aligned with widely held Victorian notions of the frailty of women. In the words of Lepel Griffin, "[t]he characteristics of women which disqualify them for public life and its responsibilities are inherent in their sex and are worthy of honour, for to be womanly is the highest praise for a woman, as to be masculine is her worst reproach."¹⁴⁷ Thus the 'sturdy' Punjabi Jatni by her very nature came to affront the deeply held Victorian assumptions of the British. Perhaps most importantly, Sikh women in direct opposition to Victorian notions of females as naturally devout and virtuous 'angels of the household' were perceived as ultimately responsible for the degeneration of the Sikh faith. Uneducated, they were unable to give the "abstract faith of Sikhism" the estimation it deserved. According to British observations Sikh women were more likely than Sikh men, to turn to the dreaded Hindu tradition which was "easy to understand" and able to give "a colour and life to their religious exercises" not imparted by the "dry recital of obscure passages of the Granth." Highly superstitious, "the influence of the Brahmin [also] weigh[ed] more heavily on the women than on the men."¹⁴⁸ For the British as the self-defined 'keepers of the Sikh faith', Sikh womanhood, steeped in superstitious and 'hinduized' practices constituted an unwelcome impediment to the purification project of Sikhism.

¹⁴⁷ "The Place of Bengalis in Politics," *Fortnightly Review* 57 (Jan. - June 1892), p. 811, cited in Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p. 35.

¹⁴⁸ R.W. Falcon, *Handbook on Sikhs*, p. 21.

Counteracting the folly of Sikh women through education came to be understood as the most expedient means to the reform of a degenerate society. Accordingly, the Panjab Educational Department was instituted in 1856 with specific guidelines for the education of females. Yet progress was painfully slow, especially among the rural population, which forced the Government to appeal initially to the higher classes of Sikhs to support the cause of female education.¹⁴⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century the educational torch had been passed to the Singh Sabha reform movement. Needless to say, the Sikh intelligensia, carefully molded and educated to conform to British political designs benefited greatly from the 'politics of similarity' that had progressed under the tutelage of the Raj. The response of the Singh Sabha with regard to the corrupt condition and practices of Sikh females went far beyond that of education. Enthused by British Victorian customs and ethos these reformers also adopted and in some cases modified the prevailing gender constructions of the Raj. The ramifications of the melding of Victorian gender constructs with the hyper-masculine Sikh ethos of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the newly forged Sikh elite were profound and far-reaching. In essence, gender construction proved to be pivotal to the very enterprise of Singh Sabha reform.

¹⁴⁹ Baba Khem Bedi, the influential head of the priestly Bedi family became a staunch supporter of British efforts to educate females in the province. *Report on Popular Education in Panjab and its Dependencies, 1864-65*, Paragraph 36, cited in Govinder Kaur Sidhu, *A Historical Study of the Development of Female Education in Punjab Since 1849*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Amritsar: Department of Education, Guru Nanak Dev University, 1985, pp. 100-104.

Chapter Four:

Contextualizing Reform in Nineteenth Century Punjab: Continuity and Change

The last of the vast Indian frontier to be conquered by the British in 1849, Punjab was without doubt teeming with a complexity of economic, political, social and religious uncertainty. The British attempted to surmount the obvious difficulties of controlling the turbulent, widely dispersed population of the newly annexed province by establishing a benevolent, semi-military, authoritarian form of government.¹ The skilled, experienced and carefully chosen officials gathered to oversee the Punjab project were invested not only with administrative powers, but judicial as well. Accordingly, the architects of the 'Punjab School of Administration' led by John and Henry Lawrence set about their task of ensuring the optimal peaceable transition from Sikh domination to that of the Raj with a singular intent, to design and establish an administration which would ultimately ensure an attitude of loyal submission from the majority of Punjab's population.²

British procedure in the administration of Punjab had two initial foci: the placation of the bulk of the population that was comprised of rural peasants and the conciliation of the aristocracy who had lost their status as leaders of Punjab through the British take-over

¹ The framework of Punjab's administration in the mid-nineteenth century has been described as 'paternalistic', a form of benevolent authoritarian rule which prescribed and regulated the conduct of society in order to achieve the objectives imposed by the ruler. In Punjab, Henry and John Lawrence directed the project of paternalism, two highly skilled political veterans in British India. See Harold Lee, "John and Henry Lawrence and the Origins of Paternalist Rule in the Punjab, 1846-1858," *International Journal of Punjab Studies* 2, 1(1995), p. 65.

The most decisive analysis of the administrative and political workings of the Punjab Tradition is P. H. M. van den Dungen's, *The Punjab Tradition. Influence and Authority in Nineteenth-Century India* London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1972.

Van den Dungen maintains that the protective policy of the British to create and preserve a stable rural land base lay at the heart of the tradition; this translated into protective measures that culminated with the Punjab Alienation of Land Bill in 1900, which attempted to thwart the transfer of land from the major landholding groups to professional money-lenders due to agricultural indebtedness.

For an excellent overview of the development of the 'Punjab Tradition', see especially the chapter entitled "A Political Dilemma Emerges," pp. 42-109 in *ibid*.

See Chapter Five in this volume for a discussion of the Punjab Alienation of Land Bill.

² Henry Lawrence insisted that given the turbulence of the population of Punjab, "promptness, accessibility, brevity and kindness are the best engines of government...Be considerate and kind, not expecting too much from ignorant people. Make no change, unless certain of decided improvement in the

of the province. To secure the loyalty of both groups, the British administration endeavored to address their concerns and needs with remarkable foresight and benevolence. Given the fact that the stature of the Sikhs had diminished due to the decline of their empire *and* British admiration of the military prowess of the 'manly' Sikhs, the Punjab Administration particularly under Henry Lawrence conferred special privileges to both the peasant population as well as Sikh aristocracy. The loyalty of the Sikhs in particular during the uprising of 1857 only enhanced the ideals of the Punjab School of Administration.³ In the continued search for allies amongst the rural bulk of the population, the world's largest irrigation system was built under the auspices of the Raj, transforming the region from one of the poorest agricultural areas to the granary of India.⁴ Alongside the canals, agricultural colonies were developed and populated through recruitment tactics whereby ex-servicemen of the Indian army were rewarded with profitable grants of land in these Canal Colonies. The Sikh Jats in particular, well established in the preconceived notions of their manliness and loyalty to the British benefited greatly from the benevolent patronage of the Raj. Their well known abilities as agricultural cultivators *par excellence* as well as their categorization by the British as the pinnacle of the 'martial races' paved the way for their preferential treatment by the Punjab

substitute;" Lieut.-General J.J. McLeod Innes, *Sir Henry Lawrence. The Pacificator* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898, p. 115.

³ See Sir John Strachey, *India. Its Administration & Progress* Fourth edition, revised by Sir Thomas W. Holderness, London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1911 (first published in 1888), p. 510.

⁴ The Upper Bari Doab Canal was completed in 1861 whereby the Ravi River was tapped from the place it entered the plains. A canal was constructed which, after passing through the districts of Amritsar and Lahore, moved back into the Ravi above Multan. The 1870s saw the building of the Western Jumna Canal that watered the districts of Ambala, Karnal, Hissar and Rohtak. The Lower Chenab Canal was completed in 1892 and irrigated over a million acres of land. By 1922 the Chenab project had increased its range to irrigate 2.5 million acres. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India* Vol. XX, 1908, pp. 303-306. See also Malcolm Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* London: Oxford University Press, 1928 (first edition, 1925), p. 130.

Administration in the form of land grants in fertile regions and low land revenue demands.⁵ Further, the aristocratic leaders of Punjab, especially after lending support to the British during the Mutiny, benefited greatly from their auspicious show of loyalty by receiving jagirs, honourary ranks and titles and positions in local government from the Government.⁶ Leading religious families too were patronized, as well as the custodians of Gurdwaras, the *mahants* in particular.⁷ Through a “complex web of patronage” put in place by the Punjab Administration the British established what was for many years a highly successful framework for ensuring the intense loyalty of the Sikhs.⁸ According to Henry Lawrence:

The Sikhs *have* come to terms, and *have* settled down, because they have been treated well *by us*... The Sikhs perhaps care as little for their Government as do other natives of India; but like others they care for themselves, their jagirs, their patrimonial wells, gardens, and fields, their immunities and their honour. And in all these respects the Sikh and Jat population had much to lose. The Sikh position must not be mistaken. They are a privileged race, a large proportion have jagirs and rent-free lands; all hold their fields on more favourable terms than the Mussalmans around them.”⁹

From the 1860s onwards with the attainment of political stability, improved communications and irrigation systems, agricultural prices and land values increased significantly. Newly introduced crops and the ability to export goods due to the building of railway lines led to vast riches for Punjab’s cultivators, who quickly ranked amongst the

⁵ Dolores Domin, *India in 1857-59. A Study in the Role of the Sikhs in the People’s Uprising* Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1977, pp. 225- 226, 238.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 173-185.

⁷ British patronage of the Sikh religious elite remained advantageous to their political designs for many years to come. Baba Khem Singh Bedi, the head of leading Sikh religious family (a descendant of Guru Nanak who was held in special regard by the Sikh community) supported the British during the Mutiny by raising troops to stem the tide of insurrection. His continued support of the British administration in Punjab took many and varied forms. He pioneered vaccination projects amongst his followers, supported and sponsored female education, served as an honourary magistrate from 1877 onwards, and was knighted shortly before his death in 1904. Further, in return for British patronage the mahants of principal religious shrines issued *Hukamnamas* in support of the Raj in times of political crisis. See Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj, 1849-1947* Delhi: Manohar, 1988, pp. 52-53.

wealthiest on the Asian continent. Further, the Punjab Government "unlike any traditional oriental despot...allowed most of the increased agricultural profits to remain in the cultivators' hands. It pitched its revenue demand as low as possible."¹⁰

Dissension and Control: The Punjab Administration and Kuka Reform:

Alongside the well-manuevered schemes of the British to ensure loyalty from their Sikh subjects, a movement arose that scorned the British and their efforts to appease Sikh-loss-of-liberty though on a relatively small scale. The Namdharis were a Sikh sect led by Ram Singh from the village Bhaini, in Ludhiana district.¹¹ Followers of Ram Singh were alternatively called Kukas or shriekers, given the impetuous shrieking, dancing and removal of turbans occurring when they entered into a state of ecstasy.

⁸ Ibid., p. 53.

⁹ Innes, *Sir Henry Lawrence*, p. 92.

¹⁰ Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, p. 54.

The system of tax structure introduced by the British with the Permanent Settlement of 1793 called for conferral of revenue by landowners to British coffers regardless of their varying circumstances. Drought, flood or any other unforeseen expense inevitably led to an increase in the number of landless and impoverished peasants. See Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, eds., *Women Writing in India. 600 B.C. to the present* Vol. 1, New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1991, pp. 146-147. Conversely, in Punjab, the Administration went to great lengths to revise their earlier policies that were responsible for the increasing indebtedness in the greater part of India, through low revenue demands and extensive land grants to the Punjab peasantry.

¹¹ Numbers vary as to the actual numbers of the Namdhari sect. In 1871 the Kukas claimed a membership of nearly one million adherents. Other estimates put the figure between forty and sixty members by 1863, which rose to one hundred thousand by 1871. See Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* The New Cambridge History of India, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 92.

The census of 1891 however listed a membership of 10,541 that rose to 13,788 by 1901. See Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs. Volume 2: 1839-1988* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 134. According to Harjot Oberoi, a major reason for the discrepancies in the actual numbers of Namdhari Sikhs can be traced to the lack of clear distinctions between the sect and the wider Sikh community, leading to the overlapping of categories in the mid-nineteenth century. Certainly as the Namdhari ideology became increasingly militant the differences came to a head and efforts were made by the Sikh establishment to distance themselves from the movement. Harjot Oberoi, "Brotherhood of the Pure: The Poetics and Politics of Cultural Transgression," *Modern Asian Studies* 26, 1 (1992), fn # 8, p. 161.

Certainly varied and widely divergent attempts have been made to circumscribe and interpret the Namdhari movement. Punjab administrators in the 1870s, confronting what they understood as 'fanatical' anti-British behaviour, characterized the Namdharis as a wild Sikh sect. Indian nationalists eulogized the Kukas as the first anti-imperialist group in Punjab. More recently, Kukas have been presented as a millenarian community arising in response to specific socio-economic circumstances with close ties to Sikh cosmological assumptions.¹² As a millenarian reform movement its primary focus was on the restoration of ritual purity and holiness. The latter approach is helpful in that it moves beyond an either vengeful focus or elementary glorification and necessitates and examination of what the movement meant for its adherents, their utilization and significance of symbols, imagery, behavioural codes, as well as socio-political circumstances.

Little is known about Ram Singh; born in 1816, Ram Singh assisted his father who was a carpenter. By the time he was twenty he left Bhaini to join Ranjit Singh's army. Disillusioned by the deterioration of the Sikh empire following the death of Maharajah Ranjit Singh, Ram Singh left the army just before the Anglo-Sikh war of 1845 and returned to his native village. He became known for his miraculous powers, leading to an unknown number of followers. In 1855 Ram Singh opened a shop to earn his living, while at the same time collecting around him a nucleus of disciples, most of whom were former soldiers of the Lahore regiments. Upon Ram Singh's declaration of being the

¹² See W.H. McLeod, "The Kukas: A Millenarian Sect of the Punjab," *The Panjab Past and Present* Vol. XIII-I (April 1979), pp. 164-187, and Oberoi, "Brotherhood of the Pure," *Modern Asian Studies*, pp. 157-197. See also Fauja Singh Bajwa, *Kuka Movement* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965, M.M. Ahluwalia, *Kukas. The Freedom Fighters of the Panjab* Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1965

reincarnation of Guru Gobind Singh he was ardently rejected by orthodox Sikhs who maintained that the line of living gurus as having ended with Guru Gobind Singh in 1708.

By the 1860s the Government had taken a keen interest in Kuka activities. Initially, British attitudes towards the Namdharis were favourable, commending the reforming efforts of the group, their strict morality and high ideals.¹³ Ensuing interest and not little concern stemmed from repeated reports of Kukas desecrating and demolishing village shrines;¹⁴ given their vehement belief in cow protection, Kukas were being hanged by 1871 on charges of the murders of butchers. More importantly for the purposes at hand, Kukas refused to endorse the new system augmented by the British. They spurned transportation on the extensive railway built by the new rulers, rejected government employment and educational opportunities and disregarded British postal services and the judicial system.¹⁵ Further, they displayed their aversion towards English textiles by

and Yogendra Bali and Kalika Bali, *The Warriors in White. Glimpses of Kooka History* Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1995.

¹³ A report from the Inspector General of Police in 1867 warmly acknowledged the efforts of the Namdharis to restore the Sikh religion to its original purity, insisting that the movement was one with purely religious motives. See Bhai Nahar Singh and Bhai Kirpal Singh, eds., *Rebels Against the British Rule (Guru Ram Singh and the Kuka Sikhs)* New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1989, pp. 68-69.

This useful volume is a collection of official police and government reports dealing with the Kukas from 1863-1880, (hereafter cited as *Rebels*).

Another report in 1863 summarizes the Kukas as follows: "He [Guru Ram Singh] abolishes all distinctions of caste among Sikhs; advocates indiscriminate marriages of all classes; enjoins the marriage of widows, all which he performs himself; he never takes alms himself and prohibits his followers from doing so; enjoins abstinence from liquors and drugs...he exhorts his disciples to be cleanly and truth-telling and it is well that every man carries his staff; and they all do; the Granth is their only accepted inspired volume..." Dept. of Home Progs. 273-284 of August 1872, cited in Ahluwalia, *Kukas*, p. 47. The Kuka reforms outlined by officials were precisely those aspects of Sikh society observed by the British as damaging to the Sikh community at large; the position of widows, caste observances among the Sikhs, alm-taking, the centrality of popular religious rites and forms, and the effects of drinking among Sikhs. The admiration of the Kukas in these early British reports stems from the Administration's concern for and criticism of the degenerate state of Sikhism in the early to mid-nineteenth century.

¹⁴ The desecration of shrines was consistent with Namdhari beliefs that rejected the veneration of the sainted dead, an important aspect of the popular religiosity of rural Punjab.

¹⁵ British authorities were well aware of the Namdharis' rejection of the various systems put in place by them. In 1868 information was passed on to the authorities noting that the "Kookas have a private dak of

wearing distinctly indigenous clothing made out of white Indian fabric.¹⁶ Given their overt anti-British, anti-Western notions and the increasing incidents of violence carried out by Namdhari adherents against kine butchers, the Punjab administration's apprehension intensified. British concern led to the awareness of their need to come to a deeper understanding of the Sikh religion, which had ostensibly given birth to the 'rebel' movement. The Government turned its attention to Sikh scripture, calling upon the

their own, going about with letters or verbal message; this man goes in great haste to a certain stage where he is relieved by another, who takes from him either the letter or verbal message; their strict order is not to exchange a syllable with any individual whilst conveying things. We ought to be very careful in this." Foreign-Political-A Progs. 383-85 of September, 1868, cited in Ahluwalia, *Kukas*, p. 67. With regard to the education of Namdharis, Guru Ram Singh insisted that the ability to read and memorize scripture was essential for all, males and females. Proper prayer and worship rituals were definitively tied to the moral universe the Namdharis envisioned as well as essential to the reform of the Sikh community. "Without education prayers cannot be properly learnt... See, my daughter everything is due to prayer and worship: otherwise we see the condition of our own brotherhood. Hence, my daughter, let all girls and boys devote themselves to worship." "Translation of Paper No. 8," in Jaswinder Singh, *Kuka Movement. Freedom Struggle in Punjab. Documents, 1880-1903 A.D.* Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, p. 55. This is a useful volume of translations of the correspondence between the exiled Guru Ram Singh in Burma and his adherents in Punjab as well as official letters pertaining to Guru Ram Singh and his followers.

¹⁶ While for centuries India had exported fine cloth to the world, in 1813 under pressure from Britain's Lancashire textile industry, the British government imposed a high tariff on the import of Indian textiles. British goods on the other hand had virtually unlimited entry into India. The results on the Indian textile industry were shattering. Between 1814 and 1835 British cotton goods exported to India rose from one million yards to thirty-one million yards. On the other hand, Indian cotton goods exported in the same seventeen years declined to one-thirteenth of their original proportions. Weavers who had supplied fine muslins and brocades to the aristocracy in India and the world were no longer in demand; thriving textile towns were laid to waste. Further, new tariffs and shifts in textile production, both in Europe and India had profound ramifications for peasants in all locations. While in Europe displaced weavers and peasants found employment in the new industries put in place by the Industrial Revolution, in India this same population was left in an increasingly vulnerable position; fieldwork became the sole option for those who had earlier contributed to the textile industry. When the rains failed and harvests were poor, or during the months when there was little to do in the fields, textile workers wove their own, coarser cotton clothes but little else. The changing economic conditions had a particularly devastating effect on women's work in particular; while weavers had little option but to find work in the new plantations set up by the British, women were necessitated to stay back and take charge of the household, increasingly dependent on the earnings of their men. Tharu and Lalita, eds., *Women Writing in India*, pp. 146-148.

See also A.K. Bagchi, "De-industrialization in India in the Nineteenth Century: Some Theoretical Implications," *Journal of Development Studies* 12, 1975-1976, pp. 135-164.

Namdhari opposition to the effects of the English textile industry and sole endorsement of Indian cloth is a crucial indicator of their unqualified condemnation of the commercial system put in place by their new rulers. It also points to a thorough awareness of the subsequent devastation of the textile industry in India. A chilling observation by Governor General Bentinck lent itself well to this state of affairs: "The bones of the cotton weavers are bleaching the plains of India," he wrote in 1834. See William Bentinck, in

services of Ernest Trumpp a renowned German Indologist, to translate the *Adi Granth*.¹⁷

In essence, the administration wished to ascertain whether Ram Singh's anti-establishment ideology had its basis in Sikh scripture. The project, riddled with difficulties from its inception, was published in 1877 upon Trumpp's return to Munich in 1872.¹⁸ Officials in consultation with Trumpp concluded that the political bias of the Kuka creed was far removed from the harmonious message of the Sikh scriptural tradition.¹⁹ Satisfied that

Rajani Palme Dutt, *India Today*, Calcutta: Manisha, 1947 (first published 1940), p. 82, cited in Tharu and Lalita, eds., *Women Writing in India*, p. 148.

¹⁷ Earnest Trumpp was hired by the Secretary of State in 1869 to translate the *Adi Granth*, though the project was planned as early as 1859. After the annexation of Punjab in 1849, British designs included the translation of both the *Adi Granth* and the *Dasam Granth*. Robert Cust, a Civil Servant of the East India Company offered to translate both works, provided he was given both release time and funds. At that time, the project did not materialize. See N.G. Barrier, "Trumpp and Macauliffe: Western Students of Sikh History and Religion," in Fauja Singh, ed., *Historians and Historiography of the Sikhs* New Delhi: Oriental Publishers & Distributors, 1978, pp. 167-68.

However, with the perceived threat of the Namdhari movement the need to translate Sikh scriptures became increasingly urgent. Accordingly, in 1869, little effort was spared to carry out this project. See Correspondence in Foreign Political 1859, April 8, 141-142, cited in *ibid.*, p. 167.

¹⁸ According to Trumpp, after meeting with *granthis* in 1870 he was dismayed with their lack of comprehensive understanding of their scripture as well as the paucity of dependable commentaries to elucidate the meaning of the *Adi Granth*. However, with some assistance Trumpp was able to read through the *Granth*, making notes of the grammatical forms of the text and drawing up a grammar and dictionary with which he proceeded to translate the scripture upon his return to Europe in 1872. See Ernest Trumpp, "Preface," *The Adi Granth or the Holy Scriptures of the Sikhs* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970, (first published in 1877), p. v.

Another version of the circumstances surrounding Trumpp's dissatisfaction with Sikh religious literati is noted by Max Arthur Macauliffe, a near contemporary of Trumpp. He noted in a damning report: "On Dr. Trumpp's arrival in the Punjab he received an official introduction to the Sikh priests at Amritsar and they waited on him on his arrival there to begin his work. He told them that he was a Sanskrit scholar, that he understood their sacred writings better than they did themselves, and by way of emphasizing his remarks, pulled out his cigar case and perfumed with it the *Adi Granth* which was laying on the table before him." Tobacco was considered an abhorrence to the Sikhs, and they fled from his presence.

According to Macauliffe, this was the reason why Trumpp was unable to receive adequate assistance during his time in Punjab. M.A. Macauliffe, "The Holy Scriptures of the Sikhs," *Asiatic Quarterly Review*, October, 1910, pp. 1-2, cited in Darshan Singh, *Western Perspective on the Sikh Religion* Delhi: Sehgal Publishers Services, 1991, pp. 30-31.

Whether the story is genuine is perhaps open to debate, but the reaction to Trumpp himself, his translation and his disparaging remarks about the Sikh sacred literature led to significant protest from Sikh leaders. A petition to the India office was drawn up condemning Trumpp's efforts in light of the substantial monetary costs of the project to the British Government. See Mandajit Kaur, "A Documentary Evidence on the Sikh Reaction at Trumpp's translation of the *Adi Granth*," *Punjab History Conference Proceedings* Fourteenth Session, (March 1980), p. 222.

¹⁹ "Copy of Notes of Conversation held with a view to ascertain if *Adi Granth* throws any light upon the political history of the Sikhs," Proceedings, Foreign Gen., A, January, 1874, No. 3, (NAI), cited in Nazer

the untainted core of Sikhism's ideology was not incompatible with the designs of the Raj, officials went to great lengths to uplift and support an interpretation of Sikhism conducive to their own value system and designs in Punjab.

The Genesis of the Punjab Intelligentsia:

In the midst of this process, an educational and literary society was initiated by G.W. Leitner, the newly appointed Principal of Government College, Lahore in 1865. The Anjuman-i-Punjab was a multi-faceted movement with numerous aims which included the revival of ancient and classical studies by traditional scholars trained in Western methods of critical thinking as well as the creation of modern literature in the vernaculars through the translation of European and Western works. One of the initial ventures of the society was the creation of a 'Free Public Library' in Lahore. Within a year the library had acquired 1431 volumes through donations from British officials and the monetary contributions of the landed gentry.²⁰ The 'Orient movement', another offshoot of the Anjuman endeavoured to establish an Oriental University to give a more popular indigenous character to the existing system of education by making the vernaculars of India the medium of instruction for the European sciences. As well, close association with the 'natural leaders' of Punjab was promoted through the representation of the chiefs, leading zamindars, priests and merchants in the management of educational institutions.

Singh, "Notes on the Anjuman-Punjab, Aligarh Movement, Brahmo Samaj, Indian Association, Arya Samaj and Singh Sabha in the Context of Colonial Education in the Punjab, 1865-1885," *Punjab Past and Present* Vol. XXVI-I (April 1992), p. 64.

²⁰ Given the fact that print material was still fairly uncommon in Punjab during the late 1800's the 'Free Library' became a focal point for the growing numbers of the Lahore literati. See Harjot Oberoi, *The*

These objectives were put in place largely to promote the bridging of the cultural-political gap between the rulers and the natives, as well as the immense discontinuity between the minute number of educated Indians and the vast bulk of illiterate peasantry. It was thought that given the participation of the scholarly classes such as the *pandits* and *maulvies*, Indian languages, literature and thought would be given their due recognition. Further, the Anjuman was influential in the formation of Panjab University College in Lahore in 1869. Leitner played a key role in the educational establishment, subsequently moving to the position of Registrar of the Senate, an appointed body that was largely responsible for the higher-education needs and strategies planned for the region. The movement became immensely popular with the Punjabi aristocracy as well as with Europeans, both officials and non-officials. The participation and support of British officials in particular gave the Anjuman a position of prominence, leading to lavish donations to support the University stratagem by wealthy Punjab Chiefs.²¹

The year 1872 saw the culmination of Namdhari agitation ending in British massacres of Kukas and the subsequent exile of Guru Ram Singh to Rangoon, Burma.²² On January 15, one hundred and twenty Namdharis attempted to invade the town of Malerkotla where they were met by well-armed state troops who were warned in advance

Construction of Religious Boundaries. Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 231-232.

²¹ Leitner's championing of the establishment of an Oriental University was not successful. Instead, Lahore Oriental College with 'provincial' status was created. It began as a school in 1865 and moved to College status in 1872-73; it too was run by the Punjab University College Senate. Leitner's Anjuman-i-Punjab became the informal Manager to the educational complex consisting of Oriental College, Punjab University College and the Government College, Lahore. See Nazer Singh, "Notes," *Punjab Past and Present*, pp. 35-38.

²² Guru Ram Singh was transported to Allahabad on January 18, 1872, and from there exiled to Burma until his death on November 29th 1885. Kukas however believe that Guru Ram Singh escaped from the British jail and took up residence in the suburbs of Mergui. Thus, a prophecy of Guru Ram Singh's was fulfilled, in which he had forewarned the controversy surrounding his death. He had claimed that the

of the approaching contingent. On the same day troops from the Sikh principality of Patiala captured sixty-eight Kukas and transported them to Malerkotla. There, L. Cowan, the Officiating Deputy-Commissioner of Ludhiana district, ordered forty-nine of the offenders to be blown from canons without a legal trial. The following day T.D. Forsyth, Commissioner of the Ambala Division had sixteen more Namdharis blown away from guns, this time after a brief trial. For the administration, the immediate and brutal suppression of a group it interpreted as conflicting with the interests of the civil society set up by the Raj was deemed legitimate and suitable, given overt Namdhari anti-British attitudes and activities.²³

The year following the altercations between the Raj and the Namdhari Sikhs was an eventful one for the Sikh community. Needless to say, Sikh leaders were well aware of a possible plunge from the lofty heights of British estimation of their community. Fearful of losing their favoured status, Sikh leaders went to great lengths to demonstrate their unwavering loyalty to the Raj.²⁴ At the same time, when in 1873 four Sikh students at a Christian mission school in Amritsar pledged their intent to convert to Christianity, an alarm reverberated through the Sikh community. Sikh leaders feared a headlong race of

"body can sustain for 250 years," leading Kukas to believe that Ram Singh is still alive in the present day. See Ahluwalia, *Kukas*, pp. 171-173.

²³ Letter from T.D. Forsyth, Esp., C.B. Commissioner of Ambala, to The Secretary to the Government of Panjab, 19 January, 1872, in *Rebels*, pp. 213-217.

²⁴ A group of well respected Sikh sardars addressing the lieutenant governor in Amritsar in 1872, denounced the Kukas as a "wicked and misguided sect" who had injured the hard fought honour and loyalty of the Sikh community in the estimation of the government, through "their misconduct and evil designs," and "well-nigh leveled with the dust the services we [the Sikhs] had rendered to the government, such as those for instance performed in 1857..." *The Englishman*, March 23, 1872, cited in Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. 2, p. 133.

Troops of the Maharajahs of Patiala, Nabha and Jind had given ample assistance to the British during the altercations with the Kukas in January of 1872. See Telegram, 17th Jan, 1872, Deputy Commissioner, Panjab Government to Home Secretary, Calcutta, reproduced in *Rebels*, p. 183.

In a further show of loyalty to the British Government, the Maharajah of Patiala subsequently ordered the arrest of all known Kukas in his state in a Proclamation dated 19th January, 1872. *Rebels*, pp. 242-244.

their brightest and most educated minds to the religion of their new rulers. They were thus faced with a dual predicament: losing the patronage dependant on their favoured standing with the British as well as a growing need to cement the bonds of their community to ensure that the movement towards Christian conversion be checked. Having taken part in associations playing an important role in the cultural, religious and political transformation of Punjab, Sikh leaders were well aware of the benefits, methods and means of group formation.²⁵

Subsequently they too initiated the process by which a common platform was established to protect and bolster Sikh interests. The Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Amritsar was inaugurated in 1873 as the first purely Sikh association aimed at expressing the indisputable loyalty of Sikhs towards the British, as well as the upliftment and reformation of Sikhism. It represented the needs, values and loyalties of a select, highly placed group of men, including religious leaders and members of the Sikh aristocracy.²⁶ Certainly, this segment of society was most anxious to maintain the ties of loyalty towards the British administration given its preferential treatment regarding patronage privileges. While there had been other groups dedicated to the modification of prevalent Sikh conditions, these

²⁵ The conquest of Punjab had created an urgent need for educated Indians to staff government and missionary offices and institutions. Bengalis were the first of the educated Indian elite to fill these positions. With them they brought existing organizations such as the Brahmo Samaj, founded in Lahore in 1863, which attracted a number of Sikhs to its fold. Bhagat Lakshman Singh's autobiography is explicit about the esteemed role played by the Brahmo Samaj in Lahore. "[T]o belong to the Brahmo Samaj or to rank amongst its sympathizers was to belong to the intellectual aristocracy of Lahore. The Brahmo Samaj Mandir, was, thus, the only place where one could hope to meet Indians of advanced views on religion and social reform." Lakshman Singh continues that he had close associations with the Brahmo leaders and their organization. See Ganda Singh, ed., *Bhagat Lakshman Singh, Autobiography* Calcutta: Sikh Cultural Centre, 1965, pp. 40-41.

²⁶ Notable aristocrats and religious leaders including *pujaris*, *gianis*, *granthis*, *udasis* and *nirmalas* attended the first session of the Amritsar Singh Sabha. For an excellent analysis of the forces generating and sustaining the newly established Singh Sabha, see Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, especially pp. 207-304. This volume remains the most comprehensive and well-balanced study of the Singh Sabha reform movement among the Sikhs.

efforts had been limited to sects and groups considered heterodox or on the periphery of the Sikh faith.²⁷ In contrast the newly established Singh Sabha was composed of well-respected political and religious leaders, well within the fold of Sikhism.²⁸

²⁷ Both the Nirankaris and Namdharis were nineteenth century Sikh sects advocating the reformation of a 'decadent' and 'degenerate' Sikh tradition. Dayal Das, the leader of the Nirankari community called for a return to the pristine Sikhism of its origins. The Nirankaris repudiated the Brahmanic priesthood, idols and many of their accompanying rituals. New ceremonies and codes were established by the Nirankaris to allow for the elimination of Brahmans, including birth, death, marriage and naming rituals. Further, they insisted on the elimination of beliefs surrounding the uncleanness of women at childbirth. Baba Dayal Das died in 1855 succeeded by his son Darbara Singh, who continued the efforts to transform the existing state of Sikhism. In essence, the Nirankaris focussed on the ideology of Guru Nanak, the first Sikh guru, insisting on the worship of God's formless nature, as opposed to the more militant and ritualized philosophy of Guru Gobind Singh. Though their ranks were open to both the baptized and non-baptized within the Sikh fold, the Nirankari community drew its membership largely from the urban, non-Jat section of Sikhs.

The Namdharis, as already noted, also advocated a 'pure' Sikhism, but focussed instead on ideals constituted through the formation of the Khalsa, whereby baptized initiates were required to exhibit their adherence through distinct outward garb and obvious Sikh symbols. The Namdharis too advocated the abandonment of gods and goddesses, idols, and the Brahmanic priesthood and condemned popular religious forms such as the worship of graves, tombs, trees, snakes and saints. They extended their focus to include reforms for women, insisting that women also undergo initiation through baptism, advocated widow remarriage, rejected dowries, and forbade child marriage. Further, they denounced the special status awarded to members of the lineage of the Sikh gurus, the Sodhis and Bedis, as well as the authority of the hereditary custodians of Sikh gurdwaras, the mahants. The Namdharis attracted people from the peasant and untouchable castes, particularly the Jat community that had initially heeded the call of Guru Gobind Singh. Through the community's emphasis on strength and martial qualities, adherents were transformed into a disciplined and well-organized group, believing themselves to be the 'true' bearers of Sikhism. They too initiated their own rituals, symbols and ceremonies. The Namdharis in particular, given their vehement denouncement of Brahmans and the orthodox religious establishment within the Sikh community quickly ran into the opposition of prominent Sikh leaders. As already noted, in the case of the Namdharis, this included conflict with the British administration.

For information on the Nirankaris see John B. Webster, *Nirankari Sikhs* New Delhi: Macmillan, 1979, Harbans Singh, "Sikh faith and the Nirankaris: A historical perspective," *Punjab Past and Present* 13 (1) 1979, pp. 220-226, Ganda Singh, *Sikhism and Nirankari Movement* Patiala: Guru Nanak Dev Mission, 1978. For an analysis and comparison of the Nirankari and Namdhari movements in light of the later reforms brought in by the Singh Sabha movement, see Kenneth Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform*, pp. 87-94. Jones defines both movements as 'transitional', linking "the pre-colonial period with the era of English political domination, and if successful, over time with the colonial milieu. Once in contact with it, transitional movements made limited adjustments to that environment." In the case of the Namdharis, this included a definitive rejection of the British social structure. The Nirankaris, on the other hand, did not clash with the British, but flourished in part, due to the establishment of British rule, given the ensuing restriction of Sikh government. Jones contrasts these movements with others termed 'acculturative', those that originated within the colonial milieu and were led by individuals who were products of the cultural interaction with the Raj. The difference according to Jones, is primarily in their time of origin. See pp. 3-4.

²⁸ See N. Gerald Barrier, "Introduction," *The Sikhs and their Literature. A Guide to Tracts, Books and Periodicals, 1849-1919* Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1970.

British administrators looked upon this reformatory process within the Sikh community with favour. They had long expressed their dissatisfaction with what they considered the inconsistency between the ideals of Sikhism and its actual state in the nineteenth century.²⁹ More importantly for their purposes the leaders of the Amritsar Singh Sabha had hitherto professed and exhibited their allegiance with the British cause; thus English officials viewed the formation of the Sabha as a propitious vehicle for furthering their educational, social and political agenda. The lack of education in particular among the Sikhs was an obstacle that the Administration had sought early on in its mandate to remedy.³⁰ In line with the religious reform initiatives of the Sabha,

²⁹ As noted above, the British had initially supported the reform initiatives of the Namdhari, but following the increasingly anti-British ethos of the Kukas, all Namdhari contributions to the reformation of Sikh society were vilified.

³⁰ According to the Census of 1881, the "Sikhs are the most uneducated class in the Punjab." *Census Report of India, 1881* Part I, pp. 38-39.

In other parts of the country, particularly in Bengal education had become a key focus of the new rulers of India. Beginning with the East India Company's Charter Act of 1813, officials took on the assumption of a new responsibility towards the education of Indians. Following the opening of centres of higher learning the English Education Act of 1835 made English the medium of instruction in Indian education. Alongside this development came the decision to inculcate Indians with a Christian, anglo-liberal based teaching as opposed to 'Orientalist Conservative' thought that advocated methods of instruction rooted in the Indian vernacular languages as well as the endorsement of Indian culture and religion. This decision however was not without its critics; debates both in India and Britain raged over the question of how the educational schema in India was to proceed. Francis Warden a British parliamentarian argued decisively about the benefits of the British educational system to Company rule in India, insisting that if "education should not produce a rapid change in their opinions on the fallacy of their own religion, it will at least render them more honest and industrious subjects." Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, 1831-32*, "Minute by Francis Warden, December 29, 1832," 9:520, cited in Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest. Literary Study and British Rule in India* New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, p. 89. Proficiency in the English language became the key to success for Indians applying for the coveted government service positions. With the Dispatch of the Court of Directors in 1854 (sometimes called the 'Magna Carta' of English education in India) leading to the establishment of universities and Provincial departments of education, English based education acquired an even firmer footing in India. Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest* cited from above is an excellent analysis of the often polarized and varied forces and motives behind the establishment and development of education policies by the British in India.

Punjab, as the last province to be annexed lagged far behind other areas in India and consequently, the Punjab Administration made concerted efforts to convince the education-wary Punjabis, particularly the Sikh Jat population of the need for a solid educational foundation for both males and females. While Sikh Jats hesitantly endorsed the education of boys, the education of girls remained a more contentious issue. However, the effects of a purely anglo-based education on the Bengalis were already making

admission to Leitner's Oriental College was initially restricted to those whose parents were hereditary religious leaders. This in essence was to yield new religious leaders and teachers who would have considerable influence in the moral uplifting and religious renewal of Punjabi society. Correspondingly, their traditional standing in the Punjabi community was expected to raise the prestige of the college. Further, Leitner started a 'Punjabi class' in the college in 1877-78, where Gurmukhi and the Adi Granth were taught.³¹ Although there was some opposition to the apparent bias of the so-called religiously neutral College, Leitner's indelible influence among the education authorities allowed for the continuance of the class. 'Orientalist' objectives to develop and further indigenous languages *and* the attainment of twofold Singh Sabha demands for the upliftment of Punjabi and 'Western-educated' interpreters of Sikh scriptures were thereby fulfilled.³²

Following closely on the heels of the overt sanctioning of Sikh reformative efforts at Oriental College came another weighty educational controversy. In 1879 the Government decided to raise Punjab University College to University standing. For many the decision, following the abolition of Delhi College in 1877, was indicative of attempts

themselves known in the form of nationalist rhetoric and opposition to the discriminatory policies of the Raj, particularly by those who were well equipped with the liberal, utilitarian message of Western thought. Education authorities attempted to evade similar developments in Punjab by supporting and developing a system, which had as its foundation the vernaculars of Punjab, as opposed to a wholly anglicized scheme. See G.W. Leitner, *History of Indigenous Education in the Panjab. Since Annexation and in 1882*. Patiala: Languages Department Punjab, 1971, (first published 1883). See also Sana Ullah Khan, *A History of Education in the Punjab. Volume I. (Primary Education)* Lahore: Rai Sahib M. Gulab Singh & Sons, 1932, especially pp. i-30.

³¹ Significantly, the Punjabi class at the Oriental College was even officially labeled the 'Bhai class'. During 1878-79 there were a total of seventeen boys in this class. Nine of them were sons of granthis, mahants, and practicing pandits. Nazer Singh, "Notes," *Punjab Past and Present*, p. 39.

³² To secure the loyalty of Punjab's landowning class, Aitchinson College was founded in 1886 in Lahore to educate the sons of the principal landowners. Admission was by and large restricted to Punjab's rural elite. As was the case with other Sikh groups given preferential treatment at the various institutions of

to conclusively distinguish Punjab's educational policy from that of Calcutta University, of which Delhi College had been an affiliate. The fears, particularly those of Punjab's Brahmo Samajists and others of the intelligentsia who were products or supporters of the Calcutta system, revolved around questions regarding the nature of Punjab education. Would Punjab University simply be an extension of Oriental College, which sought to downplay the English language and western sciences through its concentration upon Indian classical studies?³³ At the announcement of the College's status change in 1879, Lord Lytton, the Viceroy, referred to the distinctions between the principles of the Punjab scheme of education and those upon which the University of Calcutta was operating. First, he noted, vernacular languages would be the medium of instruction. Secondly,

the object of instruction shall be to develop the sentiment of enlightened loyalty by association with it all those sentiments of natural reverence, duty and self-respect which every race inherited from the highest types of its own special character, whatever that character may be; and of whatever the religion may be; natural sources instinctively revered.³⁴

For some, these distinctions only bolstered concerns that the Administration was attempting to isolate Punjab from Bengal (and the nationalist movement led by educated Bengalis) by denying the people of Punjab the facilities for higher, English-based education, already in place through the Calcutta system; these educational measures had

learning, restricted access to British education inculcated a sense of emotional attachment and loyalty to the Raj for students of the College. See Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, p. 57.

³³ Leitner was the Registrar of Punjab University College. The close association of Oriental College with Punjab University College was completed in 1876 when Leitner became the Honorary Superintendent of the former. The indelible 'Orientalist' aims of Leitner, given his prominent position at the helm of both institutions, gave cause for alarm by those members of society who rejected his educational schemes. See Nazer Singh, "Notes," *Punjab Past and Present*, p. 38.

³⁴ Lord Lytton, Convocation Address, Punjab University College, April 12, 1879, *Supplement to Civil and Military Gazette* Lahore, 16th April, 1879, cited in *ibid.*, p. 40.

previously led to successful bidding for government employment in the region.³⁵ And indeed, the Punjab Administration dreaded the spread of anti-British sentiment believed to have been engendered by the a-religious, liberal, utilitarian thought which had taken root in the educated elite of Bengal. Believing that the threat of the freethinking 'effeminate' Bengal was minimal in comparison to a possible anti-Government backlash of the 'manly' Punjabis, the authorities insisted that Government-sponsored education be accompanied by a thorough religious curriculum.³⁶

Simultaneous to the linguistic and religious revival of the Sikhs in the higher centres of learning was the inauguration of the Arya Samaj reform movement in Punjab. Swami Dayanand's iconoclastic monotheism and egalitarian message flourished in a region where Brahmanic authority had a weakened hold on both the religious and cultural establishment.³⁷ Accepting the invitation of a number of Brahmos, Hindus and Sikhs,

³⁵ The controversy led to open division in the Anjuman-i-Punjab. One faction supported the Government's decision (and Leitner's advocating thereof) to elevate the College to University status. The second faction, believing a strong Western, English based education to be the panacea for India's problems with regard to social reforms and Indian advancement in Government ranks, resolutely opposed the underlying designs of the decision. The ardent 'Anglicist' Sayyid Ahmed Khan and his Aligarh Movement, independent of the Anjuman's internal opposition became the chief spokesperson against the 'Orientalist' agenda in Punjab, and a leading critic of Leitner. He renounced the education policies of the Government by insisting that "the regeneration of India depends entirely upon the spread of English education among the natives." "The Aligarh Institute Gazette, 27th November, 1880," reproduced in *Report on the Native Newspapers, Punjab*, Jan-Dec., 1880, p. 829, in *ibid.*, p. 44.

³⁶ The Anjuman's news organ, the *Akhbar-i-Anjuman-i-Punjab*, an Urdu weekly insisted that "the Government should patronage only those men who distinguish themselves both in Eastern and Western Science and adhere to their religion, and not the so called votaries of Western Science who are free thinkers and whose conduct is calculated to promote disaffection towards the Government." "The *Akhbar-i-Anjuman-i-Punjab*," 10th Dec., 1880, in *Report on the Native Newspapers, Punjab*, Jan. - Dec., 1880, p. 832, *ibid.*, p. 45.

Given Leitner's close association both with the Anjuman and the Government, his remarks are indicative of the Administration's sentiments.

³⁷ In the years of 1863 to 1872 Dayanand was transformed from *sanyasi* to social and religious reformer in large part due to his increasing interaction with anglicized Indians. In 1872 he was invited to Calcutta by Debendranath Tagore, which resulted in close contact with Brahmo Samaj leaders. Though he established Sabhas in both Gujarat and Maharashtra, they had little impact on their respective societies and soon folded. It was only upon Dayanand's arrival in Punjab in the late 1870's that the movement

Swami Dayanand arrived in Punjab in 1877. A number of highly educated and influential Sikhs took part in Arya activities during the initial stages of Arya expansion. The amorous alliance soured quickly however, when Swami Dayanand and his followers in the name of Vedic revival began a series of fiery attacks on the Sikh gurus and the Sikh religion.³⁸

took hold and expanded, becoming perhaps the most influential of the varied groups attempting to reform Punjabi society.

³⁸ According to Dayanand, Sikhism was one of the numerous sects of Hinduism. "Nanakji had noble aims, but he had no learning. He knew the language of the villages of his country. He had no knowledge of Vedic scriptures or Sanskrit... Therefore he spoke against the Vedas before his pupils and at times spoke in praise of them too. Had he said nothing in praise, people might have tabooed him as an atheist." Given the Vedic thrust of the Swami's message, Sanskrit became the key to true knowledge. Thus Nanak's contributions to the purification of Hinduism could not last. This led, ultimately to subsequent teachings of the Gurus and their followers to degenerate into idolatry. "They do not worship idols, but they worship the *Grantha Saheb* which is as good as idolatry... Just as the priests of temples ask their devotees to see the goddess and offer presents to her, similarly the Sikhs worship the book and present gifts to it." Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya, *The Light of Truth. English Translation of Swami Dayananda's Satyarth Prakasha* Allahabad: The Kala Press, 1960 (first published in 1875), pp. 522-523, 525.

Devotees of Swami Dayanand furthered the crusade against the contemporary practices of the Sikhs. Lala Guru Datta in 1888 sharply criticized the community insisting that Guru Govind Singh was "not even a hundredth part like our Maharishi Swami Dayanand Saraswati and it is difficult to say whether the Sikhs have any religion or not, but surely they have no knowledge of any kind... If Swami Dayanand Saraswati Maharaj called Guru Nanak a great fraud, what did it matter? He held the sum of the Vedas in his hands, so if he wanted to compare this light with anything, what was that?" Bhai Amar Singh, *Arya Samaj aur Us Ki Bani ki Taraf se Dunya ke Mukhtalif Hadian Mazhab ki be-i-Izzati* (Disrespect of the Leaders of Various Religions of the World by the Arya Samaj and its Founder) Lahore: Dev Bidhan Press, 1890, pp. 23-24, cited in Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharm. Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab* Delhi: Manohar, 1989, pp. 137-138.

See also Kenneth W. Jones, "Ham Hindu Nahin: Arya-Sikh Relations, 1877-1905," *Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. XXXII, No. 3 (May 1973).

Similarly, members of the Brahmo Samaj, though initially committed to supporting Dayanand's reform initiatives, were quickly alienated from the inner core of Arya devotees in response to the Swami's ardent insistence on Vedic infallibility and criticism of established Brahmo beliefs. Dayanand succeeded in attracting a great number of Brahmos into the Arya fold, particularly non-Bengali members. The Punjabi elite became increasingly suspicious of the 'imported' ideology and membership of the Brahmo Samaj, thereby hampering Brahmo expansion and influence in the Punjab reform endeavour.

See Jones, *Arya Dharm*, pp. 40-43.

Nonetheless, while a large number of Sikhs left the Arya Samaj to join the Singh Sabha movement, a number of highly influential Sikhs remained within the Arya ranks. Bawa Chhajju Singh retained his position as editor of the *Arya Messenger*; his brother Bawa Arjan Singh was in charge of the *Arya Patrika*. See Ganda Singh, ed., *Bhagat Lakshman Singh*, p. 132.

Further, while historians have focussed primarily on the intense animosity between members of the Singh Sabha and those of the Arya Samaj, there is ample evidence of a great deal of over-lapping and cooperation between the two groups. Lakshman Singh, though himself an ardent critic of the Arya Samaj movement sheds an interesting light on the ambivalent relations between the Sikhs and the Arya Samajists. With regard to a central Arya force in Lahore, Lala Hans Raj Sahni, Singh notes: "But I am speaking the bare truth when I say that he was the centrifugal force of the public life of the Hindu community of the town. Even the Muslims respected him. The Sikhs loved and admired him, because,

Singh Sabha leaders responded quickly and identified the Arya Samaj movement as the most immediate threat to their reform initiatives and recognized the need for Singh Sabha expansion beyond Amritsar. The Lahore Singh Sabha was established in 1879 followed by successors from surrounding districts. By 1899, one hundred and twenty Sabhas were operative.³⁹

Leitner's successful bid endorsing the teaching of the Gurmukhi script and Punjabi language at Oriental College was heartily supported by Singh Sabha leaders in that they believed that the close linguistic association of Punjabi and Sikhism would only bolster their attempts to reform their tradition. Further, it was believed that only through the medium of Punjabi could the masses be educated in 'true' Sikh practices and beliefs; the populace could also be warned against the erroneous customs prevalent among them. The establishment of a Sikh education committee soon followed which included Leitner, British officials and Sikhs. To mobilize the Sikh community to take action against its educational underdevelopment, leaders moved to initiate its own educational institutions. Thus the Lahore Singh Sabha opened the first denominational school in 1880. The concrete mobilization of the Singh Sabha movement also led to the adoption of the following principles:

The purpose of the Singh Sabha is to arouse love of religion among Sikhs.

1. The Sabha will propagate the true Sikh religion everywhere.
2. The Sabha will print books on the greatness and truth of the Sikh religion.

though a zealout Arya Samajist, he, nevertheless, cherished great esteem for their holy Gurus. He contributed liberally to the expenses toward the celebrations of the Sikh festivals and *Gur-purbs*. And whenever Sikh processions passed through his street he was invariably in his balcony with his wife and children with flowers and scented water in his hands which he lovingly sprinkled on them and his handsome face, all the while, beamed with joyful smiles which are still fresh in my memory and evoke an abiding feeling of love and regard for him." Ibid., pp. 27-28.

³⁹ Barrier, *The Sikhs and their Literature*, p. xxv.

3. The Sabha will propagate the words of the Gurus.
4. The Sabha will publish periodicals to further the Panjabi language and Sikh education.
5. Individuals who opposed Sikhism, who have been excluded from Sikh holy spots, or who have associated with other religions and broken Sikh laws cannot join the Sabha. If they repent and pay a fine, they can become members.
6. English officers interested in Sikh education and the well being of Sikhism can associate with the Sabha, also those who support the Panjabi language.
7. The Sabha will not speak against other religions.
8. The Sabha will not discuss matters relating to the Government.
9. The Sabha will respect well wishers of the community, those who love Sikhism, and those who support truth and education in Panjabi.⁴⁰

Though the numerous Sabhas were held together by the common threads of their linguistic concerns, education projects, the restoration of Sikhism to its original state of pristine purity and their loyalty to the Raj, they varied considerably in character and specific interest. In due time these interests, often stemming from the individuals instrumental in their establishment, began to clash. Two distinct models began to emerge. The first was led by the Amritsar Singh Sabha, which derived much of its strength from the wealth and constitution of the aristocratic and religious class. The second was initiated by the Lahore Singh Sabha and was composed of what Bruce Lawrence has delineated as the "elite consumers of the new knowledge."⁴¹ These were professionals and lower caste individuals who had risen in status due to educational opportunities offered by the British educational system. The Amritsar group tended to be more conservative, holding fast to the assumptions and privileges of the upper and respected religious classes. The Lahore faction composed as it was of a previously unknown middle class, particularly those who

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. xxiv-xxv.

⁴¹ Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God. The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age* San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989, p. 98.

Lawrence purports that the indigenous elite at the helm of the first stage of reform in India were 'consumers' of the 'new knowledge' that was based on the Enlightenment and incorporated into the teachings of their British educators.

had risen from the lower social milieu of their origin through the legacy of the British system of education found the traditional attitudes and elitist premises of the Amritsar group to be demeaning and demoralizing.⁴² The Lahore faction's comprehensive reform initiatives were based on the notion of the equality of all Sikhs, focussing particularly on the elimination of caste distinctions within the fold of Sikhism.⁴³ Though attempts were made as early as 1880 to bring the Lahore and Amritsar Singh Sabhas under one executive body, given the antithetic composition of the two groups, the final and well publicized breach between them came to a head in 1883.⁴⁴ It was only in 1902 that the Chief Khalsa Diwan was formed in 1902 as the umbrella organization of all existing Singh Sabhas.⁴⁵

⁴² Undeniably, the men who benefited most from the system of education put in place by the British were a small, though highly powerful elite in a society where 93 per cent of the society were illiterate. The Census of 1891 indicates that 19,274 out of an approximate twenty-three million inhabitants of Punjab could speak and write English. Harjot Oberoi, commenting on these numbers purports that "[b]ilingual skills and western education became a form of capital in a colonial society that could be effectively used to acquire power, privilege and the ability to strike political bargains." Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 262.

⁴³ On one occasion, upper caste Sikhs had refused to accept *karah prasad* from the hands of Ditt Singh, who though of the Mazhabi caste, had become a potent force in Sikh reformative circles due to his educational opportunities. Ditt Singh became a veritable force in the castigation of the Amritsar Singh Sabha. Another powerful leader of the Lahore Singh Sabha, Gurmukh Singh Chandur had risen to prominence as the first professor or Punjabi at Oriental College. His father had served as a cook in the palace of the Raja of Kapurthala, and due to a scholarship provided by the Raja, had received an education normally reserved for those of the upper echelons of society. These individuals, though coming from a lower strata of their community, had risen to positions of eminence due to their educational qualifications, but were still being denied a higher social position given the prevailing caste prejudices. The incongruence between the age-old dogmatism of caste and their new middle class worldview was a potent factor in determining their reform initiatives. See Bhyamala Bhatia, *Social Change and Politics in Punjab, 1898-1910* New Delhi: Enkay Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1987, p. 207.

⁴⁴ There were however instances of cooperation between the feuding groups, particularly during times of perceived threat (as in the vitriolic attacks on the Sabhas by extremist Arya Samajists, or through the establishment of important institutions like Khalsa College which was inaugurated in 1897). Nonetheless, increasingly the vested interests determining the objectives of both groups necessitated a widening chasm between them.

⁴⁵ By the turn of the century the need to alleviate the duplication of programs and projects being carried out by both factions became increasingly ostensible. A central agency was needed to guide the smaller sabhas as well as coordinate the varied efforts of the Sikh reformers. This umbrella organization was inaugurated through the efforts of Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia in particular who along with others drafted a constitution that outlined the principles of the Chief Khalsa Diwan. According to Barrier, efforts at collaboration were possible because by the turn of the century "many founding fathers had died, and with them, the acute bitterness and personal feuds." Barrier, *The Sikhs and their Literature*, p. xxix.

With the Lahore Singh Sabha's approach to comprehensive reform directing the objectives of the Sikh intelligentsia, the more conservative, orthodox religious establishment's reform objectives became increasingly demoted as less meritorious and publicly denounced as such.⁴⁶ The Lahore Singh Sabha's membership was constituted largely of British and missionary educated professionals who were well seasoned by the tactics employed by the potent missionary machine in Punjab, especially its proclivity in the spreading of Christian tenets through the written word.⁴⁷ They in particular initiated widespread Sikh participation in what Marshall McLuhan has aptly labeled 'print culture'.⁴⁸ Power dynamics, as Trinh T. Minh-ha has shown, have aptly inscribed themselves in language and these new elites utilized the widely available printing press to further their cause.⁴⁹ The doors of communication and the transmission of information

⁴⁶ The attacks of the Lahore Singh Sabha leaders against their Amritsar colleagues resulted in bitter rebuttals by leaders of the Amritsar Sabha. Whereas the Pujaris of the Golden Temple had issued a Hukamnama in 1879 urging all Sikhs to join the Singh Sabha, by 1883, an official Hukamnama from the Akal Thakhat decried the activities of Lahore leaders as being injurious to Sikh interests. Given that the Lahore Singh Sabha's initiatives affected Sikhs beyond that of the aristocracy or the religious elite, most other Singh Sabhas too severed their connection with the Amritsar group. See Bhatia, *Social Change and Politics in Punjab*, p. 153.

⁴⁷ Although Christian missionaries were viewed primarily as a threat by the newly emerging elite, Bhagat Lakshman Singh, himself a protégé of missionary educators, speaks fondly of Dr. Newton of the American Christian Mission, and of their friendship which continued well beyond his educational years with the Mission. See Ganda Singh, ed., *Bhagat Lakshman Singh*, pp. 36-37.

⁴⁸ The term 'print culture' was utilized by McLuhan to distinguish between cultures based on oral knowledge (contingent on scribes and word-of-mouth communication) and societies influenced by the introduction of the printing press. The availability of the printing press has led to a novel condition whereby the printed word is exchanged and distributed as a commodity. The written word as commodity leads ultimately to a transformation of societal power dynamics. Those qualified in the forging of print culture become the principal powerbrokers of society. I am indebted to Harjot Oberoi's explication of the term 'print culture', as well his analysis of its effects upon the Singh Sabha reform initiatives. His conclusions are based on M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* London, 1962. See Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, pp. 262-264.

⁴⁹ Trinh T. Minh-ha, "The Language of Nativism: Anthropology as a Scientific Conversation of Man with Man," *Woman, Native, Other. Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989, pp. 51-52.

by the new proprietors of literary power were thrown open, allowing for a virtually unlimited capacity to disseminate their opinions, designs and 'enlightened' worldview.⁵⁰

Indian Reform, the Missionary Undertaking and the 'Women's Question':

Pivotal to the efforts of the newly established Singh Sabha movement, as well as those of other reform groups was the notion of returning to what was perceived as the fundamental principles of their respective traditions. The degenerate condition of women - Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim - became a central tenet of the reorganization and interpretation process of each religious movement.⁵¹ The imperial masters had long

⁵⁰ The Singh Sabha leaders channeled vigorous energy into the new medium of publishing, printing, writing and editing. Though there was a great surge to set up presses and papers, many attempts failed quickly due to the lack of experience and proper financing, particularly prior to 1900. Notwithstanding these and other difficulties, by 1910 there were over twenty Sikh newspapers and journals. The Khalsa Tract Society, founded in 1894, produced small, cheap volumes on Sikh theology and social conditions. By 1902, 192 works had been published and the number of distributions had risen to over half a million copies.

Further, notable writers such as Bhai Ditt Singh, Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, Bhai Teja Singh and Bhai Vir Singh and others, wrote voluminously and diversely, including theological and scriptural commentaries, novels, tracts and treatises, often attacking prevalent social conditions. Taking a stand on the contentious issues of the day, they were resolute in the belief that their efforts were beneficial in serving to reform and uplift the Sikh community.

For an invaluable summary regarding the literary achievements of the Singh Sabha leaders in particular, see especially N. Gerald Barrier, "Introduction," *The Sikhs and their Literature*, pp. xvii-xlv.

Another important source is N. Gerald Barrier's, "The Sikh Resurgence, 1844-1947," W. Eric Gustafson and Kenneth W. Jones, eds., *Sources on Punjab History* Delhi: Manohar Book Services, 1975, pp. 219-252.

⁵¹ The reformation of the status of women in India was a consistent theme in the various reform movements throughout India. A useful overview of the manifest efforts with regard to the question of India's women is Geraldine Forbes', *Women in Modern India* The New Cambridge History of India, Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Another invaluable study of the history of reform in Bengal pertaining to women is Meredith Borthwick's *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal. 1849-1905* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. See also Patricia Uberoi, ed., *Social Reform, sexuality and the state* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996; Kiran Pawar, ed., *Women in Indian History. Social, Economic, Political and Cultural Perspectives* Patiala and New Delhi: Vision & Venture, 1996; Nita Kumar, ed., *Women as Subjects. South Asian Histories* Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1994; Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women. Essays in Indian Colonial History* New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997; Gail Minault, ed., *The Extended Family. Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan* Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1981. For excellent

pointed to what they considered the depraved attitudes of Indians toward women as moral justification of their presence and rule in India. Missionary activities were also spurned on considerably due to their perception of the degenerate position of women in India. According to an early missionary report, "the degree of attention which is being devoted in this country to work amongst women and girls, is one of the most striking features of the missionary work."⁵² Zenana missionary activity, women's education, and women's medical missions were a focal aspect of the varied and multifarious Christian missionary efforts in Punjab.⁵³ India's womanhood in particular was often presented as directly responsible for the degenerate condition of India at large.⁵⁴ Regarding 'India's Problem' (India's women), one account aptly sums up missionary attitudes toward Indian women's status and societal roles:

On the threshold of this subject we meet with a paradox, but that is to be expected. In no country is woman more despised than in India, and in no

studies on Muslim reformatory efforts see: Shahida Lateef, *Muslim Women in India. Political and Private Realities: 1890s-1980s* Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990; Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982; Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Perfecting Women. Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar. A Partial Translation with Commentary* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1900; Gail Minault, tr., *Voices of Silence. English Translation of Khwaja Altaf Hussain Hali's Majalis un-Nissa and Chup ki Dad* Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1986.

⁵² *Forty-Eighth Annual Report of the Lodhiana Mission* Lodhiana: Lodhiana Mission Press, 1883, p. 35.

⁵³ The most comprehensive volume written on missionary activity in Punjab remains John C.B. Webster's *The Christian Community and Change in Nineteenth Century North India* Delhi: Macmillan, 1976. For early missionary accounts see in particular Rev. J.A. Graham, *The Missionary Expansion of the Reformed Churches* Edinburgh: R & R Clark, Ltd., 1898, pp. 116-120; W.R. Lambeth, "Woman's Work for Woman," *Medical Missions: The Twofold Task* New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1920, pp. 135-160, Miss A.E. Henderson, *The Golden Gate of India: A Study of the Punjab Mission of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand* Dunedin: Foreign Missionary Committee, P.C.N.Z., 1922, and the yearly *Annual Report of the Lodhiana Mission* Lodhiana: Lodhiana Mission Press, which began its publication in 1835 (the Mission was occupied in 1834). The report includes in-depth summaries of the missionary work carried out at the 'Out-Stations', which included Jagraon, Khanna, Bassi, Rampur, Rupar, Morinda, Raekot, as well as other major centres such as Saharanpore, Sabathu, Jalandhar, Lahore, Ambala City, Ambala Cantonment, Ferozepore, Hoshiarpore, Woodstock School. Each Report has a subsection on 'Girls Schools and Zenana Work' as well as 'Medical Work', as well as individual missionary accounts which often included particular reports on services to Punjabi women.

⁵⁴ See C.B. Newton, cited in *Forty-eighth Annual Report of the Lodhiana Mission*, p. 35.

country are there so many goddesses. They are malignant goddesses, for the most part, such as the cruel mother of small-pox, and the mother of cholera... In no country has woman more power, and yet she has no recognized place in society. Religion gives her no position, yet she is the upholder of religion... Surely the poignant grief of Sita, Savitri and others should have vindicated wifely devotion for all time – if times had not changed, and fetters had not been forged, and wrongs had not been inflicted, as the years went by, until now it is quite true that woman is no longer the helpmeet of man. She has sunk too low to help him. She drags him down, and herein is India's undoing. A proverb has it that a cart cannot run on a big wheel and a little one. No more can it, and if man is the big wheel and woman the little, nay, more often the broken wheel, he cannot pursue his course in safety.⁵⁵

The Indian woman was thus in desperate need of reform; Western women's example and work with Indian women was viewed as one way to bring 'light' to the darkness of their lives.⁵⁶ As one writer noted:

There is a mighty tide of good influence pouring into India with the Christian women of the West, representatives of many missionary societies. And there is a return wave, for, last but not least, there is a noble band of Indian lady pioneers, who are surely the means in God's hand to raise their wronged sisters... Of the signs of the times there is not much more to say. It is enough that the decisive hour has struck, and that India's women are on the point of gaining their lost freedom.⁵⁷

In Punjab in particular, Christian missionaries were closely aligned with the larger government machine sweeping its influence through rigorous control mechanisms set up

⁵⁵ A.D. *Until the Shadows Flee Away. The Story of C.E.Z.M.S. Work in India and Ceylon* London: Church of England Zenana Missionary Society, n.d., pp. 29-30.

⁵⁶ Ballhatchet has shown that not all Indians concurred with this belief. Many Indians were shocked by European manners, particularly the offensive behaviour of British women baring their shoulders and dancing openly. These behaviours did not encourage Indians to abandon traditional customs of the seclusion of respectable women. He notes further that it was a sore point for the Imperialists that Indian gentlemen did not bring their wives to social gatherings where Indians and Britishers mixed. Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj. Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their Critics, 1793-1905* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980, pp. 5-6; Further, by the end of the nineteenth century, prostitution by European women was becoming a problem. In Calcutta, Bishop Thoburn of the Methodist Episcopal Church complained that it "is a striking fact that the most shameless characters in the city are not Indian but persons imported from Europe..." Bishop J.M. Thoburn, speech, 17-11-1893, cited in *ibid.*, p. 131.

⁵⁷ A.D. *Until the Shadows Flee Away*, p. 37.

throughout the Province.⁵⁸ Gone were the early British ideals of the necessary detachment of Church and State that were clearly in evidence in Bengal during early missionary expansion efforts.⁵⁹ In Punjab for the most part, British administrators supported the missionary enterprise.⁶⁰ Subsequently, they also applauded the efforts of the reformers, presenting them as compelling evidence and direct manifestation of their exemplary influence upon Indian society.⁶¹ Further, the partial restructuring and redefinition of the overall condition and roles of women in the name of reform, was perceived at least by the small minority of the educated indigenous elite as a clear

⁵⁸ Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements*, p. 87.

⁵⁹ The early British presence in India, the East India Company, spurned missionary attempts to advance quickly through the Indian subcontinent. It was only with the Charter Act of 1813 that controls over missionary activity in India were relaxed. See Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, p. 36.

⁶⁰ Ballhatchet has written about the somewhat ambiguous relationship between Christian missionaries and the British administrators. "Although most of them followed a European lifestyle, they were professionally involved in close relationships with Indians. Many proved to be uncomfortable members of the ruling race, criticizing British as well as Indian immorality. In this role they were strengthened by close ties with religious and reforming groups in Britain. On the one hand, they were greatly stimulated by the evangelical revival during the first half of the nineteenth century and by the social purity movement subsequently... In general, however, the presence of missionaries of the ruling race encouraged the British to see themselves as more moral than Indians..." Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj*, pp. 4-5.

There was a major change in the sexual attitude of the Raj in the late eighteenth century, due in large part, to the sudden increase in Christian missionary endeavour in India, and to the evangelical revival in Britain. In the wake of religious revival in Britain came the rise of the powerful Purity Campaign which crusaded against the Contagious Diseases Act put in place to regulate prostitution (inaugurated in 1869), resulting ultimately in a repressive new sex code among the British. See Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality. The British Experience* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990, pp. 64-65.

Punjab, as the newest and last frontier to be conquered during the mid-eighteenth century, witnessed the 'purified' attitudes of the British more pointedly than other areas vanquished earlier by the imperial masters.

⁶¹ Farquhar's account of the reform movements in particular leaves little room for doubt with regard to contemporary perceptions of the influences that Christianity was having on the reform efforts sweeping India. "While the shaping forces at work in the movements have been many, it is quite clear that *Christianity has ruled the development throughout*. Christianity has been, as it were, a great searchlight flung across the expanse of the religions, and in its blaze all the coarse, unclean and superstitious elements of the old faiths stood out, quite early, in painful vividness. India shuddered, and the earlier movements were the response to the revelation... In every case the attempt is made to come up to Christian requirements. Frequently the outcome is extremely slender, yet the purpose can be seen. Christianity has been the norm, and no part of the most orthodox movement is fully comprehensible except when seen from the Christian point of view." J.N Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* The Hartford-Lamson Lectures on the Religions of the World, London: The Macmillan Co., 1924, pp. 433-434.

indication of their transformation and adherence to the ideals of 'modernity'. The very notion of 'reform' also pointed to the uncontaminated origins of their respective religious traditions.⁶² The concern with women's status was a major aspect of the Bengal Renaissance, where the educated elite in eastern India were engaged in a new intellectual activity focussed on a rediscovery and refurbishing of their own past. Rammohun Roy is listed as the first among nineteenth-century reformers concerned with the upliftment of women's position and status.⁶³ His influential tract entitled "Abstract of the

⁶² James Mill, in his influential *History of British India* (first published in 1826) had argued that the position of women in any given society could serve as an indicator of the civilized status of that society. "Among rude people, the women are generally degraded; among civilized people they are exalted." As societies advanced, "the condition of the weaker sex is gradually improved, till they associated on equal terms with the men, and occupy a place of voluntary and useful coadjutors." Commenting from afar upon Indian society in the early nineteenth century, Mill insisted that "nothing can exceed the habitual contempt which the Hindus entertain for their women.... They are held, accordingly, in extreme degradation." James Mill, *The History of British India*, 2 Vols. New York: Chelsea House, 1968, pp. 309-10.

This evaluation of their society, highly publicized and widely known, became a pivotal initiative for the transformation of their 'degraded' nation by Indian reformers in the nineteenth century. See Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, pp. 12-19.

⁶³ Roy is lauded as the first of the Indian reformers to question the position of women and engage in the reinterpretation and rewriting process that marked the nineteenth century's reform procedure with regard to the status of women. Roy was a tireless critic of societal norms, particularly with regard to the practice of sati. See his "In Defense of Hindu Women," in W. Theodore de Bary, *Sources of Indian Tradition* New York: Columbia University Press, 1964, pp. 581-584.

Historians however, have questioned the practical manifestation of Roy's convictions with regard to his own relationships with women. See Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, p. 10.

Certainly the locus of reform, at least until the beginning of the twentieth century was in Bengal; Bengalis bore the brunt of British attitudes of moral superiority with regard to the women's question, and in reaction, actively endorsed their own programs and visions for the reformation of society. Undoubtedly, this activity was restricted to a select few males, those who were the initial recipients of early British educational schemes. These individuals, in many cases advocated far-reaching initiatives with regard to the status of women, and in some cases, translated their ideology into radical transformation of their own reality with regard to their wives and daughters. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar championed female education and instigated the campaign to legalize widow remarriage. He had witnessed the hardships of young widowed girls, and when his elderly guru married a young girl. Morally enraged, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar defied tradition and rejected his guru's hospitality. Within a year the guru died and left behind a girl widow with no means of support. Vidyasagar vowed from then on to devote his life to uplifting the Hindu widow and advocated unceasingly for widow remarriage, despite repeated insult and threats to his life. See S.K. Bose, *Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar* New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1969, pp. 5, 32-35, and Asok Sen, *Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and his Elusive Milestones* Calcutta: Riddlu-India, 1977, pp. 58-60.

Keshub Chandra Sen, a leader of the Brahmo Samaj, was particularly influential in advocating new roles for women through education and the inclusion of women in religious gatherings. Dissatisfied with the

arguments regarding the burning of widows considered as a religious rite," summarized his writings on the subject from 1818 to the 1830s.⁶⁴ Seeking ways to circumscribe and explicate the superstitious and highly ritualized aspects of Hinduism increasingly denoted as degenerate, Roy was at the forefront of the reform impetus calling for a return to Hinduism's core, the Vedas and the Upanishads. The combination of his early Hindu classical training and his thorough ease with Western ideas led Roy and others of the educated indigenous elite to apply the principles of reason and individual rights, (common to both Hindu and Western thought in their view), to the problems facing Indian society. Evoking both principles and their untainted history as the basis for the renewal of Indian society, reformers decried the 'evil customs' that had crept in such as child marriage, polygamy and sati, as disharmonious with 'nature'. These early reformers saw India as needing to recovering from a degenerate age; one fallen from a past Vedic 'golden age' when women led fulfilled lives and held positions of high status. The prominence given to India's past Vedic glory was in large part adopted from early Orientalists and was

breadth of reform with regard to the equality of women advocated by the originator of the Brahmo religion Debendranath Tagore, Sen and others parted ways with the Brahmo Samaj in 1866 with a new organization called the Brahmo Samaj of India. Those loyal to Tagore re-grouped themselves into the Adi Brahmo Samaj. See Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements*, pp. 34-39.

Certainly, reform efforts were not restricted to Bengalis. In Bombay, Mahadev Govind Ranade founded the National Social Conference to convoke attention on social reform, particularly with regard to the status of women. He was made a judge in Poona in 1871, and soon thereafter, his wife of nearly twenty years died. His colleagues in social reform expected him to marry a widow, but Ranade's father, anticipating what he considered a disaster, quickly arranged a marriage with an eleven-year old girl. While Ranade protested, he did not refuse the marriage arrangement. Ranade was husband, teacher and mentor to Ramabai, who became one of the most important of India's social reformers. Ramabai, upon her husband's death, wrote a memoir in which she described her childhood, her outlook on marriage as a child, her education under the tutelage of Ranade and her life with him until his death in 1901. See Ramabai Ranade, *Himself, The Autobiography of a Hindu Lady* New York: Longman, Green and Co., 1938.

Another important reformer was the Parsee journalist Behramji Malabari who wrote provocative articles on the tragedy of enforced widowhood and child marriage. See Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, pp. 25-27.

utilized by these intellectuals to refute James Mill's interpretation of India's 'low' status on the hierarchy of civilizations. It was precisely the *discovery* of their golden past that made it possible for the indigenous elite to prescribe change, particularly with regard to the 'women's question'.

For Muslims, reform was not only confined to western influences in the nineteenth century. As Gail Minault has pointed out, particularly in North India Muslims had their own tradition of cultural re-examination and reform dating as far back as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries however, witnessed a renewed vigour among Muslim literati to "rid Indian Islam of medieval accretions and to re-examine the sources of the faith to find new wellsprings of strength and inspiration, whether political, religious or cultural."⁶⁵

Most significantly, the reconstruction of the past being carried out by reformers of the various religious traditions was not confined to the realm of the British Orientalists, accumulated, analyzed and read by a select few. Instead, it was widely being disseminated by leading spokespersons of all the Indian religions through vernacular newspapers and pamphlets made possible by the introduction of the printing press in India.⁶⁶ As Uma Chakravarti has aptly pointed out,

the indigenous literati were *active agents* in constructing the past and were consciously engaged in choosing particular elements from the embryonic body of knowledge flowing from their own current social and political concerns...[a]ll this meant that apart from a general increase in historical

⁶⁴ In J.C. Ghose, ed., *The English Works of Raja Rammohan Roy* Vol. 2, New Delhi: Cosmo, 1982, pp. 367-84.

⁶⁵ Minault points to the work of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi and Abdul Haq Muhaddis Dehlavi in the seventeenth century and Shah Waliullah of Delhi in the eighteenth century as forerunners in the Muslim quest for a renewal of practices and ideology. Minault, *Voices of Silence*, p. 4.

⁶⁶ Uma Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism, and a Script for the Past," Sangari and Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women* p. 32.

consciousness, the past was beginning to be classified and analyzed more rigorously to argue the debates of the present.⁶⁷

Undoubtedly, the newly emerging intelligentsia, composed as it was of both traditional and modern elements perceived itself to be the legitimate interpreter of tradition, both that of the past and of the present.

The status and position of women were crucial aspects of this interpretive process. As already noted, the 'higher' morality of the imperialists and the superiority of western ideology could effectively be established by accentuating the low status of Indian women. In seeking to alleviate women's position, reformers were reacting to the indictment of their moral inferiority and depravity put in place by imperial rule. A rejoinder by R.C. Dutt, in his *A History of Civilization in Ancient India* purports that passages drawn from the Vedas indicate that women were educated and highly "honoured in ancient India, more *perhaps than among any other ancient nation on the face of the globe...*" (italics mine).⁶⁸ Central to the resurrection of the Vedic *dasi* was the notion of the 'Aryan' and the Kshatriya values closely associated with her; vigour, militancy and manliness of her male counterparts were pivotal to this new identity.⁶⁹ Correspondingly, these female Kshatriyas, given the educational opportunities offered to them were the intellectual companions of their husbands. They were also the source and inspiration of martial valour, making no demands on their menfolk and enabling them to sacrifice their lives with

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ R.C. Dutt, *A History of Civilization in Ancient India* Delhi: Vishal Publishers, 1972 (first published in 1888), p. 170-171, cited in *ibid.*, p. 51.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Dutt utilized as his medium the Rajput and Maratha heroes, who were linked to ancient Kshatriya warriors such as the Pandavas. The Kshatriyas were then linked to the Aryans who were the original conquerors in history. Whatever was good among the later Aryans was thus associated with the Kshatriyas. Genuine Indianness in the reformed Hindu thus lay in Kshatriyahood composed as it was of

honour. Thus was developed the ideal of the *helpmate*, wholly agreeable in the forfeiture of her own demands and needs and ever ready to sacrifice her life in the name of honour, indomitable courage and interminable resistance to the forces which contested Aryan rule and the honourable position of their womenfolk.⁷⁰ In essence, indigenous reformers developed a feasible counterpart to the 'helpmate' of Victorian ideals. Needless to say, the Indian reformers of the late nineteenth century viewed women and the status of women as transformable through persuasive arguments, social action, education and ultimately, through legislation; women themselves were not collaborators in these designs. Indeed, they were often portrayed as opposed to their own liberation. As Forbes has pointed out, "[w]ithout first-hand accounts by these women, their reluctance to change in the ways prescribed by their husbands and fathers could be read as nascent feminist resistance, an intelligent reading of their true interests, or plain and simple opposition to any change."⁷¹ Nonetheless, the reformers were adamant about their unwillingness to relinquish their position in the patriarchal system that they endeavoured to change; nor

martial, Hindu and Aryan elements of the past. Ibid., pp. 48-49, citing Dutt, *A History of Civilization*, pp. 7-9.

⁷⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 51-52, based on R.C. Dutt, *Pratap Singh: The Last of the Rajputs* Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1943.

Rajput women in particular were presented as the embodiment of virtue and valour, especially during the 'dark' period of Muslim rule. British writers were instrumental in this process of idealization, identifying the Rajput women of ancient times as 'the Rajput Amazons'. British constructions of race, particularly the Rajput-Aryan connection, (and thus the close identification of the British with these Aryan remnants) were central to British fascination with the ancient Rajputs. In "The Ruby of Hazrat," Michael MacMillan weaves a tale of suspense and intrigue around the brave and virtuous Zuleika: "Fearless of being seen by a stranger, her fair brow was open to the fresh morning breeze, that played with the ringlets of her auburn hair. Her eyes, inherited from some Kaffir ancestress, were blue, and her complexion rivaled the rosy tints of the peach-blossoms that grew in the boughs above her head, and strewed the green sward at her feet." The heroines in MacMillan's stories were those who remained virtuous without the confines of the zenana. In "The Rajput Amazon," Pudmani's beauty was "enhanced by the brightness of her complexion, due to a healthy life in the open air, and if her soft cheek was slightly browned by exposure to the sun, that too...made her far more attractive than any of the pale-faced beauties of the zenana." See Michael MacMillan, *Tales of Indian Chivalry* London: Blackie & Sons Limited, n.d., pp. 100, 75.

were they open to a redistribution of economic power. "They dreamed of a world where women would be educated and free from some of the worst customs of the society – child marriage, sati, polygyny. But at the same time, these new women would be devoted to home and family."⁷²

Positioning Punjab's Womanhood – Indigenous Politics and Principles in the Colonial Milieu:

The Singh Sabha movement has been lauded as the first among the Sikhs to confront the 'women's question' in the nineteenth century.⁷³ However, as early as 1853, at the incentive of British officials, local chieftains, landlords, merchants and aristocrats gathered to deliberate issues pertaining to the position of women in Punjabi society. Central to this meeting and subsequent gatherings were issues such as the eradication of female infanticide, sati, limiting the cost of dowries and other marriage expenses. Tracts and pamphlets followed, publicizing government policy and its condemnation of these customs. Hindu, Sikh and Muslim leaders were acutely humiliated by British denunciation of societal conditions; willingness to support British initiatives regarding the eradication of these practices offered them an opportunity to gain the approval of the British.⁷⁴ Some years later, in 1872, Sikhs and Hindus came together to form the Amritsar Dharm Sabha which had as its aim the eradication of all "evil practices...which are opposed to the

⁷¹ Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, pp. 20-21.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ See Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, "Singh Sabha Movement and Social Change," Gurnam Kaur, ed., *Sikh Value System and Social Change* Patiala: Punjabi University Publication Bureau, 1995, pp. 32-37.

⁷⁴ Kenneth W. Jones, "Socio-Religious Movements and Changing Gender Relationships among Hindus of British India," James Warner Bjorkman, ed., *Fundamentalism Revivalists and Violence in South Asia* Delhi: Manohar, 1988, p. 48.

Shastras and to intelligence, which are in vogue among the Hindus.”⁷⁵ Significantly, the Sabha focused on customs and behaviours traditionally associated with women as particularly substantial problem areas. Practices such as dowry, mourning and marriage rituals, prostitution, women’s songs and garb were areas that were of particular concern to the Sabha. With regard to prostitution, the Sabha’s Annual Report notes that while women from respectable families had readily become ‘public’ women, the efforts of the Sabha to stop the practice had been successful.⁷⁶ Assuredly, the high incidence of prostitution in Punjab, as well as its honorable position in the nineteenth century is supported by Jacquemont’s report on the city of Amritsar a number of decades earlier.⁷⁷ The radical departure from earlier attitudes toward prostitution can only be understood as fundamentally motivated by a need to better align Punjabi and Victorian British ideals in order that the vested interests of these earlier reformers, as well as those of the British administration be fulfilled. As noted earlier, British attitudes toward prostitution were changing, due in large part to a rigorous Victorian ethos transforming sensibilities towards prostitution in England.

Other resolutions of the Amritsar Dharm Sabha maintained that women were no longer to bathe naked at ponds, wells, rivers or canals, but should instead bathe in the

⁷⁵ *Tajawiz Kameli Dharm Sabha* [Annual Report of Dharm Sabha] Lahore, 1873, cited in Jones, “Socio-Religious Movements,” Bjorkman, ed., *Fundamentalism*, p. 48. I am greatly indebted to Jones’ analysis of this movement and am entirely reliant on his account of the Dharm Sabha in the above noted volume. Henceforth, I will be referring to the *Tajawiz Kameli Dharm Sabha* simply as Jones, Annual Report, “Socio-Religious Movements,” Bjorkman, ed., *Fundamentalism*.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁷⁷ “The prostitutes have theirs [quarter], which is not the most magnificent, but is certainly the best kept, in the city...Public opinion does not regard them as degraded, as with us. They are never exposed to insult, and it would be a grave lack of good manners not to return the salutation which they never omit to give to respectable passers-by.” H.L.O. Garret, trans., and ed., *Punjab a Hundred Years Ago. As Described by V. Jacquemont (1831) and A. Soltykoff (1842)* Punjab Government Record Office, Monograph No. 18, n.d., reprinted by Punjab Languages Department, Patiala, 1971, p. 27.

privacy of the home, behind a curtained area.⁷⁸ If no such bathroom were available, women were to bathe wearing a *chadar* or *dhoti*. Further, Punjab women were not to sing love songs or utter obscene words at the time of marriages, in public places or behind a curtain.⁷⁹ The mourning rituals of women that traditionally included the uncovering of heads or breasts were also not to be carried out in the market places. Significantly, the Dharm Sabha also insisted on a dress code for women: "First, a ghagra with a wide girth; second, a pyjama under it; third, a kurta; fourth, a dopatta; fifth, a chadar made of long cloth."⁸⁰

The Dharm Sabha also condemned the traditional customs of women during festivals. During the period of *Kanagats* the women of a locality, according to their position and status would don their best clothes and jewelry and collect together as a group, take their stand in a public place and hurl insults and abuses on the women from another locale.⁸¹ The subjects of their affronts would inevitably be the husbands, parents

⁷⁸ Bhagat Lakshman Singh recounts in his autobiography that women frequented the surrounding rivers in Punjab to bathe. His mother and her friend, Bibi Nihal Devi, aunt of Sardar Sahib Bawa Hari Singh, Jagidar and Honorary Magistrate went out daily for their baths in the river Leh over a mile away from their homes, returning before dawn. See Ganda Singh, ed., *Bhagat Lakshman Singh*, pp. 11-12.

These were the daily practices of the women of the elite echelons of Punjabi society who, given their relatively high status would have had higher needs with regard to seclusion and modesty issues. Women of the lower classes would also bathed openly at the riversides and canals.

⁷⁹ Jones, Annual Report, "Socio-Religious Movements," Bjorkman, ed., *Fundamentalism*, p. 49.

Oman reports that the *panchyats* of the Khatri caste in Lahore, following their co-reformists in Amritsar, imposed a fine upon any Khatri whose wife partook of the customary singing of "obscene songs in streets of Lahore." J. Campbell Oman, *Cults, Customs and Superstitions of India* London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908, p. 161.

⁸⁰ Jones, Annual Report, "Socio-Religious Movements," Bjorkman, ed., *Fundamentalism*, p. 50.

⁸¹ Kenneth Jones notes that this was a "ritual occasion on which women could vent their accumulated frustrations and strike back at the male members of the world." Jones, "Socio-Religious Movements," Bjorkman, ed., *Fundamentalism*, p. 51.

Oscar Lewis notes that the period of Kanagat or Sraddha in northern India takes place during the sixteen day period between the full-moon day of Bhadon and Amavas (no-moon day) in the month of Asauj (September-October). During this time deceased person is remembered and honoured by family members. "The dead family members who are honored at Kanagat may include the father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, and sons over eighteen. Sons below that age are not included. Daughters are considered members of another family through marriage. A girl cannot perform a *sraddha* in memory of her father

and relatives of the other group. These *Kanagats* often included physical fighting between women and were a source of entertainment for the men who gathered to watch the proceedings.⁸² Another rite attacked by the Dharm Sabha was that of *Sada Talla*, a fertility ritual where women gathered at the Tek Chand Garden and the Guru Bagh in Amritsar:

...while there are in front of them thousands of men of all classes, collected together to see this entertainment or drama, and these women bare their bodies up to their breasts and then start rolling on the ground with great zest and enthusiasm, shouting with their mouths in loud voices: 'I have laid down on a wheat field, may my womb become fertile'. During this action of theirs almost the whole of their bodies become naked. The women believe that by this action of theirs, they become pregnant immediately thereafter.⁸³

This rite the Sabha declared to be shameless and evil. Its members were exhorted to wield their control over their female family members and relatives to ensure the abolishment of the rite.⁸⁴

Harjot Oberoi has analyzed the varied and manifold rituals that were a conspicuous aspect of the 'enchanted universe' of the nineteenth century, particularly in rural Punjab; Sikh participation in the popular religious worldview was persistent.⁸⁵ In this rural milieu, dependent as constituents were on the seasonal fluctuations, mechanisms of control

and mother; only sons can do that." See Oscar Lewis, *Village Life in Northern India. Studies in a Delhi Village* New York: Vintage Books, 1965, p. 213.

See also McKim Marriott, "Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization," McKim Marriott, ed., *Village India. Studies in the Little Community* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955, p. 192.

⁸² Jones, Annual Report, "Socio-Religious Movements," Bjorkman, ed., *Fundamentalism.*, pp. 50-51.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 51.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

⁸⁵ The chapter entitled, "An Enchanted Universe" is a provocative overview of the forces surrounding and maintaining the popular religion of Punjab. See *ibid.*, pp. 139-203.

While Oberoi's study predominantly focuses on the rural manifestations of popular religious forms in Punjab, the ritual boundaries delineating those from rural areas from the urban population are necessarily inconclusive, particularly with regard to the rites claimed and exercised by women. Popular religious rituals were legitimate instruments of agency for women in a society that was largely controlled and defined by men.

and ways and means to comprehend the disparities of life were necessary.⁸⁶ Thus the populace turned to miracle saints and conducted pilgrimages to their shrines;⁸⁷ cultic practices were abundant; spirit possession and magic endowed the vast illiterate masses with agency and at least partial influence on the forces surrounding them.⁸⁸ As Oberoi notes: "[T]he focus of religiosity was not on analysis but on pragmatic results. Whereas scriptural religion is concerned with explaining reality, popular religion seeks to manipulate reality to the advantage of its constituents, be it through the intercession of spirits, magic or other rituals."⁸⁹ Needless to say, the popular religious forms conjoined

⁸⁶ The interdependence of the peasantry and their livelihood on the forces of nature was particularly manifested in those areas of the riverain tracts of the province. The Ravi, the Beas, the Sind, or 'the harlot Sind' could in one moment flood their banks and wipe out entire crops, homes and even settlements. The river-god was known as Khwaja Khizar, and grain and *gur* (unrefined sugar) were offerings left to appease his wrath. See Malcolm Lyall Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* London: Oxford University Press, 1928 (first published in 1925), p. 66.

⁸⁷ Sakhi Sarvar was widely worshipped by adherents of all the religious traditions in Punjab. The Jats in particular paid homage to the saint. Sikhs who venerated Sakhi Sarvar were known as Sultani Sikhs, and presented by Falcon as a separate Sikh sect. See R.W. Falcon, *Handbook on Sikhs for the use of Regimental Officers* Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1896, p. 17.

One British account notes that the "greatest shrine in the Western Punjab is that of Sakhi Sarvar...Men, women and children, Sikhs, Hindus and Mohammedans alike, come from all districts in the Punjab." Major Aubrey O'Brien, "The Mohammedan Saints of the Western Punjab," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 41, 1911, p. 519, cited in Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 147.

⁸⁸ According to Sohinder Singh Bedi, there are many types of magic performed in Punjab for the welfare of the community, but there is also an invocation of 'black magic' that calls upon evil spirits for anti-social purposes. "It is performed with the evil intention of taking revenge, causing harm to someone, promoting a split in the victim's house, or ruining someone completely. For this purpose the witch or wizard invokes dark, supernatural powers and achieves full mastery over evil spirits." Women in Punjab who achieve mastery over evil spirits are known as *dains*; men as *ojhas*. See Sohinder Singh Bedi, *Folklore of Punjab* Folklore in India Series, New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1971, p. 41.

Jacquelin Singh gives a fascinating fictional account of the power of a sorceress in contemporary rural Punjab, in this case, a local sweeper woman named Veera Bai. The belief in the sorceress' power to transform and manipulate the adverse realities of women in particular is adroitly captured by Singh in her description of Veera Bai's state of possession and its aftermath: "They listened with their entire bodies, heads nodding, eyes intent, waiting to be called, to receive from her magic hands the charms sealed in metal lockets and strung on black threads that, tied around the loins of a male child, would ensure his survival into adulthood. There would be short mantras whispered into the ears of jealous wives, chants that would win back a wayward husband from his mistress; phials of love-potions to start romances." Jacquelin Singh *Seasons* Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1991, pp. 164-165.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

the various religious communities in Punjab resulting in the cultural, social and religious fluidity which characterized nineteenth century Punjabi society.⁹⁰

While the restrictions put in place by the Amritsar Dharm Sabha in 1872 reflect the absorption of a popular religious ethos on all levels of society, not only rural but urban as well, it was in the urban centres that the practices associated with these popular traditions was initially confronted. The desire to do away with what the reformers considered to be 'irrational' or useless behaviour on the part of their womenfolk was in no small part connected with the image of the 'Punjabi' that the Dharm Sabha wished to present to their new rulers. According to the Annual Report of the Sabha,

you can get honour only when you have modesty first. Our rulers, who are Englishmen, also feel happy on seeing good characters and respectable persons. What I mean to say is that this great shamelessness and immodesty has spread among the women folk of this city, on seeing which other people ridicule us. Let us adopt measures, by means of which this blot giving us a bad name might disappear.⁹¹

The arena of women's ritual, previously outside the jurisdiction of male authority and experience became increasingly viewed as contributing to immoral behaviour, and thus understood as largely responsible for what was intrinsically 'wrong' with Punjabi society. Women's 'decadent' conduct was understood as lacking *proper* rites and behavioural patterns which were more conducive to the image the reformers wished to project. New

⁹⁰ According to the Census of 1891, the religion of the Indian masses had little resemblance to the more orthodox forms of religions, and was defined as 'animism', "the belief in the existence of souls or spirits of which only the powerful – those on which man feels himself dependent, and before which he stands in awe – acquire the rank of divine beings, and become objects of worship...In the stage of development...in which we find animism in India, it has passed from its archaic and indeterminate shape into a collection of polydaimonistic tribal religions, in which spells, magic, and exorcism are all prominent. In this stage the malevolent spirits are considered the more important, and little notice is taken of the good. The main object, in the first place, is to get power over the spirits by magic, and, in a higher stage of belief, by gifts or homage" [sic]. *General Report on the Census of India*, 1891, reported by Sir John Strachey, *India*, pp. 315-316.

⁹¹ Jones, Annual Report, "Socio-Religious Movements," Bjorkman, ed., *Fundamentalism*, p. 52.

ideals of morality affected largely by the mores, needs and practices of the British were thus intrinsic to the reordering process put in place by the male reformers. The pointed concern and embarrassment of the Amritsar Dharm Sabha with regard to the 'immoral' behaviour of their women-folk can best be understood in light of acute fears of women's actions jeopardizing the approval and support of male reformers by the British. Their honour was at stake, particularly by the annual feminine rites that traditionally made room for women to emerge from the underside of the patriarchal hierarchy customarily ordering their lives. These rituals had traditionally allowed for acceptable outlets for the accumulated anger and frustration experienced under this system. Respectability, along with a renewed sense of honour however, had become the watchwords by which the reformers reorganized their own lives and the lives of their womenfolk.⁹² As one feminist historian has aptly proposed,

[o]ne comes to change one's view on a particular group not so much because former beliefs have been rationally demolished, but rather because one believes (for a number of reasons) that it is no longer proper to hold a particular view, at least not publicly... Other than through the use of disreputable images, attitudes are changed through a general alteration in a society's thought patterns so that a previously accepted view now becomes 'old fashioned' or 'superstitious'.⁹³

⁹² The strong sense of honour with regard to Punjab's womenfolk is reported in many early accounts. One such account is authored by Mufti-Ali-Ud Din of Lahore writing in 1854 with regard to the societal conditions in the time of Ranjit Singh. He makes specific notation of the 'unsophisticated' and 'simple-minded' Sikh Zamindars being particularly sensitive about the protection of honour of their womenfolk. Ali-Ud Din reports that no Zamindar would allow his wife to remain with another person, irrespective of the fact that she chose to elope with her paramour or was forcibly abducted. His first concern, Ali-Ud Din reports, was to recover his wife. See Gurbux Singh's account of Ali-Ud Din, "Society in the Punjab under Ranjit Singh – Mufti Ali-Ud Din's Analysis," *Punjab History Conference. Tenth Session. Proceedings* (Feb. 1976), pp. 135-136.

⁹³ Hilda Smith, "Feminism and the Methodology of Women's History," Berenice Carroll, ed., *Liberating Women's History: Theoretical and Critical Essays* Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1976, p. 378.

The 'irrational' feminine rites utilized by women to explain, control and order their circumstances came increasingly to be perceived by the reformers as needing to be transformed into an ordering more in line with their own, and their rulers' 'rational' and enlightened world view.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has argued that a concern for body image and rules regulating its treatment and behaviour correlates closely to social categorization and distribution of power.

Differences in the rules governing the body (dress and sexual codes, freedom of movement, and so forth) will demarcate social differences and positions of relative power. A concern with social control will dictate a system of rigid bodily and sexual restrictions governing the group to be socially controlled. And so, social and sexual politics interact.⁹⁴

The reform approach taken by the Dharm Sabha with regard to regulations controlling women's bodies, women's dress codes and women's actions is indicative of a novel apportioning of social power relations among male and female Sikhs and Hindus in Punjab. To ensure that women comply with the new demands and expectations of these reformers, the education of females increasingly came to be viewed as the panacea for the degenerate condition of their society. Subsequently the reformatory efforts of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims raised their educational endeavours to the forefront of their objectives. Thus aligned with the ostensible designs of the British to uplift India's womankind, educational reform efforts aimed at rehabilitating the dissolute female population offered early reformers and religious leaders in Punjab the opportunity to gain positive recognition from the Administration.

Dissenting Visions of Gender Reform: Guru Ram Singh and the Namdhari Sikhs:

Certainly the questions of reform with regard to women in the mid-to-late nineteenth century was not restricted to those who could benefit from alignment with British policy. The Namdharis' efforts at redefining and creating a new moral order included a radical restructuring of attitudes, roles and rituals as they pertained to women.⁹⁵ The head of the Namdhari sect Guru Ram Singh resolutely censured widely prevalent practices of female infanticide. A large number of his followers were of the lower caste groupings, especially Jat Sikhs who widely practiced infanticide. Ram Singh, well aware of the extent of infanticide issued circulars to his devotees harshly attacking the custom. "Teach your children and do not kill infant girls as infanticide is a great sin.

⁹⁴ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Writing History: Language, Class, and Gender," Teresa de Lauretis, ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* Theories of Contemporary Culture Series, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, p. 49.

⁹⁵ I am at somewhat at variance with Harjot Oberoi's examination of the Kuka order as a millenarian 'brotherhood of the pure' in that he excludes any analysis of gender construction. In light of the radical transformation of gender roles in the development of the new moral order envisioned by the Namdharis, any analysis of the movement as millenarian must also posit explanation for the changes introduced by them with regard to the role, status and ritual organization pertaining to women. Further, while British apprehension towards Kuka activity has tended to create vast differences between this 'sect' and orthodox Sikhism, Oberoi rightly underscores the need to understand the community within the framework both of the larger Sikh tradition and wider Indian religious culture. The Namdhari cosmology regarding right conduct, purity issues, dress and food taboos, and understandings of sacredness can only be understood within this context. The reorganization of gender constructs, including ritual activity too must be understood within this framework. See Oberoi, "Brotherhood of the Pure," *Modern Asian Studies*, pp. 160-161, and W.H. McLeod, "The Kukas: A Millenarian Sect of the Punjab," *The Punjab Past and Present*, pp. 164-187.

While other studies of the Kukas have elevated Guru Ram Singh's innovations with regard to women, they have tended to extol rather than adequately analyze how and why these changes came about. Thus the extension of the framework provided by both McLeod and Oberoi in their analysis of the Namdharis as a millenarian movement to include an examination of gender construction is both useful and beneficial to the study of this Sikh sect.

For accounts eulogizing Kuka contributions toward the emancipation of women, see Y. Bali and K. Bali, *The Warriors in White*, pp. 44-47, 74-81. See also, Bajwa, *Kuka Movement*, pp. 28-30 and Pritam Singh Kavi, *Istrian di Pahula. Mukti Dada* [The First Saviour of Women] Ludhiana: Bhani Sahib, 1979.

Excommunicate those who are cruel enough to put their children to death.”⁹⁶ The Bedis and Sodhis, the revered Guru lineages were particularly associated with the practice and were especially scorned by Guru Ram Singh despite their esteemed position in Sikh society.⁹⁷ Ram Singh also attacked the practice of selling and exchanging females, which was particularly widespread in Ludhiana the area surrounding Guru Ram Singh’s headquarters. The practice resulted in inordinately high rates of prostitution in the region. According to an early 19th century document “Ludhiana has the reputation of furnishing women to all the British regiments stationed there. In a population of not more than 20,000 there are 3,000 prostitutes – that is nearly half the female population are engaged in this occupation.”⁹⁸ Although many of these girls were stolen or bought from the surrounding hill country, females from the district were bartered as well.⁹⁹ According to Darling, this trafficking of women persisted well into the twentieth century and became a lucrative moneymaking scheme for Punjabis in the area. British official position was

⁹⁶ Letter to Daya Singh, Appendix B, in Jaswinder Singh, *Kuka Movement. Freedom Struggle in Punjab (Documents, 1880-1903 A.D.* Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1985, p. 44.

Also Memorandum, 22nd June, 1863, Captain Menzies, District Superintendent of Police, Amritsar, in *Rebels*, pp. 9-10 and Memorandum, No. XII, Selected Papers, *ibid.*, pp. 25-30.

See for the Namdhari ‘Code of Conduct’ see “The Namdhari Rahit-nama,” W.H. McLeod, ed. and tr., *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 129-130.

⁹⁷ See Dept. of Home, Progs. 273-284 of August 1872, cited in Ahluwalia, *Kukas*, p. 47.

Sikh religious leaders were unanimous in their denunciation of the practices of the Namdharis. Nihangs, Akalis, Bedis and Sodhis attempted to refuse admission to Guru Ram Singh and his followers to important religious shrines, including the Anandpur Gurdwara, but were persuaded by Government authorities to allow the Namdharis into the Gurdwara. At the Kesgarh Gurdwara on the 20th of March, 1867, persuaded by Government officials to admit Guru Ram Singh, religious authorities omitted the customary blessing following the Guru’s monetary donation. Ram Singh subsequently challenged the Pujaris of the Gurdwara and demanded an explanation for their actions. Pointing to Namdhari practices as setting them apart from ‘true’ Sikhism, the Pujaris were in turn chastised for supporting common ‘un-Sikh’ practices of female infanticide, drinking and meat eating. Ram Singh concluded that they could not possibly be Sikhs, as they did not live according to their own scriptural precepts. See Translation of Report of Fazl Hoosain, Inspector of Police. Hooshiarpur District, 20th March, 1867, in *Rebels*, pp. 57-62.

⁹⁸ H.L.O. Garret, trans., and ed., *Punjab a Hundred Years Ago*, pp. 21-22.

opposed to the practice but appeared unable to eradicate the custom. Darling noted: "The risk is small: if awkward questions are asked, there always witnesses enough to prove satisfactory antecedents; and even if a former husband appears, the worst to be feared is a suit, which is not necessarily lost."¹⁰⁰ Guru Ram Singh's vehement censure of the buying and selling of daughters is intelligible given its prevalence in the region.

Further, novel forms of marriage practices and rituals were initiated which disposed of the services of Brahmans and rejected the customary practice of dowry.¹⁰¹ Guru Ram Singh launched his program of marriage reform in June 1863 in the village of Khote where a large number of Namdhari disciples had gathered for an inter-caste marriage. Along with other couples, Guru Ram Singh married the daughter of a carpenter to a son of the Arora caste. Village Brahmans were quick to protest the alternative introduced by Ram Singh since their earnings and authority rested on their sole guardianship of religious and social rituals. Consequently a report was made to the authorities about the Namdhari gathering in the village and the Deputy Commissioner of Ferozepore proceeded to Khote to investigate the activities. Fearing a headlong clash between the religious authorities and the Namdharis, the latter were compelled to depart

⁹⁹ Darling describes one such incident as late as 1925: "[A]n Amritsar Jat bought a widow and daughter (also Jats) for Rs. 600. He sold the daughter, who was in her teens, for Rs. 1,200 and six months later got Rs. 300 for the widow, clearing Rs. 900 in all." Darling, *The Punjab Peasant*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁰¹ Though chronologically first initiated by the leader of the Nirankari movement in 1855, both the Nirankari and Namdhari movements claim credit for the origins of innovations to marriage rituals in the mid-eighteenth century known as the 'Anand' marriage ceremony. For the Nirankaris the innovations focussed on the encircling of Sikh scriptures as opposed to the sacred fire of both orthodox Sikh and Hindu cosmology. While the Namdharis included the reading of Sikh scriptures, they also incorporated the sacred fire into their marriage ceremony. Both however, excluded the services of the Brahman for marriage rituals. See K.S. Talwar, "The Anand Marriage Act," *Punjab Past and Present* Vol. II, (Oct. 1968), pp. 402-403.

from Khote.¹⁰² The reformed rites continued; Guru Ram Singh himself presiding at marriage ceremonies.

It was however Namdhari critique of prevailing dowry practices that was particularly consequential in light of prevalent attitudes toward women. Extravagant dowries in particular had led to great indebtedness among the Sikhs in Punjab and contributed significantly to negative attitudes toward the birth of girls.¹⁰³ Ram Singh exhorted his followers to arrange inexpensive marriages without incurring debt from dowries.¹⁰⁴ According to British officials, it was precisely these modifications which induced "men to come forward and join...the moderate expenditure at marriage ceremonies and the immunity enjoyed from brahmanical oppression and exaction."¹⁰⁵ Remarriage of widows was another aspect of the reforms initiated by the Namdharis, an aspect that was warmly supported by early British records outlining Kuka activities.¹⁰⁶

It was in the area of religious ritual transformation more than any other aspect of their reform endeavour that the Namdharis radically extended the role and status of women in the nineteenth century. As already noted, initiation rites into the Sikh panth had been in place since the time of the first Guru, but were transformed into a strictly male rite by Guru Gobind Singh. Guru Ram Singh embraced the traditional Khalsa cosmology with a number of significant exceptions: all adherents were required to wear white, wear a *malla* or woolen rosary and men *and* women were to be baptized in an identical manner.

¹⁰² See Ahluwalia, *Kukas*, p. 50.

¹⁰³ According to one source, "The girls are sacrificed in order that loans for their marriage expenses may not encumber the land descending to the sons. The birth of a daughter is regarded as the equivalent of a decree of Rs. 2,000 against the father..." *Jullundur Gazetteer*, 1904, p. 60, cited in Darling, *The Punjab Peasant*, p. 56.

¹⁰⁴ See Letter to Daya Singh, in Jaswinder Singh, *Kuka Movement*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁵ *Census of India 1891* Vol. XIX, p. 156.

The traditional colour of the Khalsa on the other hand was blue and was strictly associated with Sikh males.¹⁰⁷ Blue garb worn by males of the Khalsa effectively separated the 'true Sikhs' from all others; women in orthodox Sikh circles were thus essentially excluded from the ranks of 'true' Sikhs. Conversely, all Kukas were required to wear white, regardless of gender, thereby making a radical break with the colour differentiation that traditionally segregated Sikh women and men. Moreover, Guru Ram Singh's innovation with regard to the *malla* as another quintessential Kuka Sikh symbol was a requirement for all adherents.¹⁰⁸ With regard to the baptism of women, while there are varied accounts with regard to the actual number of women baptized, sources concur regarding their baptism into the Namdhari order.¹⁰⁹ Further, by their rejection of the esteemed and

¹⁰⁶ Home Judicial Proceedings, 273-284 of August 1872; Foreign Political (A) March 1867, Cons: 111/112, cited in Bajwa, *Kuka Movement*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁷ Falcon, writing of the regulations among Sikhs that pertain to women notes that females are explicitly forbidden to wear blue. R.W. Falcon, *Handbook on Sikhs*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁸ Translation of Paper No. 4, in Jaswinder Singh, *Kuka Movement*, p. 52.

¹⁰⁹ Kuka tradition has twenty-five women baptized at the village Siahar in Ludhiana district in 1863. See Kavi, *Istriyan di Pahula. Mukti Dada*, p. 37.

See also Bajwa, *Kuka Movement*, p. 28.

Surjit Kaur Jolly notes the baptism of a woman named Khemo in 1858 in *Sikh Revivalist Movements. The Nirankari and Namdhari Movements in Punjab in the Nineteenth Century. A Socio-Religious Study* Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing House, 1988, p. 89.

Guru Ram Singh in his letters to his following from his exile in Burma insisted that the Namdharis refer to the *Prem Sumarg* as "the foundation of the Sant Khalsa." See Letter to Daya Singh, in Jaswinder Singh, *Kuka Movement*, p. 45.

While the work claims to be written by a younger contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh, the exact details as to the authorship and dating of the *Prem Sumarg* are suspect. Traditional historiography insists that the *Sumarg* is an early work composed in the early decades of the eighteenth century. This would render the work one of the earliest compositions following the death of Guru Gobind Singh. See J.S. Grewal, "The Prem Sumarg: A Theory of Sikh Social Order," *Punjab History Conference. First Session. Proceedings* (Nov. 1968), p. 82.

Recent scholarship however has questioned the eighteenth century dating of the *Prem Sumarg*, positing instead that the work must be understood as a mid-to-late nineteenth century composition, revealing distinct 'reformist' influences. (An extant manuscript of the *Prem Sumarg* is dated Sammat 1931 [1874, A.D]. This date has been posited as the actual time of composition of the *Sumarg*. See Gurpreet Kaur, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, 'Historical Analysis of Sikh Rahitnamas', Amritsar, Guru Nanak Dev University, 1988, p. 319).

The work reflects distinct nineteenth century concerns ranging from linguistic issues to rituals attempting to distinguish Sikhs from Hindus. Marriages were to be solemnized without the services of Brahmans and Sikh scriptures were to be read during the ceremony. Further, inter-caste marriages were suggested.

monopolized position of the Sodhis, Bedis and Udasis, the traditional guardians of the major Sikh centres where initiation ceremonies were carried out, Namdhari innovations not only opened initiation to women but also made these rites more accessible to all. Obviously, many rural Sikhs were simply unable to travel to the traditionally revered shrines.¹¹⁰

Further, with the growing number of adherents, Ram Singh had divided Punjab into districts and placed each area under an agent who bore the Muslim title of *suba*; the various districts were under the individual *suba*'s direct control.¹¹¹ The Namdhari leader extended the traditional roles of women in terms of female involvement in these leadership

Moreover, in the ideal Sikh state posited by the *Sumarg*, Gurmukhi was to be given official status. Hygienic conditions, wholesome foods and spacious houses were also advocated. See Randhir Singh, ed., *Granth Prem Sumarg* (Punjabi) Jalandhar: New Book Company, 1965, (2nd edition), pp. 32-35, 43, 103, 72, cited in *ibid.*, pp. 309-350.

Needless to say, the concerns outlined above were unheard of in the eighteenth century. Most importantly for the purposes at hand, the *Prem Sumarg*'s vision of the Sikh social order included explicit instructions with regard to the baptism of women by *khande ki pahul*. Randhir Singh, ed., *Granth Prem Sumarg*, p. 37, cited in *ibid.*, p. 312.

While there are no primary sources referring to Guru Ram Singh's specific injunctions with regard to the baptism of women, his repeated reference to the *Prem Sumarg* would support claims that Guru Ram Singh baptized women in the same manner as men. Significantly, his reliance on the *Prem Sumarg* appears only in documents originating in the late nineteenth century from Burma. This could suggest a possible connection between the authorship of the *Sumarg* and Namdhari ideals and/or following. The *Sumarg*'s insistence that women be baptized also lends itself to this conjecture, particularly since earlier injunctions explicitly forbade the baptizing of women through the rite of *khande ki pahul*. Certainly, Guru Ram Singh had admirers that extended beyond the bulk of his lower caste following. Giani Gian Singh, the author of the voluminous and influential *Panth Parkash* who wrote in the second half of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries was himself an adherent of the Nirmala sect and wrote of Baba Ram Singh with respect, designating him as prophet. See Bhagat Singh "Giani Gian Singh," *Punjab History Conference. Ninth Session. Proceedings* (April 1976).

Unfortunately, given the paucity of scholarship on the *Prem Sumarg*, this notion must remain in the realm of elemental conjecture.

With regard to the discrepancies regarding the dating of the *Sumarg*'s composition, see S.S. Hans, "Prem Sumarg – A Modern Forgery," *Punjab History Conference. Proceedings* Sixteenth Session, 1982. J.S. Grewal, who included a chapter on the *Prem Sumarg* entitled "A Theory of Sikh Social Order" in his influential *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh* Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1972, pp. 72-83, apparently convinced by the claims made by S.S. Hans with regard to this 'modern forgery', excluded the chapter in the subsequent editions of the volume.

¹¹⁰ Bajwa, *Kuka Movement*, p. 22.

¹¹¹ See Stephen Fuchs, *Godmen on the Warpath. A Study of Messianic Movements in India* Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1992, p. 313.

and administrative positions. The duties of the *subas*, both women and men included travelling, preaching and other proselytizing activities.¹¹² One particularly successful female *suba* known as Hukmee was twenty years old when her preaching and proselytizing achievements were reported.¹¹³ Guru Ram Singh's decision to appoint Hukmee as *suba* can only be interpreted as a challenge to the prevailing attitudes toward women among the Sikhs, given the prevalent attitudes toward young women in particular as needing the protection of the confines of the home. It also points to a decided attempt to transform and enlarge the scope of women's roles among Sikhs in Punjab. Needless to say, the initiation of females into the ranks of *subadar* was cause for great contention among the Sikhs.¹¹⁴ British officials, highly suspicious of Namdhari activities by this time looked upon these developments with great interest. Well aware of Sikh attitudes regarding legitimate women's roles, they interpreted the falling popularity of Guru Ram Singh as stemming directly from his resolution to appoint a woman as *subadar*.¹¹⁵

¹¹² The decision to appoint women to this administrative position is particularly significant in light of the Russian Prince, Alexis Soltykoff's observations in 1842 that the custom of purdah had spread to such an extent that courtesans were the only females to be seen in Punjab towns. See Alexis Soltykoff, *Voyage Dans L'Inde*, (P.G.R.O.P.), Monograph On. 18, Panjab Government Records Office Publications, p. 104, cited in P.N. Khera, "Social Life in the Sikh Kingdom," *Punjab Past and Present* Vol. XII-II (April 1979), p. 53.

¹¹³ Correspondence from the Inspector General of Police, Panjab, to the Secretary to Government, Panjab, dated 20th January, 1868 notes that a "female Soobah, a young woman of twenty years of age, has been appointed to the Amritsar District. Her name is Hookmee; she is a daughter of Ruttan Singh, Zemindar of village Wayah, Thana Sirhali, in the Amritsar District; and her duty is to convert women and receive them into the faith." In *Rebels*, p. 77.

In another report, Subadar Hukmee's work is described as "functioning in Amritsar and Hoshiarpur, [where] she preache[s] with great success converting a large number of Sikhs to Kookaism." Foreign-Political-A Progs. 202-3 of February 1868, reproduced in Ahluwalia, *Kukas*, p. 66.

¹¹⁴ Punjabi folklore insisted that "three things are bad: grinding for a man, threshing for a buffalo, and travelling for a woman." *District Gazetteer of Multan*, p. 98, cited in Ganda Singh, "Some Important Sources of Information on Maharajah Ranjit Singh's Period," *The Punjab Past and Present* Vol. XV-11 (October 1981), p. 361.

Another proverb maintained that 'she who stays at home is worth a lakh and she who wanders out is worth a straw', *ibid*.

¹¹⁵ Letter of T.H. Thornton, Esq., Secretary to Government of Panjab to W.S. Seton Karr, Esq., Secretary to Government of India, 1st October, 1868, in *Rebels*, p. 90.

Moreover, officials were alarmed at the increasing number of women joining the movement; women and children often accounted for one-third to one-half of the adherents meeting at fairs and other gatherings.¹¹⁶ British sensibilities led to conclusions that the movement allowed for "much too free intercourse between the sexes" and officials played no small part in advancing rumours of sexual immorality among Kuka adherents and their leader, Guru Ram Singh.¹¹⁷

In light of traditional early nineteenth-century attitudes toward women in the social and religious spheres, the opening of ritual and leadership activity to women, traditionally reserved only for men, can only be understood as an extension of roles and transformed attitude toward women. Further, women's activity on many different levels of religious and political activity, including those deemed as political insurrection by the British authorities delineate a radical transformation of roles beyond abstract ideology and reform rhetoric.¹¹⁸ Of the sixty-six prisoners rounded up by the authorities upon the murders of Muslim butchers, two were women. British Victorian ideals would not allow them to be blown away as canon fodder along with the other sixty-four Kukas, and they were

According to British records, Guru Ram Singh appointed more than one woman as subadar. See Appendix B, No. 4, 'Chiefs of the Kuka Sect', *ibid.*, p. 164.

¹¹⁶ See Translation of Report of Fazl Hoosain, Inspector of Police, 20th March, 1867, in *ibid.*, p. 60.

See also Confidential, from L.H. Esq., to E.C. Bayley, *ibid.*, p. 338.

¹¹⁷ Memorandum regarding Gooroo Ram Singh, Captain Eliphinstone, Deputy Commissioner, Jalandhar, 8th June, 1863, in *ibid.*, p. 4.

The Punjab Administration had attempted to present the Kukas as a wild and immoral group, and condemned in particular Kuka women as "loose," amid charges of sexual immorality among Guru Ram Singh and his adherents. Official records charged the Guru Ram Singh as having adulterous affairs leading to rumours of him having contracted venereal disease. The rumours regarding Guru Ram Singh's immoral lifestyle were subsequently withdrawn though charges against the loose conduct of Kuka women remained. See Abstract, in *ibid.*, p. 80 and Memo. On Ram Singh and the Kukas, 4th November, 1871, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 147.

¹¹⁸ In light of Namdhari attitudes toward women, correspondence from Guru Ram Singh from Burma was often addressed to the women and children of his following as well as to the men. Further his exhortations with regard to the Kuka path of liberation including the memorization of Sikh scripture, and

subsequently released.¹¹⁹ In terms of ritual activity beyond the initiation rites for female Kukas, women as well as men were included in Guru Ram Singh's guidelines of ritual purification with regard to preparations for ablutions and prayer.¹²⁰ The wife of Guru Ram Singh, upon his exile to Burma assumed the position of 'Mai' or mother of the community and took on the task of performing the *bhajan* ceremony.¹²¹

Contextualizing Women's Reform in the Nineteenth Century: Contrasting Perspectives

The Namdhari movement had as its ideological core a need to distinguish itself from the wider civil society. This translated into a strict moral code defining and distinguishing for the community what was pure and impure, what was right from wrong, and what was sacred from the profane. Certainly the cosmology of orthodox Sikh society lent itself well to Guru Ram Singh's vision and must be understood as pivotal to the leader's re-interpretation and reformation thereof. However, the difference with regard to these regulations and rites lending themselves to the formation of purity must also be underscored. Significantly, the inclusion of women at virtually all levels of religious and political activity figures largely in the construction of difference between Kuka and orthodox Sikh society. The incorporation of women in leadership roles, religious rites as well as their inclusion in regulations underlying the construction of difference circumscribing Kuka understanding of 'the pure' in their vision of an ensuing moral order

constant prayer were addressed and applicable to both men and women. See Translation of Paper No. 17, in Jaswinder Singh, *Kuka Movement*, pp. 63-64 and Translation of Paper No. 1, in *ibid.*, p. 49.

¹¹⁹ An earlier Kuka attack on Malodh Fort also included women. See "The Kooka Outbreak," *The Friend of India* 1st Feb., 1872, cited in *Rebels*, p. 394.

¹²⁰ Translation of Paper No. 1, in Jaswinder Singh, *Kuka Movement*, p. 49.

is central in coming to an understanding of the large influx of women into Kuka ranks.¹²²

Their numbers would suggest a profound vacuum in terms of the traditional attitudes and circumscribed female roles in nineteenth century Sikh society.¹²³ Needless to say, the Namdhari movement must be appropriately contextualized within traditional patriarchal norms and values of Sikh society in the nineteenth century without exalting the movement as gratuitously women-centred; yet it must also be pointed out that traditional research into Namdhari history has not adequately come to terms with the suppositions inherent in the restructuring of attitudes and roles pertaining to women within the Namdhari world view. Women were an integral component in the renewed and purified universe the Namdharis saw themselves as forging. In comparison to the reformative efforts of the Amritsar Dharm Sabha, which attempted to do away with many of the same women's rites

¹²¹ Jaswinder Singh, *Kukas of Note in the Punjab. (Documents – 1881)* Ludhiana: Namdhari Darbar, Bhaini Sahib, 1984, pp. 55-56.

¹²² In another letter from Rangoon, Guru Ram Singh upheld strict injunctions regarding the relations between men and women in terms of ablution activity. "Deliver this order also to the Sangat that only women should shampoo women, and men, men. Women should not be allowed to perform this office for men, nor should the latter be permitted to shampoo women. Make this known, as it is the Guru's command." See Translation of Paper No. 4, Jaswinder Singh, *Kuka Movement*, p. 53. Whether the woman streaming to Kuka meetings were simply attracted to the emancipatory message of Guru Ram Singh without undergoing initiation or were official adherents of the order is unclear. However, British repeated references to the large numbers of women at Kuka gatherings point to a radical departure from normative customs observed within Sikh orthodoxy.

¹²³ It is impossible to compare numerically the proportion of women at Namdhari gatherings with women at other Sikh gatherings due to the paucity of precise information. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre in March, 1919 meticulously recorded in terms of caste, religion and gender groupings, does offer an insight into the ratio of women to men gathered. Of the 381 persons killed in the massacre ordered by General Dyer, only two were women. Sikhs constituted the majority of those gathered and slaughtered at the Bagh, and both women killed were Sikh Jatnis. Further, the largest percentages of those gathered at Jallianwala Bagh were from rural communities. While the Singh Sabha movement had for nearly thirty years loudly proclaimed the upliftment of Sikh women as foremost of its reform endeavour, the ratio of 2/379 women to men at this gathering of a largely rural populace attests to the gap between the ideology of Sikh reformers and the actual practices of the rural population. While a number of Sikh gatherings did increasingly include women, particularly the Education Conferences held after 1908, the minute number of women at the Jallianwala Bagh of 1919 attests to the consistency of male predominance at religious assemblages and the corresponding chasm between women and men in the religious realm. While not wanting to inflate the importance of this particular occurrence, it does offer an illustration of the state of Sikh affairs with regard to the augmentation of women's roles and status within Sikhism in the early

and beliefs condemned by Guru Ram Singh, the Sabha did not create alternative rituals nor expand existing male-oriented rites to include women. In essence then, Punjabi females could were left with few alternatives to fulfill their need to order and control their everyday lives. In spite of the avowedly male-centred framework within which the Namdharis operated, in creating an enlarged space for women in terms of purity issues, ritual activity as well as augmenting women's traditional roles in Namdhari political affairs, Guru Ram Singh opened doors for women's direct involvement in the transformed moral universe Namdhari ideology attempted to create. Conversely, the efforts of the Amritsar Dharm Sabha must be understood as stemming from a profound need to *extend* male control over those areas traditionally under the dominion of women. Significantly, the Amritsar Dharm Sabha, initiated at the same time that Namdhari agitation and suppression thereof was at its peak, castigated women who followed gurus insisting that female devotion to a guru would undermine the authority of her husband.¹²⁴

Studies on the reform process within Sikhism in the nineteenth century have tended to focus on the movement championed by the Raj, the Singh Sabha movement. This reform endeavour was, as noted earlier, initiated by individuals who by virtue of their assimilation into the British educational framework had moved upward on the social hierarchy into positions of power and prestige that were traditionally reserved for members of the aristocracy and religious orthodox leadership. The exploits of these 'new elites' have tended to strike the imagination of a great number of scholars. Much

twentieth century. For a statistical analysis of the Jallianwala Bagh affair, see Surjit Hans, "Jallianwala Bagh: The Construction of Nationalist Symbol," *Journal of Sikh Studies* Vol. XVIII, 1993-94, pp. 1-17.

¹²⁴ Jones, Annual Report, "Socio-Religious Movements," Bjorkman, ed., *Fundamentalism*, p. 50. The resolution condemning women's adherence to a living guru may well stem from the large influx of women into Namdhari ranks.

of Sikh historiography has on the other hand underplayed the reorganization process undertaken by the Kuka leader Ram Singh and his predominantly lower class adherents. Also significant from a colonial perspective, the reforms undertaken by the Namdharis, particularly those pertaining to women, were deemed reprehensible given the rigid Victorian ethos informing the gender constructs of the British authorities.¹²⁵

Uma Chakravarti has criticised the tendency of historiography to concentrate on the activities of upper caste male reformers, those individuals who worked broadly within their own traditions through a process of redefinition and 'recasting' of women into roles amiable to their 'reformed' sensibilities.¹²⁶ The Namdhari movement, situated in the fluid universe of Punjab in the nineteenth century and containing undifferentiated elements of both Hinduism and Sikhism (especially the popular religious traditions of the peasantry) has generally not been given the attention nor recognition it has warranted. As a reformed alternative the Namdharis had profound implications in terms of their conspicuous critique of dominant class ideologies and gender. Further, while the 'elite' reformer of the upper echelons loudly touted their objectives pertaining to the 'women's question', there was virtually no challenging of the extant patriarchal framework. On the one hand, control of women through the imposition of novel restrictions and carefully defined, 'proper'

¹²⁵ In light of the negative reports regarding the large influx of women and their conduct at Kuka gatherings, British intentions to 'uplift' the status of Punjabi women must indeed be held suspect. Certainly the parameters of these intentions with regard to women in Punjab have less to do with the actual upliftment of women that was clearly taking place within Namdhari ranks and ideology than British compulsions to subdue and control the population of Punjab.

¹²⁶ Uma Chakravarti, "Reconceptualising Gender: Phule, Brahmanism and Brahmanical Patriarchy," Pawar, ed., *Women in Indian History*, pp. 161-162.

Exceptions to the dominant social reform movements, according to Chakravarti, are those originating with Jotiba Phule, the non-Brahmanical leader of Maharashtra and the other with Pandita Ramabai, the Brahman widow of the reformer Ranade. Both these movements originated in western India and focussed their attention on the structure of Brahmanical patriarchy, which they identified as the locus of gender oppression.

spaces for women on the other became matters of central importance for the new elite. Conversely, Namdhari not only challenged the religious status quo with regard to women, but also supported their assertions by radically enlarging women's space and involvement on all levels.

Dayananda's Arya Samaj Movement and Singh Sabha Reforms: Contesting Claims and Rhetoric:

The Arya Samaj, though founded after the initiation of the Amritsar Singh Sabha, was the most far-reaching and influential of the reform initiatives in Punjab with regard to the question of women. As noted earlier, Sikhs and Hindus played active roles in the formation of the Arya Samaj during the late nineteenth century. Consequently, Dayanand's vision of the role and status of women largely affected both communities. Swami Dayanand, like Roy and others of the Bengali literati, was centrally implicated in the reinterpretation of the past and the rewriting of Indian history. He differed from the universalism of the Brahmo Samaj in his insistence on the superiority of the Vedas and subsequently, Vedic religion over all others.¹²⁷ Understandably, this led to irreconcilable differences between Arya and Brahmo leaders.¹²⁸ He did however follow in the footsteps of his Brahmo predecessors in his belief that the key to a correct understanding of the

¹²⁷ Liddle and Joshi explain the difference between the ideology of the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj accordingly: While the Brahmos attempted to *reform* Hinduism, Dayanand pledged to *revive* the Hindu religion. See Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, *Daughters of Independence. Gender, Caste and Class in India* Delhi: Kali for Women/Zed Books, 1986, p. 20.

¹²⁸ Dayanand's awareness of the stigma attached to Hinduism in its degenerate state, as well as his emphasis on a reinterpretation of Hinduism based on the *Rg Veda* led him to use the term 'Arya' for his purified and reformed adherents. Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*?" Sangari and Vaid eds., *Recasting Women*, pp. 55-56.

position and role of women was to be found in the Vedas.¹²⁹ Dayanand conjured up a vision of a return to the 'golden age' through the purification (*shuddhi*) of all peoples, as well as through the procreation of superior offspring.¹³⁰ Given the centrality of his concern regarding the furtherance of race, the role and sexuality of women was of immense concern to Dayanand. Thus, the *Satyarth Prakash* or '*Light of Truth*' is specific about the rules and regulations for ideal conception, ideal child-rearing practices, and ideal womanhood.¹³¹ One example is in his explicit instructions regarding the nursing of infants, important given his understanding of race and the necessary potency thereof:

As the body of the child is made out of the elements of the mother's body, the mother gets weak at the time of child-birth; therefore, it is best that she does not feed the child at her breast. The nipples of the mother should be anointed with such ointment as might check the flow of milk. This will rejuvenate the mother within a month. Till then the husband should exercise self-restraint. The husband and wife who live up to these principles are sure to be blessed with excellent progeny, long life, and gradual progress in strength and valour and all their children will be the

¹²⁹ The religion of the Aryas, who were according to Dayanand the original inhabitants of the northern region known as *Aryavrata*, was the oldest and truest religion. The essence of this religion was revealed through the hallowed language of Sanskrit in the Vedas. As the revealed word of God, the Vedas were the touchstone of all knowledge and according to Dayanand, the only legitimate basis for a renewed society. Dayanand's vision included a return to this age of universal Vedic belief and practice, where Sanskrit would once again be given its place of honour. Education became the key to ensure the renewed centrality of the sacred language of Sanskrit; the procreation of superior offspring was another means of the social reconstruction of a denigrated society. Women, as child bearers, were a pivotal aspect of Dayanand's reform initiatives. See Indu Banga, "Socio-Religious Reform and Patriarchy," Pawar, ed., *Women in Indian History*, pp. 245-247.

¹³⁰ While Hinduism traditionally lacked a conversion ritual, Dayanand introduced the *shuddhi* ritual to purify and readmit Hindus into the faith that had converted to Islam or Christianity, as well as those of the untouchable caste, to initiate them into membership within the clean castes. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Aryas purified a number of Rahtias, a Sikh caste of untouchables. Sikhs of the Singh Sabha movement also adopted the *shuddhi* reconversion rite, largely to contest the conversion activities of the Arya Samaj. See Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements*, pp. 100-101.

¹³¹ With regard to the conception of children, Dayanand gave concise descriptions and regulations as to the timing and circumstances surrounding the sexual act between marriage partners. Central to his concern was the outcome of a superior rank of progeny. He cautions: "The sex rules should be strictly followed by the husband and the wife. Efforts should be made not to waste the seminal fluid preserved through Brahmacharya as best children can only be born of the best generative elements." Upadhyaya, tr., *The Light of Truth*, p.137.

possessors of the best kind of strength, and valiance, long life and righteousness.¹³²

Dyananand also vehemently criticized other issues affecting females such as child-marriage, prostitution and the lack of female education. These were viewed as largely responsible for the inferior rank and state of Hindu progeny (fallen from the superior state of the original Aryan race), which had ultimately led to the degenerate state of Hindu society.¹³³ Central to the sexual regulations pertaining to women as well as men was a profound need to control sexuality. Thus, while both girls and boys were entitled to an education, their physical segregation was imperative. The schools themselves had to be separated by a minimum of three miles and teachers and all other employees of these respective schools needed to be of the same gender. Thus, within the confines of boys' schools, all had to be male; in girls' schools, only females were allowed entrance.¹³⁴

¹³² Ibid., p. 44.

¹³³ Dayanand's *Satyarth Prakash* was insistent that all children be educated. The duration for girls' education however was much shorter than for boys, the minimum being eight years as opposed to seventeen for boys. Further, the level and contents of the curriculum for girls included supplements for special training suitable for the household duties they were responsible for after marriage. Certainly, girls were not to be educated for any professions outside the home, with the exception, as the need became increasingly urgent for female teachers, for teaching in girls' schools.

With regard to marriage, Dayanand's understanding of societal rejuvenation was based on the notion of monogamous marriages, restraint, fidelity and compatibility with regard to giving birth and raising superior offspring. The minimum age for marriage, after completion of a girl's education, was sixteen years; the increased age of females giving birth to children was believed to lead to better progeny. Domestic harmony too was presented as conducive to good socialization of children. Thus, the compatibility of marriage partners was essential in Dayanand's societal vision. See Indu Banga's analysis of Dayanand's *Satyartha Prakash*, in "Socio-Religious Reform and Patriarchy," Pawar, ed., *Women in Indian History*, pp. 248.

The first Arya Samaj girls' school was opened in the early 1890s by Lala Munshi Ram and others in Jullundur and known as the Arya Kanya Pathshala. It was founded to provide an education along the lines advocated by Dayanand with the added intent to safeguard girls from missionary influence. The success of the Kanya Pathshala led to a realization of the need for a centre of higher education for girls, and in 1896 the Kanya Mahavidyalaya was founded, eventually developing into a high school and finally a women's college. See Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements*, pp. 101-102.

¹³⁴ Dayanand wrote: "No boy of five years of age should be allowed to enter a girls' school, nor a girl of that age in a boys' school. It means that as long as they are *Brahmcharis* (male students) and *Brahmcharinis* (female students), they should keep themselves aloof from eight kinds of sensualities -

Needless to say, while the larger concern for the propagation of the Aryan race implied that both men and women were included in his observances, the *function* of women as primary procreators is thus of particular importance to Dayanand's vision of reform.

The Singh Sabha movement inaugurated in the late nineteenth century has been presented as being solely induced and under girded by the immutable forces of Sikh scripture.¹³⁵ The British administration however viewed the reforms pertaining to the women's question sweeping the province as directly tied to their own moral superiority and ensuing influence. Certainly British influence on the Singh Sabha movement is undeniable, particularly in light of the preferential treatment given the Sikhs by the Raj. Correspondingly, Singh Sabha leaders exhibited admiration and unequivocal support toward their rulers. However, many of the reforms pertaining to women put in place by the new elite had their foundation in the vision and reconstruction of society by those outside the pale of orthodox Sikhism. The Namdhari and Nirankari movements as well as other local reformatory groups such as the Amritsar Dharm Sabha played significant roles in shaping the reform efforts of the Singh Sabha movement.¹³⁶ Given the jeopardized

looking at the person of opposite sex, contactual relation, private meeting, conversation, love-story-telling, intercourse, contemplation of a tempting object and company..." Upadhyaya, tr., *Light of Truth*, p. 56.

¹³⁵ Dhillon, "Singh Sabha Movement and Social Change," Gurnam Kaur, ed., *Sikh Value System and Social Change*, p. 27.

¹³⁶ The pivotal role of the Nirankaris in the efforts of the Singh Sabha movement will be addressed in greater detail in the following chapter. For the purposes at hand, the Nirankaris posed little threat to the British authorities, and given their largely urban base, had minimal influence on the wider Sikh population, particularly the mass rural populace. Precisely because of their urban bearings, the Nirankaris figured significantly in the initiatives of the Singh Sabha, whose influence, as will be argued, was largely restricted to a small minority of Sikhs, most particularly those living in the urban centres of Punjab. As already noted, they were highly influential in the process leading to the legislation of the Anand marriage ceremony which occurred in 1909, claiming that the ceremony originated with their own reform initiatives. As with the Namdharis, with regard to their numbers, accounts vary in the extreme. In 1861 they were numerated as four or five hundred adherents. In 1891 the Punjab census listed them as 50, 726 in British territory and another 9,885 in the Native States. By all accounts however, the latter figures were far too high, this radical increase in Nirankari numbers having more to do with British nineteenth century predilection to compartmentalize at any cost, than their actual numbers. Webster notes that

position that the Kukas had placed the Sikhs into, reformers fearing a backlash that would erode their preferred status made certain that they distanced themselves considerably from the Namdhari movement's reform ventures in particular. Thereafter, and most predominantly, Singh Sabha reform initiatives regarding Sikh women were largely in response to the highly developed gender ideology of the Arya Samaj. Increasingly aware of the threat as well as the successful initiatives of the Arya Samaj, they incorporated many of the premises of Swami Dayanand's vision all the while insisting that their initiatives were solely and securely founded in Sikh scripture and tradition. By the beginning of the twentieth century Singh Sabha leaders also began to claim credit for the successful ventures of the Arya Samaj, positing their Gurus' injunctions against idol worship as laying the foundation upon which Swami Dayanand then was enabled to build his reformatory vision.¹³⁷

By the end of the nineteenth century, calls for reform were securely embedded in a need to protect and separate Sikh identity from those of the other religious communities. For increasingly, members of the new middle class within all faith traditions in Punjab began to utilize the newly established societies and institutions for their own personal gain; jobs, status, prestige and prosperity for themselves and for their respective communities.

many *sahajdhari* Sikhs erroneously returned themselves as Nirankaris. Webster, *The Nirankari Sikhs*, especially pp. 9-21.

See also Surjit Kaur Jolly, *Sikh Revivalist Movements* and Kenneth Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements*, pp. 87-90.

Jones maintains that the Nirankaris did not clash with the British, but grew in part through the establishment of British rule, "since that freed them from the restriction of the Sikh government. The Nirankaris thus became a permanent subsection of the Sikh religion and in doing so helped to clarify the lines dividing Sikhs from Hindus. Their dependence on Guru Nanak and early Sikhism for their model of 'pure' religion separated them from...the Namdharis." Ibid., p. 90.

¹³⁷ *Khalsa Advocate*, May 20, 1905.

Increasingly, "secular battles began to be fought with communal weapons."¹³⁸ While elsewhere the middle classes the educated elite were combating communal discordance in the name of Indian nationalism, in Punjab communalism acquired an ever more secure footing. Yadav gives the composition of the Punjabi middle class and circumstances within which it was cultivated as accounting for this contrariety with regard to communal differences. In Bombay, Madras and Calcutta the middle class had grown largely out of the new phase of finance capital and its respective industries, trade in particular, which resulted in the middle class being less dependent and more competitive with the British bourgeoisie and government. In Punjab, the middle class was more of a "go-between contractor class" which was inaugurated through the break-up of the feudal economy and subsequent British exploitation of the Indian market through the construction of a requisite infrastructure, roads, bridges, public buildings, railways, irrigation works: "Hence they were closely connected with the British by economic interests and therefore could not be expected to adopt an independent line of action in matters political."¹³⁹ Thus Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs vied with one another to protect their communal interests, not through agitation against their colonial masters, but through close collaboration with them. Through their respective organizations members of the various groups began to demand special privileges for themselves.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ K.C. Yadav, "Presidential Address," *Punjab History Conference. Proceedings*. Twentieth Session. (Feb. – March 1986), p. 201.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

¹⁴⁰ In 1906, Secretary of State Morley announced constitutional reforms in India, based on a parliamentary system. This was a cause for concern for the Muslim population who began demanding separate representation based on their minority status, socio-economic backwardness and steadfast loyalty to the Raj. In Punjab the Muslim League was inaugurated in 1907; Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 gave separate electorates to Muslims. These reforms, however, focussing exclusively on the Muslim community resulted in alienating Sikhs and Hindus of the Province. Correspondingly, in 1909 the Chief Khalsa Diwan asked for separate representation for Sikhs on the basis of their disproportionate

What became increasingly vital for these groups then, particularly for the minority populace such as the Muslims and Sikhs, was the creation of religious distinction and distance between themselves and the larger Hindu population. For until the nineteenth century religious identity was not confined to one particular religious tradition, especially with regard to religious rites, pilgrimages, and festivals. By the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries communal interests fostered a heightened compulsion to establish uniformity of tradition and novel boundaries between religious rites, practices, and individuals of the various faith traditions.¹⁴¹ For the Sikh this translated into a process of "Sikhizing the Sikhs,"¹⁴² re-defining the parameters of 'pure' Sikhism in light of unadulterated Sikh beliefs and reformed Sikh practices. Well molded by British

contributions and numbers in the Indian Army. G.I. Home Political, Dec. 20, 1909, cited in Sunil Jain, "Punjab's Response to Communal Representation," *Punjab History Conference. Proceedings*. Twentieth Session (Feb.- March 1986), p. 329.

While the forces of communalism were increasingly dominating the political arena in Punjab, they were by and large restricted to the urban middle classes, particularly during the earliest years of the twentieth century. According to Yadav, only a small percentage of the population (around 2%) were directly involved and affected by the communal antagonism in Punjab at the turn of the century. If his appraisal of the situation is correct, this left about 98% of the population still living in peace and amity in the villages, towns and cities of Punjab. See Yadav, "Presidential Address," *Punjab History Conference. Proceedings*. Twentieth Session, p. 202.

¹⁴¹ David Gilmartin explicates this transformation in purporting that with colonial rule came a weakening of kinship structures in urban areas; "forces of 'individualism' were transcending ties of kinship." With this realignment process came new ideological commitments to communal affiliations as opposed to what British writings delineated as the intense tribal ties in evidence in rural regions. See David Gilmartin, "Kinship, Women and Politics in Twentieth Century Punjab," Gail Minault, ed., *The Extended Family. Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan*. Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1981, p. 161. While British support for rural kinship ties was widely lauded, by the turn of the twentieth century the interests of the Raj lay less in maintaining rural kinship ties than in the active realignment of these 'tribes' by their religious affiliation. The Alienation of Land Bill in 1900 attests to this shift in Government attitude. The Punjab Government was permitted under the Act to separate Hindu Jats from Muslim Jats; member of these groups were prohibited to transfer land between themselves. Harnam Singh, the Punjab Council Member insisted that the distinctions made by the Government were erroneous; they would simply intensify communal unrest and turn brotherly relations into discord. See Norman G. Barrier, *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900* Monograph and Occasional Papers Series, No. 2, Duke University: Program in Comparative Studies on Southern Asia, 1966, pp. 74-75. Disregarding the protest of the Council Member as well as numerous and highly articulated concerns of other opponents to the Bill, the Bill was passed into Act October 19, 1900. This laid the groundwork for heightened communal ties to move beyond the confines of urban centres.

¹⁴² Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 306.

assumptions of scriptural authority and 'true' religion, Singh Sabha reformers increasingly turned to fastidious interpretations of Sikh scripture and novel interpretations of Sikh history as the basis of their reform endeavour.¹⁴³ Alongside this scriptural focus came the urgent need for education. Literacy for all, males and females, the urban as well as the rural populace, became pivotal to support and perpetuate the system of belief *and* behavioural expectations of this new elite. And to this end they intensified their attention and efforts.

Integral to the safeguarding of religious identity by the Singh Sabha in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the women's question. Sikh women as the traditional bearers of tradition and observers of popular religious forms became important sites upon which the margins of Sikh identity were constructed. Women, however, were seldom included in these transformational endeavours; the process surrounding the 'proper' construction of Sikh women's identity was executed almost exclusively by middle class males *for* their womenfolk.

¹⁴³ According to Bruce Lawrence, while scripture may be cited as the highest explicit authority, it is always invoked to advance a principle that supercedes scripture, even while acknowledging scriptural supremacy. Lawrence, *Defenders of God*, p. 115.

The call to scripture by the Singh Sabha leaders must be understood in within the parameters of religious identity construction, becoming increasingly compelling in light of the political milieu of Punjab at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.

Chapter Five:
Education, Gender Codes and Politics

What gender is, what men and women are ...do not simply reflect or elaborate upon biological 'givens' but are largely products of social and cultural processes.¹

Feminist historiography is based primarily on the notion that each aspect of reality is gendered. As such, it seeks to determine how the categories of male, of female are historically constructed over time. It moves beyond a timeless, biologically determined understanding of gender to a construct that is fluid and constantly changing. As one historian maintains: "Women do not have a fixed place in this frame; indeed, the frame is not even fixed. The frame is constantly shifting, as norms, cognition and even relationships are negotiated and renegotiated."² Needless to say, 'feminist' historiography may be *feminist* without being exclusively focused on 'women's' history.³ To return again to the analysis of Joan Wallach Scott, gender refers to an on-going, fluid process where by sexual difference acquires a socially or culturally constructed meaning. An historical focus on gender thus goes far beyond the mere addition of women to the pre-existing narrative; it fundamentally changes one's understanding of history.⁴ Yet, as Sangari and Vaid have also pointed out, gender history is a "hidden history."⁵ Particularly with regard to the various reform movements in Punjab, traditional historiography has interrogated their development through the lenses of class, of caste, or

¹ Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, "Introduction: Accounting for Sexual Meanings," Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, eds., *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 1.

² Erika Friedl, "Notes from the Village: On the Ethnographic Construction of Women in Iran," Fatma Müge Göçek and Shiva Balaghi, eds., *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East. Tradition, Identity, and Power* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 92.

³ Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, "Recasting Women: An Introduction," K. Sangari, S. Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women. Essays in Colonial History* New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990, p. 3.

⁴ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, pp. 1-3.

religion. However, reformers' roles in *defining* gender and patriarchies have generally been ignored.⁶ Yet the process of gender definition was crucial to the very formation of the emerging elite, the new middle class; it was also central to the ideology and rhetoric accompanying the development of this new elite.

Close attention paid to the rhetoric of the social reformist discourse with regard to the 'women's question' often points to an active charting of a very different political agenda. In the case of the British, the image of the oppressed Hindu woman served the larger political function as affirmation of European superiority and justification of the imperial enterprise. In reaction, nationalists elevated the Indian woman; her place in the home represented the uncontaminated purity of Indian tradition. Thus, 'woman' became the site upon which larger claims were made and contested, though claims varied and were dependent on the specific reformist discourse. Further, claims were made on behalf of the nation as a whole, or in the context of communal, caste or regional politics.⁷

Educational initiatives were an important aspect of the reformist discourse of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They were also a central means by which reformers actively constructed and defined gender. This study analyses the educational enterprise of the Singh Sabha movement in particular. However, in coming to a more substantial understanding of the underpinnings of gender construction during the Singh Sabha period, it is of central importance to acknowledge the adherence and participation of this new elite in the manifold winds of societal change whirling about the *wider* Indian subcontinent during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Still, these Sikh leaders

⁵ Sangari and Vaid, "Recasting Women," Sangari and Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women*, p. 9.

⁶ Ibid.

also elucidated and in some cases modified prevailing understandings of gender during this time period; these changes are significant in light of reformist Sikh needs and designs. As noted earlier, the distinct minority status of the Sikhs in light of the larger religious communities in Punjab is of particular importance in the discussion of gender during the Singh Sabha period. The tendency to present an unparalleled position of Sikh women and Sikh men in terms of their distinctiveness became a major aspect of this course of identity construction. The process was fraught with an urgency to highlight, rewrite and in some cases *create* interpretations of Sikh history that were conducive to the constructs of gender amiable to the reformist worldview. However, as already noted, dissensions among Sikh reformers were myriad, lending themselves to variant and often opposing understandings of the exact manifestations of those constructions. Further, the factions among the Sikhs were themselves intensely vying for prestige, control and power in the newly developing political arena under the Raj. Reforms in terms of gender constitution were often pivotal in the discourse surrounding the power dynamics of the period.

Ultimately then, the task of analyzing the construction of gender during the Singh Sabha period is a formidable one; the variance of gender reforms among the Sikhs and the rationale bolstering those differences must be central to the discussion. Clearly however, given the intense communal rivalry between the religious groups particularly in the early twentieth century, identity formation was critical. Preconceived British notions played no little part in this process. The effeminate 'Indian' at large, the 'effete' though defiant Bengali', and the sturdy, manly and loyal Sikh were heartily subscribed to by the

⁷ See Patricia Uberoi, "Introduction: Problematising social reform, engaging sexuality, interrogating the state," Patricia Uberoi, ed., *Social reform, sexuality and the state* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996,

authorities.⁸ Further, and perhaps more significantly, these classifications along with their feminine counterparts were conveniently endorsed by certain reformist groups, and vehemently protested by others. In all cases, these increasingly essentialized gender constructs became important aspects of the communal consciousness-raising carried out by the powerful new elite the Tat Khalsa, the alleged representatives of their respective communities.⁹

The Sikhs and Female Education – The Missionary Endeavour, Sikh Orthodox Tradition and Reform Initiatives: An Overview:

Educational advancement for all communities vying for representation in the administrative bureaucracy established by the Raj figured largely in this process. In the Sikh case educational progress, particularly with regard to the education of females, became a common goal uniting the various factions. However, since the dreaded missionary societies were at the forefront of the educational endeavour, a new emphasis

pp. xi-xii.

⁸ See Chapter Three.

In a lecture to the Royal Central Asian Society as late as 1961, Major J. Short who was with the 47th Sikh Regiment noted: "To come to grips with Anglicanism, you must come to grips with the mere English. To come to grips with Sikhism, you must grasp the significance of the Manja Jut Sikh...Be that as it may, what is certain is that while these Jats of Juts generally are more or less Indianized, the Punjabi Jut who is a Sikh is not only strikingly unlike the Punjabi Jat who is not one, but the Jut Sikh, very specially the Manja Jut Sikh, is the most strikingly un-Indian of all Indians." Further, referring to the "feminine" character of the 'Indian', Short purports that the "Jut Sikh is an out-and-out male." Major J. Short, "The Sikhs," *The Punjab Past and Present* Vol. XV-II (October 1981) No. 30, pp. 367-368.

⁹ Tat Khalsa was originally the distinction utilized for the faction of the Panth opposing the Sikh leader Banda Bahadur in the early eighteenth century. Singh Sabha intellectuals identified themselves as the Tat Khalsa to connote an understanding of a refined, 'pure' Sikhism that was in direct contrast with Sanatan Sikhism. The latter supported a version of Sikhism that was more at ease within the Hindu milieu. The Tat Khalsa vigorously opposed any co-joining of Hinduism and Sikhism, insisting instead that Sikhism in the past, as in contemporary times was an entirely separate religion. 'Tat Khalsa' and 'Singh Sabha' will be utilized synonymously throughout the chapter.

See Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries. Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 305-306.

Also, W.H. McLeod, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism* Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements. Series No. 5, Jon Woronoff, ed., London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1995, pp. 208-209.

was laid on the indigenous education of Punjab's youth.¹⁰ According to Baba Khem Singh Bedi, "[t]he appointment of teachers should rest with the people, for they only can best know what kind of teachers they require. Unless the teacher possesses the confidence of the people, these latter will not send their girls to schools." With regard to the missionary efforts, Bedi noted that "[t]he disinterested and unselfish efforts they make in this direction lose almost all their value when people consider that all this is done for the sake of the Christian religion."¹¹ Khem Singh Bedi, who became the representative of the Amritsar Singh Sabha and was widely vilified by the powerful Lahore Singh Sabha was nonetheless praised as highly instrumental in the establishment and funding of female education.¹² Other members of the Guru lineage also facilitated the Sikh educational progress, particularly the women of these groups.¹³ Certainly, the religious establishment's involvement in the education of both males and females was part of a long-standing tradition. The Udasi and Nirmala Sikhs were known to hold classes in their respective *deras* or *dharamsalas*.¹⁴ Further, Gurmukhi schools were

¹⁰ The American Presbyterian Mission in Ludhiana set up its first elementary school for females in 1836. The Punjab Administration patronized their efforts to the extent that they closed one of their own schools and bequeathed their building at Rawalpindi in 1860-61 to the missionary effort. Further, *zenana* instruction was carried out almost exclusively by missionary societies. Christian women, both European and Indian imparted instruction to women in their homes. By 1862 more than thirty European women engaged in the educational endeavour in Punjab. See *Punjab Education Report*, 1861-62, pp. 41-56, cited in Govinder Kaur Sidhu, "A Historical Study of the Development of Female Education in Punjab Since 1849," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Amritsar: Department of Education, Guru Nanak Dev University, 1985, pp. 131-132.

¹¹ See G.W. Leitner, *History of Indigenous Education in the Panjab Since Annexation and in 1882* Patiala: Languages Department, 1971, (first published in 1883), p. 109.

¹² Baba Khem Singh Bedi is credited with establishing 108 female schools by 1882. *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103. See also Teja Singh, "The Singh Sabha Movement," Ganda Singh, ed., *The Singh Sabha and other Socio-Religious Movements in the Punjab. 1850-1925. The Panjab Past and Present* Patiala: Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, 1984, pp. 38-39.

¹³ Mata Raj Devi of the Sodhi lineage, in memory of her son founded the Sodhi Gurbachan Singh Khalsa High School. See Ganda Singh, ed., *Bhagat Lakshman Singh, Autobiography* Calcutta: Sikh Cultural Centre, 1965, pp. 239-240.

¹⁴ H.S. Singha, "Sikh Educational Movement: Past and Present," Mohinder Singh, ed., *Prof. Harbans Singh. Commemoration Volume* New Delhi: Prof. Harbans Singh Commemoration Committee, 1988, p. 119.

often run by the wives and mothers of the *bhais* of the Sikh religious establishment.¹⁵ Under extant pressures from the British authorities however, these “more or less mysterious institutions” were perceived as lacking the requisite means to properly educate Sikh girls, and many schools were subsequently closed.¹⁶ This government action however was not without its critics. G.W. Leitner, the newly appointed Director of Instruction in Punjab was very apprehensive of this move, noting that “[a]fter all the agitation that had taken place regarding ‘female education’, it was certainly inconsistent to sweep away at one blow 108 schools.”¹⁷ Leitner believed that Government intervention and innovation in the form of inspected and monitored female schools was unrealistic and injurious to the very cause of female education. He was well aware of the notions of honour that formed the basis of Sikh society, and insisted that a more effective course of action would necessarily involve the religious establishment: “That the wives of priests should visit females of their community and teach them is right and proper, but that girls especially of a marriageable age, should cross bazars in order to assemble in a school, is, I think, objectionable.” In defense of these notions of honour he purported that the “better classes” held their women in “respect and a religious affection of which we have not even the outward profession in Europe.”¹⁸ With regard to the educational system the Government was putting in place, Leitner instead advised the authorities to support and return to the indigenous traditions of learning. “[D]omestic happiness and

¹⁵ According to Leitner, their husbands generally taught these women an elementary level of literacy; they subsequently instructed children in reading and religious duties. Q. 41, “Education Commission,” Leitner, *History of Indigenous Education in the Panjab*, p. 103.

¹⁶ Leitner, *History of Indigenous Education in the Panjab*, p. 103

Under the judicial auspices of the Education Department, the schools promoted by Baba Khem Singh Bedi were closed, perceived as they were by the authorities as lacking proper form and substance. Leitner, upon his appointment as Director of Instruction in turn revived fifty of these schools. *Ibid.*, p. 103, 102.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

purity will be furthered by abolishing the present Female Schools, except wherever the local priesthood wish for their continuance, or where the management can be made over entirely to men like Baba Khem Singh and his relatives.”¹⁹

With the establishment of the Singh Sabha movement, G.W. Leitner foresaw the possibility of an effective vehicle for the promotion of education, particularly female instruction among the Sikhs. For indeed, the education of Sikh females was a cause for great concern for the upwardly mobile, newly missionary educated Sikh males. While they were grateful for the educational opportunities brought about by the missionary establishment, they were exceedingly threatened by Christian influences upon their women and girls.²⁰ These Sikh leaders however were at a loss. They distrusted the missionary establishment's designs upon their children, but they were also increasingly wary of the intentions and educational approach of the traditional religious elite, particularly as the animosity between the Amritsar and Lahore Singh Sabha factions amplified. Bhagat Lakshman Singh gives a detailed account of the animosity between the two groups. In one small town named Sukho, Lakshman Singh in 1898 opened the Sukho Khalsa School, which within one year was placed on the list of Aided institutions due to a paucity of funds. Its rival, the Sanatan Khalsa School Sukho was inaugurated a short while later and ran successfully, due to its support by Baba Khem Singh Bedi and other moneyed men. Due to his childhood association with Khem Singh Bedi, Lakshman Singh eventually persuaded the aristocrat to support his school as well, and the school

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *Khalsa Advocate*, April 27, 1907.

The *Khalsa Advocate* was the mouthpiece of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, “propogating its ideals and carrying its messages to the Sikh intelligentsia and masses.” Gurdarshan Singh, “Chief Khalsa Diwan: Fifty Years of Service (1902-1951),” Ganda Singh, ed., *The Singh Sabha and other Socio-Religious Movements*, p. 74.

remained open.²¹ While in this particular incident the rivalry between the two groups was curtailed due to the intervention of both Baba Khem Singh Bedi and Lakshman Singh, this was not generally the case. The Lahore Sabha in particular was confronted with a good deal of opposition within the Sikh community at large and its members banned from meeting in a number of local gurdwaras. They in turn were necessitated to establish their own gurdwaras served by priests who were in line with the ideology of the Singh Sabha.²² However, the aristocracy was closely tied to the Amritsar Singh Sabha; with the aristocracy came potential monetary support and sustenance of the educational ventures. While the Lahore Sabha moved into an increasingly hegemonic position, they had few arrangements in place to financially sustain their grand educational schemes.²³

The Tat Khalsa and its Educational Ideals:

Sikh literati expounded on their ideals of education through the various mediums at their disposal; tracts and newspapers in particular were utilized to spread their objectives. Women, it was acknowledged, were sinned against as infants, in their youth, in their marriages as wives and daughters-in-law, and as widows.²⁴ Education came to be

²¹ The rivalries between the two groups, the Sanatanists represented by the Amritsar Singh Sabha and the Tat Khalsa, the Lahore group continued well into the twentieth century. See Ganda Singh, ed., *Bhagat Lakshman Singh*, pp. 145-153.

²² See Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* The New Cambridge History of India. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 111.

²³ The battle lines between the two groups were drawn until well into the twentieth century, despite a proverbial cease-fire between the groups with the formation of an umbrella organization of the Singh Sabhas, the Chief Khalsa Diwan that was inaugurated in 1902. According to the *Khalsa Advocate*, "the problem of educating the masses, difficult though it apparently seems, would have ere long been solved to the satisfaction of every body, if our aristocracy had only cared to lend a sympathetic ear to the advocates of education." September 12, 1908.

²⁴ *Khalsa Advocate*, August 15, 1904.

intricately entwined with the uplifting of women and with an ensuing notion of nation building. Without educated mothers, the Sikhs would continue to be mired in superstition, ignorance and immoral practices; neither would they be able to compete in the milieu offered by their new rulers. Well aware of British notions of the Jat Sikhs as remnants of the Aryan race, these concepts were appropriated to call for a return to their glorious heritage where both women and men were educated.²⁵ While their western counterparts had flourished as a result of this legacy, reformers insisted that the Sikhs, in spite of their distinguished past had degenerated to a point of arrant illiteracy.²⁶ Certainly this depraved situation, particularly of Sikh women, was a far cry from the lofty ideals of Sikhism. "Among the Sikhs, the women have always been entitled to receive education as men. Our Rahit-namas enjoin clearly that both boys and girls should be sent to school."²⁷ Increasingly the reformers hearkened back to the glorious days of 'true' Sikhism, to interpretations of scripture and tradition that maintained that both women and men were to be educated. According to the Singh Sabha mindset, there was indeed a resplendent time in their history when women were not influenced, and in turn swayed their own husbands, in the degenerative customs that helped define Sikhism in the early twentieth century.

While the Sikh reformers were well cognizant of the need for female education, the form, content and end of that endeavour was not nearly as clear. Particularly during the early years of the twentieth century, in an attempt to sway education-wary public opinion, the reason and rhyme of female education came to be forged through

²⁵ *Khalsa Advocate*, April 4, 1908.

²⁶ *Khalsa Advocate*, May 2, 1908.

²⁷ *Khalsa Advocate*, August 15, 1904.

newspapers of the day, through speeches made and tracts distributed. However, convincing the bulk of the Sikh population as to the benefits of female education was no small feat. What was increasingly apparent, at least to the small group of Sikh reformers, was the need to protect their young women from the educational advances of the Arya Samajists, as well as from the Christian missionaries. For the most part however, these were issues of importance confined largely for the educated elite; the bulk of the population continued was largely unaffected by the fervent debates being carried on in the cities.²⁸ Still, the need to raise the consciousness of the Sikh populace with regard to education was taken seriously, if contemptuously, by the new leaders.

The Politics of Gender: The Home and the World:

Popularized British Victorian notions of woman as 'helpmate' to man became increasingly central in the discussion of women and education.²⁹ Nonetheless, given the

The Rahit referred to is the *Prem Sumarg*. As noted earlier, the document was significant in the Namdhari reform effort. The Singh Sabha reformers increasingly utilized it as well.

²⁸ If one looks to the numbers of females educated by the principal educational institution, the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala, the numbers are relatively insignificant. Between 1908-1914 the Ferozepur institution educated 1,608 girls; by 1915, 315 girls were on the school's roll. See Shyamala Bhatia, *Social Change and Politics in Punjab, 1898-1910* New Delhi: Enkay Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1987, p. 156. These girls and women were largely drawn from the families of the educated elite. If one looks to the actual numbers, in 1907 there were 115 females in residence. While the bulk of those females hailed from Punjab, a number were sent to the school from the United Provinces as well as Burma. The numbers breakdown as follows: Amritsar District, 19; Ferozepur, 17; Patiala State, 15; Ludhiana, 13; Montgomery, 9; Nabha State, 8; Lahore, 5; Jhind, Kapurthala States, Lyallpur, Jhelum, Agra Districts, and Burma, 3 each. Of the numbers from Patiala, 8 girls belonged to the Rajinder Pratap orphanage. Of the total number of females, 97 were girls, 5 were widows, and 19 were married women. Of those married, 11 had children, a number of whom were cared for at the Boarding House. The actual numbers of females receiving instruction were significantly larger however; an additional 30 students came to the school from the vicinity without being residents of the Boarding House. Also, a significant number of the female students were from Hindu families, 27 in total. As late as 1915, the Boarding House was not yet completed and the School itself was in danger of closing due to a paucity of funding. See Sohan Singh, *Truth and Bare Truth About the Sikh Kanya Maha Vidyala. Ferozepur* Amritsar: Coronation Printing Works, 1915, p. 17, 12.

²⁹ Meredith Borthwick discusses the popularization of this notion of the helpmate in the context of Bengal. The educated elite had direct experience of the Englishwomen in a position of social companionship with

relatively late annexation of Punjab into the realm of the Raj the notion of the helpmate had undergone significant transformation. Well aware of the deeply ingrained work ethic of the Jat Sikhs, Singh Sabha leaders fused popular notions of the helpmate with the traditional Punjabi work ethic, hastening to assure the skeptical populace that education in and of itself would not diminish their young women's abilities to work.³⁰

According to the Tat Khalsa organ, the *Khalsa Advocate*:

They say that domestic economy requires that women should not be educated. If they are educated they will refuse to do the work which they usually do at home and chaos and disorder will take the place of order and tranquility. Is this objection of theirs well founded?...But happily it is only based on the superficial observation which our countrymen make of the habits and the ways of the English women living here.³¹

Benefiting from the information and experiences of the Bengalis who had been educated in England, as well as a small number of their own who were traveling to Britain, the Punjabis were far more aware of the different circumstances

their menfolk at gatherings that included both Indians and British. Krishna Mohan Banerjee attended 'conversational parties' where the host's family was present. Banerjee was sufficiently impressed with what he saw to recommend that all European gentlemen follow his host's example in giving Hindus an opportunity to see what female education had accomplished among the ruling class. According to Borthwick, the fascination and admiration Indian males had with regard to this open interaction between women and men was based upon the unique opportunity for men to be in the company of females without the 'uncivilized' element of sexuality that was normatively associated with public and social contact with females, namely, with prostitutes or nautch girls. Borthwick points out however, that the "united front of self-righteousness adopted by the British in India at this stage, did not provide the *bhadralok* with any material that may have challenged the superiority of British civilization..." Hence, at this early stage of the British-Indian encounter, Bengalis were not aware of the position of women in England. "Their view of women, and of their influence on English society, was therefore highly idealized." For the Bengalis, the restraints of purdah as well as the lack of female education among their own womenfolk became indicative of their own unenlightened position *viz a viz* the British, and ensuing criticism of the position of Bengali women and Indian women at large forced the newly educated elite to confront the 'women's question' with singular ardor. See Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal. 1849-1905* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 33-37.

³⁰ As noted by the British authorities, Punjabi women as opposed to Bengali women were considered effectual contributors to the agricultural output of Punjab, working freely in the fields without the constraints of purdah. This was especially the case among the rural Jat population.

³¹ *Khalsa Advocate*, February 15, 1905.

between women in England and the *memsahibs* in India.³² Concurring with the hard-working peasantry, these reformers did *not* want their womenfolk to emulate the practices of their rulers or at least their British female counterparts. Laziness, associated by the Punjabis with the *memsahibs* was to have no place in their society. This notion of laziness associated with education was adroitly turned upon its head; *without* education women were wont to be less thrifty and more prone to idleness.³³ Further, well cognizant and equally critical of the move of women seeking the vote in Britain, Sikh reformers insisted they could look forward to no such “nightmare of feminine frivolity.”³⁴ Their incentives for female education and appropriated notions of the helpmate had nothing to do with women having access to polling stations or occupations outside of the home. Rather, the ‘true’ helpmate was to maintain her proper position at the fireplace.³⁵

Novel dichotomies such as the spheres of home and world, and the woman’s function within the realm of the home became pivotal in the ensuing discourse.³⁶

³² According to the reformers, “Englishwomen living here are mostly the wives of well-to-do men and so can afford to keep good many servants and leave the work of the house in the hands of others. Therefore, in order to judge the matter properly, we should compare our women with the American or English women living in their own country. On doing so we find that the domestic economy of those countries is not only equally good, but superior to ours in many respects.” Ibid.

³³ *Khalsa Advocate*, April 25, 1908.

³⁴ *Khalsa Advocate*, July 11, 1908.

³⁵ *Khalsa Advocate*, January 16, 1909.

³⁶ In agreement with Engel’s ideas, in the case of the rural Sikh Jats, women’s roles were similar to those of men; both worked the fields, both men and women had varied roles. “[T]he means of subsistence and production are commonly held and a communal household is the focal point of both domestic and social life.” While sex-role differences did exist, a great deal of authority and power were shared by both women and men. The large numbers of court cases instigated by women over ownership of land is indicative of the shared authority between women and men in Punjabi rural society (See Chapter Three). However, in contrast to rural peasant familial structures the new urban elite, due to their educational advancement were participating in a process of *differentiating* domestic and the social orders. With this separation comes an accentuated understanding of the private being subordinated to the public. Women “steadily lose control over property, products, and themselves as surplus increases, private property develops, and the communal household becomes a private economic unity, a family (extended or nuclear) represented by a man. The family itself, the sphere of women’s activities, is in turn subordinated to a broader social or public order – governed by a state – which tends to be the domain of men.” For Joan Kelly’s Marxist overview, see

According to Sangari and Vaid, it is precisely the differential construction of the private and public sphere in the colonial period that belies the class character of the new Indian elite. Victorian notions of purity, education and the 'home-bound nature' of womanhood were an integral aspect of the very *formation* of the middle class.³⁷ While the husband toiled 'in the world', only the wife in her appropriate position and with sufficient education could make the 'house' a 'home'.³⁸ Education of females would lead to a situation where the true helpmate could discharge her duties in the home properly. Accordingly,

[h]ome in its true sense is that sacred place where the troubles and anxieties of the world cannot enter, where a man after his daily work and struggles can find that rest and bliss which under the present circumstances falls to the lot of a few happy mortals... Who can then make a true home? It is only a true and noble wife that can do so... In order to achieve this object, education must be physical, intellectual, moral, as well as religious... They must also be trained for the performance of those little household duties such as cooking and sewing, other similar things which contribute so very largely in the comforts of a family.³⁹

Proper duties in the home included above all, the education of children; women who were not educated could scant contribute to the process of 'nation building' so ardently sought by the reformers.⁴⁰ According to the prevailing view:

In the first place, and on the first rank stand the mothers of the country, the great army of patient, unknown, unrewarded workers whose best years of strength, intelligence and knowledge, are devoted to the perfecting of the

Catharine R. Stimpson, ed., *Women, History & Theory. The Essays of Joan Kelly* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 10-15.

³⁷ Sangari and Vaid, "Recasting Women," Sangari and Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women*, p. 10.

³⁸ *Khalsa Advocate*, February 15, 1905.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Khalsa Advocate*, May 2, 1908.

The reform initiatives on female education inaugurated a hitherto unheard of stipulation in the matrimonial notices appearing in the *Khalsa Advocate*. Heeding the reformers' counsel that female education was indispensable in the creation of the 'modern' home, education increasingly became a prerequisite to advantageous marriage possibilities. *Khalsa Advocate*, March 7, 1908; April 15, 1910.

Malcolm Darling substantiates this trend, noting that "it is becoming increasingly difficult for an uneducated girl to secure an educated husband." See Malcolm Lyall Darling, *Wisdom and Waste in the Punjabi Village* London: Oxford University Press, 1934, p. 299.

future generation... Every young woman has a chance to do her share of the work. If she is self-respecting and inspires in young men that meet her a high idea of womanhood, she is helping to push along the development of humanity in her little corner of life. Incidentally, she is preparing herself for a wise marriage and that most useful of all work, the addition of really good children to the population.⁴¹

Conversely in the rural tracts, reformers noted contemptuously that it was the ability to recite "in a sonorous tone the love story of *Hir and Ranja*" that was considered to be a sign of high breeding.⁴² The increased usage of western medicines, prescribed by doctors and labeled in the English language, gave rise to an additional concern. For the illiterate condition among females could lead to appalling blunders in their divinely ordained tasks in the home, particularly in the proper treatment of children. According to one observer:

I know of a family... where turpentine oil was given to a boy instead of the dose of medicine simply because the lady in charge of the house could not distinguish between the label of a bottle of turpentine and the medicine, placed in the cupboard. In these days of hard struggle when the men are so busy in the worldly affairs in their businesses – we have to depend upon our ladies, and, such mishaps do occur and will continue to occur as long as their condition remains such.⁴³

These reformed attitudes toward the position of the "fair sex" as gentle helpmate to her husband translated into a not-so-subtle critique of women who did not conform to this ideal.⁴⁴ The Victorian ethos informing British educated reformers allowed for little space for women who acted independently, or even worse, whose men followed their actions and counsel. Men too were censured who tolerated anything less than this new ideal. Well aware of documented British notions of the 'manly' nature of the peasant

⁴¹ *Khalsa Advocate*, April 29, 1905.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Khalsa Advocate*, April 15, 1910.

Jatni, the reformers derided those “men ruled over by women.”⁴⁵ Sadly, from the perspective of the ardent supporters of the ‘helpmate’ ideal, in the case of the peasantry the ‘weaker’ sex was prone to ‘rule’ as opposed to her suitable position as attendant to her male.⁴⁶ And with this despicable state of affairs came the reason for the degenerate condition of Sikhism, fallen from its once pristine state of purity. Accordingly, it was difficult to encounter a ‘true’ Sikh; female attachment to superstition and woman’s pivotal role in raising children accounted for this lack of genuine religiosity.⁴⁷ For women

are the most conservative, they make the customs and custom derives its force mainly from women...How often do we hear of men meeting...and passing resolutions to do certain things and not to do others, and how often directly do they go home, get their tail twisted and walk on quietly and meekly in the beauty path, never moving an inch this side or that.⁴⁸

‘True’ men however, were able to counter the un-Sikh practices that had crept into Sikh social and religious life. Indeed, well versed in British gendered allocations of ‘manliness’ and ‘femininity’, as well as their own traditional hyper-masculine values, these Sikh reformers ingeniously reversed the oft acclaimed notion of the ‘manly’ peasant Jat into the precise opposite. Those who were able to move from under the debased sway and practices of their womenfolk, the reformed, educated Sikhs were *truly* manly.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ *Khalsa Advocate*, April 15, 1904.

⁴⁶ *Khalsa Advocate*, January 7, 1910.

⁴⁷ Lala Harkishen Lal, an ardent Arya Samaj supporter of female education had earlier utilized the same argument in advocating the need for Arya females to receive an education. Accordingly, “women should be educated to the highest level they were capable of...because it is women who stand most in the way of social reform.” *Tribune*, May 9, 1894, cited in Jones, *Arya Dharm. Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab* Delhi: Manohar, 1989, p. 108.

⁴⁸ *Khalsa Advocate*, April 15, 1904.

⁴⁹ When describing the efforts of one of their own, Bhai Thakat Singh, the Manager of the Ferozepur school, he is “Sikh-like and manfully bearing the brunt single-handed.” *Khalsa Advocate*, April 18, 1909. Still, even “those few workers” of the Singh Sabha movement were in danger of ‘falling’ from their lofty heights of manliness; “For the smallest things they begin to quarrel like women.” *Khalsa Advocate*, April 15, 1904.

Those who could not, the Jat peasantry, mired in the superstitious ways of women were subsequently 'unmanly'.

According to Michel Foucault, sexual inversions, in this case, the displacement and replacement of the foolish and unmanly with the sophisticated and truly manly, has less to do "with a negative mechanism of exclusion as with the operation of a subtle network of discourses, special knowledges, pleasures, and powers."⁵⁰ Given that the reformers increasingly assumed positions of authority given their educational advances, their new circumstances allowed for a judicious construction of distinctions between truly masculine behaviour and attitude, and that which merely paraded as 'manly'.⁵¹ The revisions of masculinity put forth by the new elite must also be understood as an attempt to counter popular reaction to the reform enterprise. For the most part, the attitude of the peasantry was marked by contempt toward the Singh Sabha reformers. Significantly, this disdain had everything to do with perceived and deeply ingrained notions of masculinity. The hard, physical work ethic of the Jat peasantry, along with the traditional aversion to the 'softening' effect of education led to the popular taunt among the peasantry: 'They become Singh Sabhas, when they cannot provide'.⁵² Provision for family in the form of

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* Volume I. London: Penguin Books, 1990, p. 72.

⁵¹ The decidedly offensive attacks on the Jat peasantry by the English medium newspaper, the *Khalsa Advocate* must be put into a larger perspective. In 1901, the British enacted the Land Alienation Bill to protect the interests of the rural population from the ever-encroaching urbanites with surplus capital. This policy was interpreted by those living in city centres as being anti-urban in tone and too beneficent toward the ever-favoured and loyal Jat peasant population. An attack therefore on the traditional 'manliness' of the rural Jats is thus highly understandable, particularly since the newspaper would have, as its readership the same British officials who were responsible for the Land Alienation Act of 1901. The remarks made are thus double-edged, though highly subtle.

For an good overview of the circumstances surrounding the Land Alienation Act see Ravinder Kumar, "The Two Revolutions of the Punjab," Presidential Address, *Punjab History Conference. Tenth Session* (Feb. 1976), pp. 154-159.

⁵² "Bun gai Singh Sabhiay, jaddon muk gai arrey dey daney." Translation of the proverb was provided by Surjit Singh Lee of Punjabi University, Patiala.

Given that historical writings have tended to focus on 'male' pursuits in history, it is difficult to point to women's voices, women's agency in history. Feminist historians point to the importance of *listening* for

tilling of the land and the filling of graineries, these, according to the education-wary Jats were the true measures of masculinity. Accordingly the urbanites, those who had rejected their ancestral peasant moorings could fulfill few of the requirements of true manliness.⁵³ The Tat Khalsa, stung by these popular perceptions responded with equally goading vitriol. Increasingly they were necessitated to construct a formula of masculinity that corresponded with their hard wrought positions of prestige as the leaders of the Sikh community. Nonetheless, there were repeated concerns that through the educational process, Sikh men attending institutions of higher learning were in danger of

even oblique dissent or criticism in the absence of overt insubordination vis-à-vis existing dominant systems. In Sikh history although barely perceptible, the *taunt* has tended to survive time as well as the layers of male bias of history. The taunt has been utilized by the powerless, by the voiceless, to protest the maneuverings of hegemonic discourse. In the case of Sikh history, women's taunts are sexualized; women taunt men for not being true 'men'. Taunts pointing to the effeminacy of males, given the hyper-masculine ethos prevalent since the formation of the 'soldier-saint' ideal, are doubly effective. There are numerous examples from secondary sources in particular. Mai Bhago, the celebrated woman warrior, has been routinely presented in historical writings as taunting the cowardice of forty Sikh men who left the battlefield and returned home. See Max Arthur Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion. It's Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors* Volume V, Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1990, first published in 1909, p. 213.

Another heroine of the early twentieth century, Gulab Kaur, who took part in Ghadar revolutionary activities, is recorded as taunting the men of her party: "If there is any one here who backs out from this golden opportunity of participating in the liberation of our dear country, let him wear these bangles...if he does not, we women will march to the battle field. Let such men take care of our hearths and homes." Baba Kesar Singh, Baba Sher Singh, statements preserved in Desh Bhagat Memorial Library, Jullundur City, cited in Gurcharan Singh Sainsara, "A Sikh Heroine of the Ghadar Party - Gulab Kaur," *Journal of Sikh Studies* Vol. IV, No. 2 (1977), p. 94.

Sundri, the first novel of the celebrated Sikh author Bhai Vir Singh gives an example of the taunt through the lens of the Singh Sabha reformers, though in a somewhat nuanced manner. While the novel's principal player is a woman, it is very much addressing issues of true 'masculinity' and male faithfulness as well. *Sundri* is a dedicated Sikh woman who bravely goes onto the battlefield to fight for her faith. What she as a woman can do, her male counterparts must do with even more vigour. See Bhai Vir Singh, *Sundri* G.S. Mansukhani, tr., Delhi: Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, 1988, first published 1898.

As one analyst purports "[f]or men the shame of refusing to serve would be intense. Women's mere presence [in war efforts] in effect, blackmails men into service." Judith Hicks Stiehm, "The Effect of Myths about Military Women on the Waging of War," Eva Isaksson, ed., *Women and the Military System* London: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1988, pp. 96-97.

The taunt also appears prominently in various folktales of Punjab. See especially Mulk Raj Anand, "The Brothers" and "Tail to Tail," *Folk Tales of Punjab* Folk Tales of India Series, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd., 1978, pp. 74-112.

⁵³ I am grateful to Surjit Singh Lee, a folklorist of Punjabi University, Patiala who pointed out the sexual innuendo of the proverb.

losing their 'manly' carriage.⁵⁴ Under the heading 'A Note of Warning' reformers insisted that Sikhs, being of a different breed than other Indian men had distinct needs that had to be addressed through the process of educational reforms in Punjab:

It is a matter of great concern for every Sikh, every government on the Indian soil and every apostle of peace to see any deterioration in the physique and hardiness of these sons of Mars. Handsome, brawny youth... come out of our school or college rooms with haggard looks, sunken eyes, tottering frame and pale faces... Hence for the Sikhs at least, the culture of intellect and development of brain and enrichment of mind alone are meaningless, absurd, and detrimental to the true interests of the community as well as of the country. It is therefore the duty of the men of light and leading to insist upon adequate arrangements being made for the revival of our old national games like gatka, riding, *chacker* throwing, wrestling and others... The question is a common place one, on the surface, but a little thought will disclose its immense gravity and far-reaching consequences, for the decay of physical vigour is the first sign of the death of a nation."⁵⁵

Similar to pervasive and widely known attitudes of the contemporary "golden age of athleticism" in Britain, the reform endeavour incorporated the notion (and the fear) that

⁵⁴ One observer noted that the Sikh community was in danger of becoming like the Bengalis through the educational process; the Bengalis, according to the article were of 'lower' character. See *Khalsa Advocate*, September 13, 1913.

⁵⁵ *Khalsa Advocate*, August 26, 1910.

In all likelihood the oblique comparison being made by the writer, between "other people" and the Sikhs is referring to the Bengalis. Stereotypical notions of the Bengalis and over-educated, effeminate and weak were commonplace in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly given British repeated comparison between the 'manly' Punjabi and the 'effeminate' Bengali. The fears expressed here are indicative of widely known British Victorian notions of excessive education without adequate physical exercise leading to 'unmanly' behaviour. See Chapter Three.

The tendency to show marked contrast between the Bengalis and the Sikhs continued throughout the early twentieth century. In a series of pamphlets written by Bhagat Lakshman Singh and published in 1918, Singh responds to published observations of the development of Sikhism by Sir Rabindranath Tagore. Lakshman Singh makes a pointed reference to the Bengalis as "quill drivers, penny-a-liners or throat-renders," those who "indulge in so much cant on the pulpit and on the platform, or newspaper scribblers or writers of brochures, whose patriotic instincts act only within the precincts of temples or lecturing places, or glow on the pages of books and periodicals. It is nothing short of impertinence for Bengali Babus, however literate or high placed, to pose as critics of men whom they are constituted to understand." Bengal had not yet produced soldiers...to protect the honour of its hearths and homes." This state of affairs Lakshman Singh compares with the Sikh soldiery of Punjab, "the beau ideal of the people," though "unlettered and untaught, they are more susceptible to noble impulses" than the highly educated Bengalis. See Sahibzade Bhagat Lakshman Singh, *Sat Sri Akal. The Sikh and His New Critics* Tract No. 6, Mahilpur: The Sikh Tract Society, 1918, pp. 10, 19, 9, 19.

without the necessary element of physical exertion, education would lead only to moral depravity and unmanly behaviour.⁵⁶ With great ingenuity they also insisted that the 'manly' pursuits posited as essential for the wholesome progress of the Sikh nation were integral aspects of their glorious Sikh heritage.

As already noted, the newly crafted understanding of true masculinity was paired with the novel construct of the 'feminine'. For the Singh Sabha reformers, a most crucial indicator of the lack of true femininity among their female peasantry came to the fore with the Annual Report of the Excise Department of 1905, particularly with regard to the drinking habits of Punjabis. While the reformers were well aware that "drinking is the bane of the Sikh peasant of the Punjab," the Excise Commissioner's report indicated that "even the women folk of the Punjab are given to drinking." While taking care to respect the Commissioner's observations, the reformed mindset found the reproof of their community difficult to accept. They downplayed the report, acknowledging instead that "it may be possible to find, here and there, a stray woman of easy-going habits belonging to the unfortunate class of fallen women...who come to imbibe some of the more objectionable masculine vices...and may thus be said to have 'unsexed' themselves." They acknowledged that for the Excise Commissioner, however wrongly, to have formed such an opinion of "the average Sikh peasant woman," was indicative of the alarming extent that drink, and its influence, particularly among Sikh peasant women, "is sure to be the ruination of the manhood of the country."⁵⁷ The need for the 'unsexed' of their society, those who were no longer true females due to their unwomanly practices to receive an education became increasingly urgent. For if these 'masculine' ways

⁵⁶ See Ronald Hyam, *Empire and sexuality. The British Experience* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990, p. 73.

exhibited by their women were not altered, the effects on the 'manhood' of the Sikhs would be devastating. In essence, the men could conversely become 'effeminate'.⁵⁸ Indeed, only through proper educational initiatives, now more imperative than ever before, could Sikh women would become worthy of their highest calling, as gentle helpmates to their husbands. Needless to say, the power dynamics are palpable; the actual wording points to an active process of sexual inversion. The reformers, armed as they were with the artillery of modern methods of communications were well equipped to actively maintain this newly contrived construct.

Undoubtedly, to routine objections by these "half educated and the ignorant masses" to female education based on fears of the subsequent ir-religion of women, reformers found their greatest incentive *for* the cause of female education.⁵⁹ For if Sikhism was in a state of degeneracy then the customs observed by Sikhism's womenfolk were to blame.⁶⁰ This had long been the opinion of the Christian missionaries who earlier had noted that "the religion of the Indian women chiefly consists in adhering to superstitious rites and observances."⁶¹ Thus the reformers found a double adversary, Hinduism and women, as responsible for the degenerate state of affairs in Sikhism.⁶²

⁵⁷ *Khalsa Advocate*, June 17, 1905.

⁵⁸ The Singh Sabha reformers were well aware of the contempt of the British towards the 'effeminate' Bengali; to entertain similar revulsion from their esteemed rulers towards the Sikhs, given the high esteem that had come with their purported masculinity could understandably lead to considerable trepidation among the Sikhs.

⁵⁹ *Khalsa Advocate*, February 15, 1905.

It must be remembered that the education offered by the traditional religious leaders, the granthis, and their wives and mothers would have largely catered to the peasant population. Undoubtedly, these methods were considered suspect by those educated by missionary enterprise. The Singh Sabha reformers thus maligned all others as 'half educated'.

⁶⁰ The attitude of the Singh Sabha reformers was very much in line with early missionary accounts in Punjab. According to the Reverend C.B. Newton, "The strong point of Indian heathenism today, is in the fact that the women are still its devoted adherents..." *The Forty-eighth Annual Report of the Lodhiana Mission* Lodhiana: Lodhiana Mission Press, 1883, p. 35.

⁶¹ *Khalsa Advocate*, February 15, 1905.

⁶² *Khalsa Advocate*, April 15, 1904.

For what was the source of these rites and customs? "All borrowed and very often directly clashing against the Sikh religion."⁶³ Education of their females would lead instead to a *proper* judgement of "the right and the wrong, the true and the false, the beautiful and the ugly, and the noble and the ignoble."⁶⁴ Religious education, above and beyond all else was to become

the life blood of our educational movements... Thank God that our girl schools...are very particular in this respect. Religious instruction is a primary function there and secular education but a secondary thing. In a short time we may expect to have in our midst a set of pious sisters to give shoulders to the clogged wheel of the female portion of our community."⁶⁵

The 'clogged wheel' became the favourite of the euphemisms utilized by the Singh Sabha reformers to refer to their *own* situation *viz a viz* their women. Progress could never be achieved if that wheel was not aligned with the other, the quickly moving wheel of the reformers. For "an uneducated and therefore *uncivilized* wife is a standing nuisance for her advanced husband" [*italics mine*].⁶⁶ This state of affairs was intricately intertwined with the notion of Sikh 'national progress', which, from the reformed perspective formed the crux of the Singh Sabha agenda.

The husband, out of love with his community, wishes to join in all its undertakings whereas the imprudent wife thoughtlessly stands in his way to do this. You might often have heard of such and such person's wishing

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ *Khalsa Advocate*, February 15, 1905

⁶⁵ *Khalsa Advocate*, June 6, 1908. The writers are referring both to the Ferozepur institution and another girl's school in Quetta, the Sri Guru Nanak Kanya Pathshala, initiated in April of 1908. For the 'Rules for the control of the Sri Guru Nanak Kanya Pathshala, Quetta', see *Khalsa Advocate*, April 18, 1908. The emphasis on Sikh religious instruction and domestic abilities at the school is significant. Besides prizes for general proficiency in examinations, there were to be the following incentives: 2 prizes to girls well versed in Sikh scriptures, 2 prizes for singing Sikh Shabads, 1 prize for highest attendance, 1 prize for cleanliness, 1 prize for best *Kashida* work, 1 prize for cooking. Ibid.

⁶⁶ *Khalsa Advocate*, April 4, 1908.

Notions of the 'uncivilized' wife led in some cases to a great deal of familial strife. Bhai Thakat Singh, the manager of the Ferozepur School of the Sikhs noted that educated men often forced their wives to attend school, if they were tired of them, or, if they wished their wives to be 'proper' helpmates and help them in their own work." Caveeshar, "The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala Ferozepore," Ganda Singh, ed., *The Singh Sabha and other Reform Movements*, pp. 117.

to help propaganda but failing to fulfil his wish on account of his selfish wife's protest. What a pity then if alive to all these defects and disadvantages, we should suffer this sorry state to continue.⁶⁷

And there was but one remedy to support the initiatives of the Singh Sabha reformers as well as address the ills of Sikh society. Education was to start as early as possible while girls were still "beautiful and delicate flowers."⁶⁸ The form that education was to take was of great concern to the reformers. Care should be taken in "selecting books for a young girl. They should not be heaped into their laps just as they come from the circulating library fresh with everything that springs from the font of folly. Their education should be deeply religious and moral."⁶⁹ Only learning based on Sikh religious principles could once again return the fallen Sikh populace to a position worthy of their calling as the true representatives of their Gurus. Jat Sikhs, females in particular, with their "pitiable want of education" were highly in need of the reforming influence of the Singh Sabha educational initiatives.⁷⁰

The town of Ferozepur became the site of increasing competition between the various reform groups with regard to the issue of female education. Ferozepur was the earliest site of Arya Samaj attempts to educate their females.⁷¹ By 1910, Ferozepur had girl's schools founded not only the Singh Sabha and the Arya Samaj, but also by the

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *Khalsa Advocate*, February 15, 1905.

Younger girls, according to Bhai Thakat Singh, the manager of the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala in Ferozepur were far more pliable than older females. Married, grown-up girls, according to Thakat Singh, "shirk work and do not like discipline. They are found to be too old for the school routine. Nor is their heart in the business...It is indeed difficult to teach A, B, C to girls who are on the wrong side of twenty." See Caveeshar, "The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala Ferozepore," Ganda Singh, ed., *The Singh Sabha and other Reform Movements*, pp. 117-118.

⁶⁹ *Khalsa Advocate*, February 15, 1905.

⁷⁰ *Khalsa Advocate*, July 15, 1904.

⁷¹ In 1877, the girl's school was initiated, as an adjunct to the Arya Samaj orphanage in Ferozepur. See Kenneth W. Jones, "Socio-Religious Movements and Changing Gender Relationships Among Hindus of British India," James Warner Bjorkman, ed., *Fundamentalism, Revivalists and Violence in South Asia* Delhi: Manohar, 1988, pp. 46-47.

Muslims, Christians and the Dev Samaj and the Government.⁷² The district was thus a locality of intense vying for students. The Arya Samaj in particular, though initiated *after* the birth of the Singh Sabha movement had moved quickly and decisively in the arena of female education. Largely based on fear of Christian influences on their young females, a number of highly influential Arya leaders began an active campaign for the education of their young girls.⁷³ While the early 1880s witnessed limited movement in this area, by the mid-1880s the militant wing of the Arya Samaj became the effective catalyst for increased female education. As early as the 1892 the divisive issue of starting a Girl's High School came to the fore; projected costs for the school were Rs. 250,000.⁷⁴ Despite fears of the 'unsexing' of their girls through the effects of higher education, a number of Samaj groups supported the campaign and pushed ahead with their goal of upgrading the Kanya Maha Vidyalaya in Jullundhur to a High School, which was inaugurated in 1896.⁷⁵

⁷² Sohan Singh, *Truth and Bare Truth*, p. 43.

⁷³ The two main exponents of female education among the Aryas were Lala Dev Raj and Lal Munshi Dev Raj. Lala Munshi Ram noted in his diary the event that made him realize the need for female education. "On my return home from Court, Vedakumari [his daughter] came running with this newly learnt message, 'Christ is the Krishna...' I was startled to hear this and, on inquiry, I learnt that they were taught even to detest our holy Shastras. I realized then that an Aryan Girls School was an absolute necessity." M.R. Jambunathan, ed., *Swami Sharaddhanand* Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1961, pp. 101-102, cited in Jones, "Socio-Religious Movements and Changing Gender Relationships," Bjorkman, ed., *Fundamentalism, Revivalists and Violence*, pp. 46-47.

⁷⁴ It was feared that the costs of the proposed facility for higher female education would compete with badly needed contributions for the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College. By 1894 the Managing Committee of the Anglo-Vedic College made a well-publicized break with the champions of the women's educational movement. See Jones, *Arya Dharm*, pp. 103-107.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Initially the school developed along the lines of its predecessor, but eventually it developed into a high school and finally a women's college. By 1906, the school enrolled 203 females, both unmarried, married and widowed. It became the center of a new movement, as its alumnae themselves opened other girls' schools. In an attempt to meet the need caused by the paucity of literature suitable for women, the *Panchal Pandita*, a Hindi monthly propagating female education was inaugurated in 1898. Further, the Mahavidyala started to publish readers and texts for the moral upliftment of Arya females. See *ibid.*, pp. 216-217.

Whilst the Aryas were forging ahead with their plans for a High School for girls in the 1890s, the Sikhs were much more wary of taking the step into higher education for their girls well into the early years of the twentieth century. According to one observer, "higher education for females can not be made, to succeed

The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala:

Well aware and fearful of Arya Samaj educational endeavours the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala, a girl's school initiated by Bhai Thakat Singh and his spouse Harnam Kaur of Ferozepur in 1892, came to embody the ideals and hopes of the Sikh reformers.⁷⁶ In the Sikh case, while the other Singh Sabha leaders lauded the efforts of the founders, the education-wary bulk of the Sikh population gave little financial support to the school. It was only in 1904 that the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala acquired a boarding house to allow for girls outside the Ferozepur locality to receive an education based on Sikh principles. According to her biographer, it was Harnam Kaur who first suggested the idea of a boarding house for the fledgling Sikh Mahavidyala school.⁷⁷ The controversies that

on a large scale, but we can expect to have Primary and Secondary education." *Khalsa Advocate* August 15, 1904.

By 1907, Sikh reformers had begun criticizing the Ferozepur institution for not advancing to the status of a girl's high school. *Khalsa Advocate*, April 27, 1907.

⁷⁶ In an interview with Thakat Singh's daughter, Mrs. Paranjpal Singh of Chandigarh, she spoke of her father's 'conversion' to the cause of female education. Gurmukh Singh, the pioneer of the Lahore Singh Sabha and professor of Oriental College in Lahore was expounding on the notion of womanhood in one of his classes. Utilizing the adjective 'abla', 'helpless', he bemoaned the condition of women as not able to fend for themselves. Upon hearing his beloved professor's conceptions of women's lot in life, Thakat Singh stood up and declared that he would dedicate his life in championing the cause of the 'helpless', namely Sikh females. To translate his ideals into practice, Thakat Singh began an elementary program of education for girls in Ferozepur in the 1890's. This was the inauguration of the renowned Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala. Mrs. Singh is one of the daughters of Bhai Thakat Singh and his second wife, Agya Kaur. Private interview, Chandigarh, Punjab, April 25, 1997.

⁷⁷ Thakat Singh, well aware of Sikh attitudes toward female education was convinced that the Sikh community would not contribute to the necessary finances of this new venture. Soon thereafter however, upon a visit to Amritsar, another Sikh with the same request approached Thakat Singh: to enlarge the scope of the educational endeavour and include a boarding house for girls. Thus convinced, Bhai Thakat Singh became an active crusader for the necessity of accommodating and educating girls from far and wide. It was Harnam Kaur however who then took the initial steps for the boarding house: she rented a spacious building near the school and it served as the first abode for female students. By Baisakhi Day 1904, handbills were distributed among a gathering in Amritsar, appealing the Sikhs to send their females to the Ferozepur school. See Bhai Suraj Singh, *Sri Mata Bibi Harnam Kaur* Amritsar: Wazir Hind Press, 1908 pp. 42-51.

I am grateful for the efforts and time of P.K. Sharma of Patiala, who spared considerable time and energy translating the biography from Punjabi to English.

While *Sri Mati Bibi Harnam Kaur* purports to be an accurate biography of Harnam Kaur, it is written after her death by a contemporary, Suraj Singh, an active member of the Singh Sabha movement. Thus, the

accompanied this venture are remarkable and indicative of the anti-female-education ethos facing the Singh Sabha reformers. According to *Sri Mati Bibi Harnam Kaur*, while there was some support for the Girl's School there was also a backlash against the efforts of the crusading couple, particularly during the early years of boarding opportunities at the school. Given the notions of protective honour among the Sikhs, to allow their females to leave the confines of "gentle" family homes to live elsewhere was inconceivable.⁷⁸

The objectives of the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala were indicative not only of the attitudes of the educated elite, but also of the cultural values of the larger Sikh populace. Deeply ingrained notions of modesty, a well-defined work ethic and above all, the religious instruction of the students were the watchwords of the school. Visitors to the

values and actual words attributed to Harnam Kaur must be put into proper perspective; the volume, composed in its entirety in poetic form is written within the specific milieu of the Sikh reform movement. Clearly, the impetus of the book is to further the objectives of the movement with regard to education and women. Further, the position and aspiration of women as helpmate to her husband is distinctly specified. The first edition of the volume, which was published in 1908 after the death of Harnam Kaur in 1906 was almost completely sold out after four months of rapid sales. See *Khalsa Advocate*, February 8, 1908. Harnam Kaur came to be presented as a martyr who had died for the Sikh cause of female education; her death was viewed as stemming directly from her selfless efforts in the renewal efforts of the Sikh Panth. See *Khalsa Advocate*, September 7, 1907.

⁷⁸ Suraj Singh, *Sri Mati Bibi Harnam Kaur*, pp. 42-51.

To instill the confidence of potential parents of boarders, another handbill was distributed which explained in detail the objectives of the boarding house, as well as placate their concerns. See *ibid*.

The Khalsa Diwan initiated annual celebrations of the Singh Sabha movement, which by 1905 included separate 'Ladies Diwans'. The main event was held in Amritsar, on Baisakhi Day where "a special subdivision of the Sikh ladies was arranged. Married couples and ladies were only permitted to enter the place selected for this meeting. The usual program of singing Shabads from the Sikh Scriptures was carried out solely by the women. Several of them delivered original speeches at the occasion, which, according to reports was exceptionally large; it included the respectable Sikh women from the leading families of Amritsar and of the Province in general. *Khalsa Advocate*, April 22, 1905.

It is very likely that the event mentioned in *Sri Mata Bibi Harnam Kaur* is the same one described here in detail. Given that the 'Ladies Diwan' was composed of leading Sikh families, the opposition to the Boarding House is indeed surprising. These individuals would have been at the forefront of the reform endeavour. However, even amongst this elite gathering traditional attitudes toward women were held fast. The fact the event was closely monitored, only women and married couples being allowed into the premises is indicative of the highly protective stance taken by Sikhs toward their women-folk.

That the protective stance taken toward the females of the Ferozepur institution was in little danger of abating well into the twentieth century is demonstrated by an scandalized appeal to the Sikh populace regarding reports that love poems were being read to the female students of the institution. Observers

school commented that the general atmosphere of the school was wholly devotional; "particular attention being paid to inculcating modesty, meekness and devotion which are the peculiar traits of Indian womanhood."⁷⁹ Further, given popular fears that laziness and pride would ultimately be the outcome of female education, the school employed no servants; the cooking for those attending the school and cleaning of the premises was carried out by the students themselves. According to one observer,

the chief feature of the institution is the simplicity and the modesty of the girls, which strike the visitors very much. These are the virtues which are the real ornaments of Indian women and which we would be very much the worse for losing. Self help is taught to the girls in a very practical manner, viz, by requiring them to do all that work by themselves...This alone will stand them in good stead, when they leave the school to join the worldly life with its attendant duties and responsibilities.⁸⁰

Certainly the general ideals which were in full force at the Ferozepur institution were not unique to the reform initiatives of the Sikhs. Except for the decision to inculcate a strong work ethic into these students, for the most part the institution was run along the widely accepted premises of female education put forth by Swami Dayanand. Harnam Kaur, the first wife of the manager of the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala herself was trained through the Arya education system.⁸¹ Her biography is rife both with the values inculcated by the Arya Samaj and the objectives of the Singh Sabha movement. Education according to Harnam Kaur was as essential for girls as it was for boys. Moreover, the education of females had more far-reaching effects than that of males; through the education of

remonstrated against these reports, insisting that this was an "outrage" to their "sisters." *Khalsa Advocate*, September 16, 1916.

⁷⁹ Sohan Singh, *Truth and Bare Truth*, p. 48.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁸¹ According to the biography of Harnam Kaur much of her primary education took place at an Arya institution. She became well versed in both Hindi and Sanskrit, which, according to Suraj Singh was problematic for her parents. Believing in the necessity instead of Gurmukhi instruction, the language of the

females, entire families could receive the benefits of learning.⁸² Espousing popular views on the advancement of European nations due to their attitudes toward female education, Harnam Kaur like Dayanand hearkened back to the golden days of Draupadi and Sita when women, due to the egalitarian ethos of the day contributed greatly to society.⁸³ According to Kaur, the overriding state of illiteracy among the Sikhs had led to the humiliating position of Sikh womanhood, despite the important roles played by them in their household roles. The responsibility for their educational advancement however was placed squarely at the feet of women. "Chains of slavery shackle your feet, oh women, because of your refusal to accept the jewels of learning."⁸⁴ While acknowledging that the 'jewels of learning' would not lead to the same ends as for males in terms of occupation, Bibi Harnam Kaur purported that the effects were nonetheless important. For it was only a proper education that could illuminate the minds and morals of women. The inevitable end result would lead to happier conjugal relations and peace in the home.⁸⁵ Thus, the responsibility for her husband's contentment could be traced to the housewife's heeding the educational call.⁸⁶

Sikh scriptures, she eventually became a student at the Dera of Sant Doola Singh, the Sant being greatly revered by her father. See Suraj Singh, *Sri Mata Bibi Harnam Kaur*, pp.10-21.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 88-97.

⁸³ Ibid.

According to the Tat Khalsa mindset, "the great secret of the present supremacy of the Western nations lies in the fact that both the lever and the steam generator of the machinery are sufficiently strong to work with full co-operation to bring forth the desired results. Before these times when to impart education to females was considered a sin, and which was the tumbling stone for bringing the demoralization of Asiatic nations and subsequent utter ruin of their morality, there was an era when the Asiatic nations topped all the other nations in moral and religious views, and doctrines, and it was then when females possessed the faculty of inventions. *Khalsa Advocate*, May 2, 1908.

⁸⁴ For the biographer, clearly the blame for the lack of education among Sikh females can be placed at the feet of the females themselves; *they* refuse to be unshackled. See Suraj Singh, *Sri Mata Bibi Harnam Kaur*, p. 88-97.

⁸⁵ The sentiments on the need for female education due to the positive effects it would have on the home front is remarkably similar to Dayanand's vision. In *The Light of Truth*, the English translation of *Satyartha Prakasha*, Dayanand insists: "If men are educated and women uneducated...then the house would be a place of constant warfare between the gods and demons and there would be no happiness...Household affairs, conjugal happiness, and home-keeping are the things which can never be

The Politics of Language: A Gendered Perspective

While the objectives of the Singh Sabha educational endeavour were in most ways identical to that of Arya Samaj, there were pivotal differences between the two as well. One increasingly important issue was that of language. For with the establishment of Punjab University and the appointment of the Hunter Commission on Education in 1882, education had become intricately tied to communal identity based on religious affiliation.⁸⁷ Accordingly, along with the focus on education came deepening language controversies fueled by respective communal bodies. The Anjuman-i-Islamia in Lahore demanded Urdu, the Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj agitated for Hindi. The Punjab Administration only fueled the debate with its sanctioning of Urdu as the official language. "Punjabi was rejected by all save Leitner and the Singh Sabhas...[L]anguage was seen as a vehicle of communal solidarity at the intra-communal level."⁸⁸ By the early twentieth century, the language controversy had not abated; moreover, it had greatly intensified. For while the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha movement were closely aligned until the late nineteenth century, the twentieth century witnessed an increased

satisfactorily accomplished unless women are well educated." Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya, tr., Allahabad: The Kala Press, 1960, p. 112.

⁸⁶ On one occasion, a married woman who was a student at the Kanya Mahavidyala complained to Harnam Kaur about her relationship with her husband, seeking advice on how to control the misdeeds of her marriage partner. Harnam Kaur in turn told the student a story about a similar incident encountered by Guru Nanak in *Sinhaldweep*, where the daughter-in-law of the ruler Shiv Nath came to the master asking for advice with regard to her oppressive husband. Guru Nanak brought her attention to the koel, a bird that despite its unpretentious black coat has an enchanting and melodious voice. Similarly, Shiv Nath's daughter-in-law could succeed in changing her husband only by her modest demeanour and the sweetness of her tongue. Accordingly, Harnam Kaur advised the young student that only through a proper attitude of humility and acceptance of her situation, along with pleasing words to her husband could she fulfill her duty to her husband. Only thus could she change the troublesome ways of her spouse. See Suraj Singh, *Sri Mati Bibi Harnam Kaur*, pp. 66-71.

⁸⁷ See Chapter Four.

focus on the distinct religious identity between Sikhs and Hindus. With this distinction came a novel understanding on a separate linguistic identity.⁸⁹ Moreover, with the

⁸⁸ Nazer Singh, "Notes on the Anjuman-i-Punjab, Aligarh Movement, Brahmo Samaj, Indian Association, Arya Samaj and Singh Sabha in the Context of Colonial Education in the Punjab, 1865-1885," *The Punjab Past and Present* Vol. XXVI-I (April 1992), pp. 66-67.

⁸⁹ There were a number of watershed events within both communities that led to the increasingly fervent issue of separate linguistic identity. During the early 1880's, both Sikhs and Aryas worked together, stressing the similarities between 'true' Sikhism and Arya Samaj ideology. Moreover, the Aryas identified with Sikhism as a movement because it had initially sought to create a purified Hinduism, without the evils of idolatry, caste, and the dominance of priesthood. However, with this identification with the initial goals of Sikhism came an intense critique of the contemporary state of Sikhism. "That spiritual eminence which Sikhism had well nigh attained in those degenerate days of priestcraft and idolatry has been lost and at the present day its spiritual condition is as bad as that of the most bigoted Hindus. Indeed, it glories in being ranked with the Hindus on that point. It upholds and duly observes some of the most absurd customs which trace their origin to the base selfishness of our spiritual guides." *Arya Patrika*, September 13, 1887, pp. 1-4, cited in Kenneth W. Jones, *Ham Hindu Nahin: Arya-Sikh Relations, 1877-1905*, *Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. XXXII, No. 3 (May 1973), p. 461.

The criticism became increasingly shrill, resulting in central Sikh figures such as Bhai Jawahir Singh, Bhai Ditt Singh Gyani, and Bhai Maya Singh resigning their Samaj membership and joining the Lahore Singh Sabha. Each defector became a vocal opponent of the Arya Samaj from that point on.

Another important issue dividing the Arya Samaj and Singh Sabha reformers was the issue of *shuddhi*, particularly as it developed from its initial individual conversion technique toward mass purification. In 1896, an Arya *shuddhi* ceremony included the purification of Sikhs into Arya ranks, whereas earlier, *shuddhi* was restricted to the purification of outcastes into clean caste Hindus. By 1900, Arya attention on the outcaste Sikh population caused a great furor among the Singh Sabha reformers yet little could be done since traditional Sikh attitudes toward the outcastes were firmly in place. Reformers hastened to convince the Rahtia community leaders of their folly, but could not promise them full inclusion in the Sikh fold. Helpless, the Sikh reformers who failed to dissuade the Rahtias from the *shuddhi* purification watched the group receiving a sacred thread as well as being shaved of both hair and beard.

By 1898 the issue of Sikhs and Hindus as distinct religious groups acquired a legal dimension with the death of Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia. His will stipulated that his vast wealth be bequeathed to the Dyal Singh Trust. His widow however, Sardarni Dyal Singh and her cousin contested the will, insisting that Hindu law was not applicable to Dyal Singh Majithia, since he was a Sikh. The Punjab High Court maintained Hindu law was to be upheld, thereby determining that Sikhs in fact were Hindus. See especially Madan Gopal, "Legacy of Dyal Singh Majithia," *The Punjab Past and Present* Vol. XXVI-I (April 1992), especially pp. 156-183.

The famous tract published in 1899 by Kahan Singh entitled *Ham Hindu Nahin* [We are not Hindus] followed closely upon the Court's decision. According to Jones, the "debate continued with undiminished vigor, creating considerable confusion within the Sikh community, for there now emerged a variety of Sikhs, from the pure Khalsa Sikh dedicated to his separateness to the Hindu-Sikh entrenched in his parent religion." Jones, "Ham Hindu Nahin," *Journal of Asian Studies*, p. 467.

The early twentieth century witnessed a number of events that increasingly separated the Sikhs from their Hindu counterparts. In 1905, Sikh reformers hailed the purging of their sacred temple, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, of all Hindu idols as a massive victory for the Sikh separatist identity. See *Khalsa Advocate*, May 6, 1905.

Along with the removal of idols came the displacement of traditional privileges of Brahmans who officiated at the worship of Hindu deities. Thus, the reformist Sikhs struck at the heart of orthodox Hinduism, resulting in comprehensive outrage by Hindus. The battle between the Sikh reformers and the members of the Arya Samaj thus moved one step further to include an out-and-out condemnation of orthodox Hinduism as well.

Further, amidst a great deal of internal opposition, by 1909 Sikhs had legally acquired their own marriage rites, known as the Anand Marriage Act. See *Khalsa Advocate*, October 30, 1909.

increased focus on female education by the Singh Sabha movement, the issue of language acquired renewed force. For the Tat Khalsa, given its objectives of female religious instruction in the schools that necessarily included recitation from the *Granth*, the singing of *shabads* and general moral instruction, the Punjabi language in the Gurmukhi script was essential. Moreover, with the ever-advancing threat of the Arya Samaj upon the educational endeavour of the Singh Sabhas, Punjabi as opposed to Hindi was ever ardently championed by the reformers.

The Aryas supporting Hindi as the primary language of Punjab and the Singh Sabhas insisting that only Punjabi could fulfill that function were united in their criticism of Urdu as the official government language. The *Khalsa Advocate*, the recognized mouthpiece of the Singh Sabha reformers gave considerable space to the Urdu language issue. Increasingly, it became intricately tied to the situation of Sikh womanhood. Given the traditional customs of females to refrain from uttering the names of their husbands, official procedure carried out in the Urdu language was cause for great concern. With regard to postal services, these

poor ladies, when writing to their husbands who are...in military service...had to request an Urdu knowing man to write the address of her husband on the envelope...the lady, being charm-bound not to give out the name of her husband, could not get the address written by any other person. So, in some cases, the letters had to lie over a few days before they could be posted.⁹⁰

While the official usage of Urdu was problematic for most of the Sikh peasantry, the issue, when combined with the image of the helpless Punjabi female took on an added

Again, this signified an outright rejection of traditional Hindu notions of authority, as the rites excluded the services of Brahmans.

In 1910 the Hindu community reacted by inviting Baba Gurbakhsh Singh, the head of the orthodox Bedi family, to the Punjab Hindu Conference. See *Khalsa Advocate*, November 4, 1910.

significance.⁹¹ Subsequently, the Post Master General of Punjab, Mr. C. Stewart Wilson issued a circular insisting that all officials and clerks of his department learn Gurmukhi by the following year.⁹² Another incident, again involving a Punjabi Sikh woman who was journeying on the railroad was also highly publicized and served to unite Sikhs in the language and education issue.⁹³ The Chief Khalsa Diwan carried on a regular campaign, appealing to the Government in favour of the Punjabi language. The promoters of Punjabi were further rewarded when the Railway authorities agreed to write the names of stations in Gurmukhi script.⁹⁴

The Sikh Educational Conference – Enlarging Female Space:

The 'cause' of the Punjabi language, along with female education became the main foci of concern of the Sikh Education Conference, inaugurated in 1908.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ *Khalsa Advocate*, October 15, 1904.

⁹¹ According to Lata Mani, India's womanhood became the "currency, so to speak, in a complex set of exchanges in which several competing projects intersect." Lata Mani, "Contesting Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India," Sangari and Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women*, p. 119. Here, though supposedly motivated by concern for women, in reality, women become the backdrop to the political agenda of the Tat Khalsa.

⁹² *Khalsa Advocate*, October 15, 1904.

The notion of Sikh females approaching males, even in their official capacity in postal offices, would have been a source of aversion to the honour-bound Sikhs. Given the small percentage of Sikh females who could even write, the language problem is less the issue than Sikh notions of honour. With Gurmukhi used as the official language, women would be in a better position to observe their 'charm-bound' customs. R.E. Parry, as late as 1921 notes that "Sikh women are difficult to get a good look at, as at the approach of a stranger they disappear or hastily cover their faces." *The Sikhs of the Punjab* London: Drane's, 1921, p. 24.

⁹³ Travelers on the particular train in question were being re-routed due to a railway accident along the way. The Sikh woman was asked the name of her husband, which, "she considered as a sacrilege to express, which in writing she was at a loss..." *Khalsa Advocate*, April 4, 1908.

⁹⁴ Shyamala Bhatia, *Social Change and Politics in Punjab*, p. 163.

⁹⁵ The impetus for the Sikh Educational Conference came from a similar endeavour established by the Muslims of Punjab. By 1905, the Mahomedan Educational Conference was given a good deal of publicity by the various Sikh mediums; the *Khalsa Advocate* started calling for a similar venture among the Sikhs. *Khalsa Advocate*, April 29, 1905.

The first Educational Conference was subsequently held at Gujranwala, April 18th-19th, 1908.

Delegates to the Conference were elected through four mediums: the Khalsa Diwan, the various Singh Sabhas, public meetings where no Singh Sabha existed and through the various Sikh educational institutions.⁹⁶ However, while many of the wives of the educated elite were forerunners in the education of females through their gratuitous teaching efforts in Sikh schools, not one female delegate was elected to the Conference.⁹⁷ Ultimately, while notions of reform regarding the 'women's question' were loudly extolled by the Singh Sabha reformers, the proclamations simply did not translate into palpable and public representation at this most consequential event in the Sikh reform movement.⁹⁸ As noted earlier, with the consolidation of 'private' and the 'public' realms through the very formation of the new middle class, it was necessary to extol women as essential to the 'private' order; it was a completely different matter for women to participate in the 'higher' public realm.

Nonetheless, well wishers of the conference criticized the omission of women delegates. For, "if we are to progress we must not leave our womenfolk behind."⁹⁹ By the Second Educational Conference held in Lahore in 1909, the Reception Committee resolved to admit women to the proceedings.¹⁰⁰ Apparently stung by the criticism directed toward the reformers, the *Khalsa Advocate* took great pains to increase the numbers of female delegates, insisting that even those women visiting the conference be officially sanctioned as 'delegates'. It duly notified all readers that women as well as men were welcomed to the common *langar* meal. As well, while special seating

⁹⁶ *Khalsa Advocate*, February 1, 1908.

⁹⁷ *Khalsa Advocate*, February 6, 1909.

⁹⁸ In light of women's elections as delegates to the Indian National Congress in Bombay by 1889, the lack of women representatives at the Sikh Educational Conference in 1908 is indeed indicative of the resolutely held attitudes of the Sikhs toward women's place in the home front. See Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal*, p. 341.

⁹⁹ *Khalsa Advocate*, February 6, 1909.

arrangements were made for Sikh women for the conference, a separate 'Ladies Diwan' was also planned in advance.¹⁰¹ The seating arrangement referred to by the *Khalsa Advocate* was a screened area behind which women sat at the conference.¹⁰²

According to J.C. Oman, the educational opportunities and the subsequent birth of the new middle class led invariably to *new* restrictions placed on the women associated with the new elite, particularly their wives.

The purdah is now looked upon as a mark of gentility, and will not easily be lifted, even by the reforming spirit of the age. One might think that the spread of education will soon release women from their present seclusion, but in some cases it produces the very opposite effect. The cheap education now available in most parts of India raises a great many persons out of their natural humble sphere of life. The wives of such men, who once enjoyed the privilege of moving about freely in their own village, are converted into *purdah nasheens*, the seclusion of the women being an indication of superior rank.¹⁰³

Certainly, the elevation of the reformers' social standing placed their wives in an awkward position. Class limitations became increasingly pronounced with their augmented standing; the social confines of purdah represented their rise on the hierarchical ladder. Yet reform rhetoric invariably decried the custom as utterly foreign to Sikhism and chastised the practice as indicative of the 'Hindu' elements that had

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ *Khalsa Advocate*, March 20, 1909.

Following closely the injunctions clearly specified in the earliest of the *Rahit-namas*, women were permitted to read the Sikh sacred scriptures only among women. In the case of 'Ladies Diwans', women were solely responsible for the singing of *shabads*, but only amongst themselves. Evidently, even those who were at the forefront of reform were following the traditional customs and attitudes toward women closely.

¹⁰² At a celebration at the Sri Guru Nanak Girl's School, the mothers and other female relatives of the students were seated behind a curtain. *Khalsa Advocate*, November 16, 1907.

J.C. Oman, visiting an anniversary celebration of the Arya Samaj in 1886 noted that a woman, Mai Bhagwati, was one of the lecturers at the gathering. Well aware of traditional attitudes toward women in public, Oman writes: "A woman lecturing in public! This was a real attraction; an opportunity not to be neglected." According to Oman, Mai Bhagwati "stood behind a screen, and poured forth, from her place of concealment, a long discourse in Hindi on women's rights." See J. Campbell Oman, *Cults, Customs and Superstitions of India* London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908, pp. 164-166.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 165.

inadvertently crept into their society. Ultimately, despite reformers loud censure of purdah as foreign to Sikhism, the trappings of a higher social standing were resolutely compelling. Yet there were however those, not necessarily Sikhs, who disregarded the outward manifestations of prestige as they pertained to women. An observer in Lahore noted that "a great change has come over a section of the native population of Lahore...Certain bold men have begun to take out their wives in the evening for a drive in open vehicles. *A week ago we saw the daughter of a man of position walking with her father on the railroad platform at Lahore...Her face was quite uncovered...*" [italics mine].¹⁰⁴ The incredulity of the writer with regard to these changes in Punjabi Sikh society is obvious. Despite the winds of change however, the observer's astonishment is indicative of how solidly in place traditional attitudes toward women and seclusion remained. By 1913, rumblings could be heard against the observance of purdah among the elite who were gathering for the Educational Conference. The *Khalsa Advocate* insisted that the injunctions against purdah by Sikh Gurus should be upheld; instead, women were instructed to sit with their husbands.¹⁰⁵

Papers presented at the second Sikh Educational Conference made due reference to the glorious legacy of female education among the Sikhs. Notably, the education of women came to be intricately tied with the Punjabi language issue. One lecturer, aptly reversing earlier reformed attitudes toward Sikh education carried out by the orthodox religious elite, instead lauded these traditional methods; British intervention through the

¹⁰⁴ *Khalsa Advocate*, November 16, 1907.

¹⁰⁵ *Khalsa Advocate*, December 13, 1913.

Whether the delegates to the conference heeded these calls is not clear however. The fact that a woman, Bibi Savitri Devi was one of the presenters at this seventh Sikh Educational Conference would point to the possibilities of purdah restrictions being lifted. See *Khalsa Advocate*, April 11, 1914.

official sanctioning of Urdu was identified as responsible for the defective state of education among the Sikhs:

The first, and the only attempts at popular education was made by our Gurus, when every Sikh, man and woman, was expected to know the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib. For the first time the power, the potentiality of the mother-tongue was recognized and a system of popular education started... The popular education was gaining in strength and was extending its borders till the British Government, with its love of uniformity conceived the strange idea of teaching the Punjabi villagers through the difficult medium of Urdu... The result has been disastrous.... It is round the language learned at the mother's knee that the whole life of feelings, emotions and thought gathers, and we have in the Punjabi language a religious literature which has no rival. The pastoral poetry, the rural folklore and women's songs are full of soulful humanity, throbbing with the heart's joys and sorrows and is unsurpassed for the sweetness and true spirit of poetry.¹⁰⁶

Women, as the bearers of children, and the traditional mainstay of folk-culture had the most to lose from this state of affairs.¹⁰⁷ Thus the reformers ingeniously whetted the 'language issue' by adding a focus on Punjab's womenfolk; without doubt, the issue thus acquired a potent force. For women's issues inevitably brought with them the notion of honour, *izzat*, and according to Darling, "few things are dearer to a man than his *izzat*."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ *Khalsa Advocate*, April 10, 1909.

¹⁰⁷ As noted, the language issue became a central issue at this gathering. Given that a number of the presenters spoke in English at the first conference, it was suggested that only papers in Punjabi be read at the second gathering. This would allow all, including the newly included women delegates to understand and follow the proceedings. *Khalsa Advocate*, February 6, 1909.

¹⁰⁸ Malcolm Lyall Darling, *Wisdom and Waste*, p. 306.

*Sikh Role Models and the Tat Khalsa – Crisis of Authority*¹⁰⁹:

Another important difference between the Arya Samaj female educational endeavour and that of the Tat Khalsa was the actual authority upon which they both based their claims in support of female learning. For the Arya Samaj, both the Vedas and Swami Dayanand's vision were paramount. The Singh Sabha reformers however, striving for historical corroboration regarding the evident distinctions between Hinduism and Sikhism hearkened instead to the contributions of their Gurus. If the Aryas considered female education to originate with Swami Dayanand they were sadly mistaken. For long before the birth of the founder of the Arya Samaj, the legacy of Guru Nanak's message, 'Why call her inferior of whom kings are born?' entailed that both men and women were equal; both male and female were thus entitled to the advantages of education.¹¹⁰ Increasingly, female education came to be intricately tied to newly forged versions of Sikh history. "Among his numerous reforms of society, my Guru put the raising of womankind on a high pedestal. He told us that women, the mothers of heroes, saints, and prophets, was not to be despised, and that her education should precede and not follow that of man. The influence of his teaching was remarkable." The names of the Guru's wives, Bibi Bhani, Mata Gangaji and Mata Gujriji, the "makers of Sikh history" whose names "can not be taken without sending a thrill of pleasant and reverent sensation through our beings," were able to contribute to

¹⁰⁹ Johann Metz utilizes the phrase in his discussion of the church, authority and modernity. See Johann Baptist Metz, "Prophetic Authority," J. Moltmann, H. W. Richardson, J.B. Metz, W. Oelmüller, M.D. Bryant, eds., *Religion and Political Society* New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974, p. 179.

¹¹⁰ According to one writer, "[w]e cannot regard the Arya Samaj as having been the pioneer of female education in this province without restricting the meaning of 'education' to a close imitation of the Western manner of living, a few words of English and an imperfect knowledge of an embroidery for which the bulk of the Punjabis can hardly think of any use..." *Khalsa Advocate*, February 18, 1910.

this glorious legacy because they were educated.¹¹¹ Bibi Bhani, the daughter of Guru Amar Das, “is due the highest credit that can be claimed by any one woman in the world,” for she sacrificed five generations of men for her ‘motherland’. “Can any one say that all this was not the effect of home education which this noble lady received from her parents and imparted to her children? Raise the position of your women and you raise yourselves.”¹¹² Moreover, these writers maintained that opening of the pages of virtually any segment of Sikh history would lead readers to see “men and women –

¹¹¹ *Khalsa Advocate*, April 15, 1910.

It is not clear whether the character mentioned here is the fictitious Sundri of Bhai Vir Singh’s novel of the same title, or Sundri, one of the wives of Guru Gobind Singh. If the writer *is* referring to the latter, the upholding of Mata Sundri as veritable role model is in distinct contrast to an earlier article in the *Khalsa Advocate*. In a fascinating analysis that speaks volumes about Sikh attitudes toward women in leadership position, the writer addresses the various schisms within the Sikh community. The writer traces the contemporary disunity within the Sikh community in an indirect manner to Mata Sundri, one of Guru Gobind Singh’s wives. According to the article, after the death of the tenth Guru, ‘Baba Banda’ was nominated by Guru Gobind Singh to take on the leadership of the Sikh Panth. “The national organization of the Sikh worked exceedingly well for sometime after its completion. Then the Panth Guru had to bear a diplomatic blow...Mata Sundri Ji...was residing at the Musalman capital. She, it is said, was forced to sign or write a letter to the elected five to excommunicate Baba Banda, then at the zenith of power. Most probably, the letter was a forgery, but we do not know for certain as there are no reliable and trustworthy historic records to hand...Enough to say that the diplomatic letter wonderfully succeeded in making the first gap in Sikh organization. For henceforth, the leader nominated by Guru Gobind Singh ceased to have authority and the Khalsa body divided into 2 parties, and has never recovered its first unity...” *Khalsa Advocate*, October 15, 1904.

The account is fascinating given the thorough re-writing of history by this Singh Sabha mouthpiece. The article simply does not acknowledge Mata Sundri as official leader of the Sikhs; Banda is the actual representative chosen to be at the helm of Sikh affairs. While meagre attempts are made to disguise the blame for Sikh disunity being squarely placed on Sundri, it also transforms ‘Baba Banda’ from the ‘villain’ responsible for the division in the Panth, to the helpless victim of Mata Sundri’s erroneous actions. During the early years of the eighteenth century, the dispute between the followers of Banda known as the Bandai Sikhs, and the Tat Khalsa under the leadership of Mata Sundri led to a formidable split within Sikh ranks. Banda eventually was captured by the Mughal rulers of Punjab and brutally executed in 1716. According to W.H. McLeod, the dispute had everything to do with improper observances upheld by Banda; he abandoned the blue clothing of the Khalsa for red, insisted that his followers be vegetarians and instituted a new Khalsa slogan. “Although Banda has long since been incorporated within Khalsa tradition as one who loyally upheld its finest ideals, the contemporary situation was probably rather more ambiguous.” W.H. McLeod, *Who is a Sikh? The Problem of Sikh Identity* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, p. 48.

See also W.H. McLeod, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, pp. 48–49, especially the articles under the headings ‘Banda’, and ‘Bandai Sikhs’.

¹¹² *Khalsa Advocate*, April 15, 1910.

sitting...in congregations at the feet of the Guru and engaged in theological and spiritual discourses.”¹¹³

Ultimately, Sikh reformers were badly in need of role models, Sikh role models and the devising thereof became central to the reform endeavour.¹¹⁴ In light of the Singh Sabha endeavour to distinguish greatly between the Sikh tradition and Hinduism, new models to serve as female archetypes and novel paradigms within which Sikh womanhood could be rooted were essential. The names of Sikh females who had contributed greatly to their glorious heritage began to be uplifted. Sundri, Sharn Kaur, Rani Sahib Kaur, these were examples of true womanhood.¹¹⁵ They, in contrast to British suffragettes whose incentive was purely selfish, had imbibed fully their Gurus’ essential doctrine of service. For “[s]ervice is the root of Sikhism; service is the middle (means) of Sikhism and service is the end of Sikhism.” One only had to look to the “many discontented malcontents,” the “selfish agitators and lawless scenes” of the West to see the effects of education without this essential Sikh value of service upon women.¹¹⁶

The notion of ‘service’, along with that of ‘duty’ increasingly became the slogans utilized by the Singh Sabha reformers in their transformational endeavour of Sikh

¹¹³ *Khalsa Advocate*, February 18, 1910.

¹¹⁴ Given the paucity of information of Sikh women, the reformers also specified that a systematic study on the position of women in Sikh scripture, and history be formulated. *Khalsa Advocate*, May 6, 1905.

¹¹⁵ *Khalsa Advocate*, April 15, 1910.

The Singh Sabha leaders were aided in their efforts to promote Sikh womanhood by British writers who were gathering stories on Indian women. One such imported anecdote appeared in the pages of the *Khalsa Advocate*, May 15, 1904, namely, John J. Poole’s focus on Rani Sahib Kaur in *Women’s Influence in the East. As Shown in the Noble Lives of Past Queens and Princesses of India* London: Elliot Stock, 1892, pp. 234-241.

¹¹⁶ *Khalsa Advocate*, April 15, 1910.

Bhai Thakur Singh took great pains to shield the girls at the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala from harmful elements of western education. Accordingly, Thakur Singh insisted that with regard to the “spirit for freedom,” he “check down all such ideas. I am against *parda* but I am also against too much freedom of the western type. I have heard from many of my European friends about the evils of the new feminine movement in England and on the Continent.” He also believed however that there was little worry about the girls in his care becoming too liberal in their outlook, since they were “too mild to play that role.” See

women. The inauguration of Sikh Girl's Schools had opened a novel occupational option for Sikh women, albeit with important restrictions: to serve as teachers at the various Sikh institutions. By and large, these positions were honorary. There was a great paucity of female teaching staff at the schools and rather than employing teachers from Bengal or from the highly advanced Arya institutions a novel Sikh feminine ideal was instituted: one who gave her services to the fledgling educational enterprise.¹¹⁷ Deeply held Sikh values stressing service, *gratuitous* service in the case of women teachers, came to be embodied by those who were willing to cast off the traditional shackles of honour; women of good standing normatively stayed in the protective confines of the home.¹¹⁸ For, given that most of teachers were not paid for their services, reformers found a natural extension of work in the home to be performed at Sikh institutions. The husbands and fathers of these women who moved beyond their honour-bound customs were also highly praised.¹¹⁹ 'Duty' became another watchword

Caveeshar, "The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala," Ganda Singh, ed., *The Singh Sabha and other Socio-Religious Reform Movements*, p. 118.

¹¹⁷ Bengali women often served as teachers in other provinces that lagged behind in educational advancement for women. Women were admitted to the University of Calcutta as early as 1878, far in advance of their British counterparts. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

Sarala Debi of the Tagore family left Calcutta to teach in far away Mysore, albeit amidst a great deal of opposition. The fears of her family were given practical implications when a male stole into her room in Mysore, whereupon her family insisted she return to Calcutta despite her much needed services at the school. See Uma Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*? Orientalism, Nationalism, and a Script for the Past," in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women. Essays in Colonial History* New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990, p. 62.

¹¹⁸ According to one observer writing about two such women, Bibi Mohan Kaur and Srimati Bibi Jawala Kaur: "What graceful names these... The grace consists neither in the earthly bodies of the above Bibis, nor in their positions in life or the quantity of gold and silver they may have on their persons but it lies in the spirit they are animated with... I wish my daughters had the same spirit... How could this be done? Why by the simple process of utilizing their services in honorary positions as mistresses or Head mistresses in Sikh Schools where they might not only improve their souls by the teachings of Guru Nanak and secular education, but might also enlighten their sisters... Let S. Atma Singh set them a noble example by allowing his daughter to serve as an Honorary Mistress." *Khalsa Advocate*, January 25, 1908.

¹¹⁹ See *ibid.*

with regard women and education, particularly in light of an added financial burden.¹²⁰ Still the paucity of teachers continued to be one of the most pressing issues facing the girl's schools, which were increasingly dotting the horizon of the Sikh population.¹²¹ The lack of female teachers thus provided the pivotal bane for the successful continuation of girl's schools. The new ideal in turn took on an additional aspect, one of reproach; if schools were not furnished with the honorary services of teachers, the onus was on the women who did not fulfill their duty toward the Sikh community.¹²²

Harnam Kaur, the first spouse of Bhai Thakat Singh of Ferozepur, became the noble embodiment of this ideal of service and a frequently upheld role model for other Sikh women. Upon her death the notion of service became intricately intertwined with that of martyrdom. The apathy of the Sikh community with regard to female education was presented as ultimately responsible for her untimely death. Bhai Thakat Singh was the "living martyr," having offered his wife's life and services to the school. Thus the Ferozepur School was founded "at the cost of her life."¹²³

An earthquake in the Kangra Valley in 1905 presented another fortuitous opportunity for Sikh women to show their true mettle in the name of service to the

¹²⁰ Accompanying the education of women, and the duty of those educated to serve as teachers came a new financial burden for Sikh families. For, given the gratuitous nature of teaching among the Sikhs, education for females came with no economic rewards. Further, the previously unpaid labour of female family members would have necessitated the hiring of additional servants in the home. See Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal*, p. 61, where she outlines the financial costs of gratuitous teaching in Bengal.

¹²¹ By 1908 the call for teachers filled almost every edition of the weekly medium, the *Khalsa Advocate*.

¹²² Despite the attempts of the Singh Sabha reformers to address traditional honour-bound attitudes that worked against the desperate need for female teachers, for the most part, these and other obstacles remained firmly in place. Malcolm Darling, addressing the lack for teachers as late as 1934 notes: "Most of the available teachers are of urban origin, and in nine cases out of ten it is useless to send a town-bred to live and work in the village...: her heart will not be in her work, her teaching will have an urban bias, and she will be regarded as an alien. Even if a sufficient number of qualified village teachers could be found, there remains the immense difficulty of their accommodation and protection under conditions which in no way allow for women living alone." Darling, *Wisdom and Waste*, pp. 299-300.

¹²³ *Khalsa Advocate*, January 30, 1909.

suffering victims. Stories of yore when women “accompanied the Khalsa army in their several battles, cooked food and supplied it to the warriors and nursed the wounded and took care of them” were lifted high as models for contemporary women.¹²⁴ “Dogra influence and religion” however, after the demise of the tenth Guru led to the state of “chaos that prevailed in the social life of the country” leading ultimately to the debasement of women.¹²⁵ According to an article that underwent frequent reprints, the degraded position of Sikh women was finally being attended to by the reform endeavour, resulting in women volunteering to “minister unto the sufferers from the Earthquake as they did during the days of the Khalsa wars.”¹²⁶ The catastrophe in the Kangra Valley was held up as ideal opportunity for women to return to their position of preeminence put in place by the “sublime teachings of the Gurus.”¹²⁷ And a number of Sikh women rose to the occasion. Along with their ministration efforts in the Kangra Valley, several women in Amritsar began a campaign of door-to-door collection of funds for the relief effort. Observers noted that the effects of the Sikh Guru’s teachings, as well as the reform efforts were beginning to make their mark on the debased position of Indian womanhood.¹²⁸ Repeated calls were made to other women to follow the example of the Amritsar Sikhs.¹²⁹ Needless to say, traditional codes of honour continued to reign

¹²⁴ *Khalsa Advocate*, May 27, 1905.

¹²⁵ *Khalsa Advocate*, May 6, 1905, May 27, 1905.

The ‘Dogra influence’ noted to by the writer is a reference to the Dogra family, Rajputs from Jammu who were extremely powerful during the years of Maharajah Ranjit Singh and particularly during the tumultuous years after his death. The Dogra family, since the time of the Singh Sabha reformers has been held as ultimately responsible for the ‘Hindu’ elements that have been creeping into Sikh society since that time.

¹²⁶ *Khalsa Advocate*, May 27, 1905, reprinted from *The Tribune*.

¹²⁷ *Khalsa Advocate*, May 6, 1905.

¹²⁸ *Khalsa Advocate*, May 27, 1905.

¹²⁹ *Khalsa Advocate*, April 29, 1905.

supreme, most particularly among the leaders of the reform initiative.¹³⁰ The well-known couplet “*Andar baithi lakh di, bahar gayi kakh di*,” ‘The woman who lives indoors is worth lakhs, one who moves about it worthless’, attests to the venerable position given existing notions of honour among the Sikhs.¹³¹ Yet the newly constructed paradigms of service and duty, the dual watchwords of the movement’s march toward reformed society allowed for a limited dismantling of the traditional codes designed to maintain both women’s position at the hearth and family honour intact.

The necessity of proper role models for Sikh women led to an awareness of the paucity of literature focusing on Sikh females. Calls were made to the Khalsa Diwan to supply the public with such stories.¹³² And Sikh writers began heeding the appeal.¹³³ The form these writings took as well as their content was varied; novels, dramas, poetic works, instructional treatises, tracts and stories focusing on women soon began to dot the Sikh literary horizon. Journals dedicated solely to the need for female education as well as other concerns facing Sikh women were initiated; they also fulfilled the need for ‘proper’ reading material for Sikh females.¹³⁴ Heroism and piety were traits that were

¹³⁰ According to one critic, “the things have come to such a pass that if a Sikh comes to see another Sikh at the latter’s home, he is made to wait at the door till the female of the house manages to hide herself in some corner.” *The Sikhs and Sikhism* Gujranwala, July 16, 1904, cited in Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, “Character and Impact of the Singh Sabha Movement on the History of the Punjab,” Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Patiala: Department of History, Punjab University, 1972, p. 169.

¹³¹ *District Gazetteer*, Multan, 1901-02, p. 98, cited in Dhillon, “Character and Impact of the Singh Sabha Movement,” p. 168.

¹³² *Khalsa Advocate*, August 15, 1904.

¹³³ Accordingly, “[m]easures of reform are being taken in certain quarters. Lives of Sikh ladies...have recently been written and published. With their study the tide of reformation has set in.” *Khalsa Advocate*, May 6, 1905.

¹³⁴ The journal *Punjabi Bhain* [Punjabi Sister] was published through the Ferozepur Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala and edited by Vir Singh, a school master employed by the school in 1908. *Punjabi Bhain* contained articles on the Sikh religion, stressed the need for ‘pure’ Sikh rites for females, and focused especially on family and household duties. Above all, the journal was singularly non-political in nature. The journal ran issues from 1908 to 1930. Another short-lived periodical concerning women’s education as well as other women’s focused issues was *Istri Satsang*, published in Amritsar from 1904 to 1908. See “Sikh Periodicals,” in N. G. Barrier, *The Sikhs and their Literature. A Guide to Tracts, Books and Periodicals, 1849-1919* Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1970, pp. 75-88.

especially uplifted through the various genres utilized; some were fictional representations and a number were vaguely based on historical fact.¹³⁵ The ultimate sacrifice of women in the form of martyrdom for their religious beliefs was an important subject matter for the worldview the Singh Sabha reformers were attempting to construct; martyrdom increasingly came to be presented as a particularly 'Sikh' ideal.¹³⁶ The benefits of female education in conjunction with particularly pious or productive lives were also prudently forged.¹³⁷ Instruction booklets for women regarding their daily activities were written,¹³⁸ as was condemnation and moral indoctrination on the social evils prevalent among women; these included directives regarding proper Sikh women's rituals, knowledge befitting Sikh women and appropriate attitudes for women.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ The following lists are taken from *ibid*.

Amar Singh, *Chhoti Nunh Ya Lachhmi* Amritsar: Khalsa Agency, 1908; Bhai Atma Singh, *Guru Hazar Hai* Amritsar: Bhai Atma Singh, 1919; Narijan Kaur (Bibi), *Sur Bir Bhainan* Kairon: Khalsa Bhujangan Conference, 1916; Ram Kishan Singh (Bhai), *Sikh Istriyan De Prasang* Amritsar: Wazir Hind Press, 1914; Sewa Das Pahiri, *Lilha Bhagtni Bhilni* Amritsar: Chattar Singh, 1918; Sohan Singh (Bhai), *Natak Rup Kaur* Simla: Khalsa Youngmen's Association, 1916; Teja Singh, *Rani Jhala Kaur* Amritsar: Bhai Bahadur Singh, 1910; Thakar Singh (Bhai), *Harpal Charitar* Rangoon: Bhai Thakur Singh, 1912; Vir Singh (Bhai), *Bijay Singh* Amritsar: Wazir Hind Press, 1900; Vir Singh (Bhai), *Rana Surat Singh* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1919; Vir Singh (Bhai), *Srimati Sundriji De Dardnak Samachar* Amritsar: Wazir Hind Press, 1898.

¹³⁶ See Bhagwan Singh (Arif), *Khalsa Deviyani Almaruf Singhaniyan De Sidq* Bhalwal: Bhagwan Singh, 1914; Ditt Singh (Gyani), *Shahidian* Lahore: Baldev Singh, 1911; Ditt Singh (Gyani), *Singhanian. De Sadiq* Lahore: Khalsa Press, 1898; Partap Singh (Bhai), *Man Putar Di Shahidi* Amritsar: Bhai Labh Singh, 1912; Sohan Singh (Bhai), *Prasang Srimati Bibi Saran Kaur* Amritsar: Bhai Chattar Singh, 1919.

¹³⁷ Haribhagan Singh (Sant), *Savitari Natik* Amritsar: Sardar Dan Singh, n.d.; Mohan Singh Vaid (Bhai), *Subhag Kaur* Tarn Taran: Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, 1912; Parduman Singh (Bhai), *Anand Jhok* Baddon (Hoshiarpur): Bhai Parduman Singh, 1911; Sunder Singh (Bhai), *Upkari Jiwan* Amritsar: Sat Bivharak Agency, 1910.

¹³⁸ Amar Singh (Bhai), *Ghar Da Nirbah* Amritsar: Khalsa Agency, 1905; Bhagvanti, *Sidak De Bere Par* Amritsar: Amar Press, n.d.; Jodh Singh (Bhai), *Bharosa* Lahore: Sri Gurmat Press, 1906; Wadhawa Singh (Sardar), *Granth Istri Updesh* Amritsar: Sardar Wadhawa Singh, 1900.

¹³⁹ Amir Singh (Diwan), *Novel Prakash Kaur* Amritsar: Diwan Amir Singh, 1915; Darel Singh, *Ak Nun Milni* Hoshiarpur: Bhai Darel Singh, 1909; Dharm Dev (Pandit), *Istri Sudhar* Lahore: Lala Mohan Lal, 1905; Ganesh Singh (Sant), *Istri Amrit Nikhed* Lahore: Sri Gurmat Press, 1902; Gurmukh Singh (Bhai), *Gutt Hai Ke Sundaka?* Ludhiana: Managing Committee, Sikh Kanya Pathshala, 1913; Mohan Singh Vaid (Bhai), *Benati* Tarn Taran: Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, 1912; Narain Singh (Bhai), *Khalsa Mat Istri Amrit Mandan* Amritsar: Wazir Hind Press, 1904; Thakar Singh (Gyani), *Putri Nun Sikhya* Amritsar: Gyani Thakur Singh, 1915.

Suitable family relationships were expounded on,¹⁴⁰ as was the victimization of women in the context of 'un-Sikh' behaviour such as the effects of drink, negative consequences of unions between Sikhs and non-Sikhs, early marriage and gambling.¹⁴¹ Loyalty to their British rulers also became an important aspect of the attitudes Sikh reformers attempted to inculcate in the context of women-focused writings.¹⁴² All were placed in a context of a newly organized, carefully crafted understanding of 'true' Sikh womanhood.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Gurdit Singh (Kavi), *Jhagra Nunh Sauhara* Lahore: Mohammad Abdal Aziz, 1917.

¹⁴¹ Bela Singh (Bhai), *Singhni Parbodh* Lahore: Bhai Bela Singh, 1917; Ganda Singh (Bhai), *Manmattan Di Kartut* Gujranwala: Bhai Ganda Singh, 1916; Gurdit Singh (Bhai), *Bachchi Da Varlap* Lyallpur: Bhai Gurdit Singh, 1915; Jawahir Singh (Bhai), *Git Jawariye Di Istri Da Virlap* Lyallpur: Bhai Jawahir Singh, 1913; Mohan Singh Vaid (Bhai), *Abla Vilap* Tam Taran: Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, 1918; Mohan Singh Vaid (Bhai), *Vidhva Vilap* Amritsar: Wazir Hindu Press, 1918.

¹⁴² Variam Singh (Kavishar), *Naukar Di Nar* Amritsar: Sri Gurmat Press, 1918.

¹⁴³ Along with the above mentioned titles came an explosion of anonymous works pertaining to women as well. The majority stem from the Khalsa Tract Society founded by Bhai Vir Singh during 1892-94.

Undoubtedly, most of the unnamed writings can be traced to Bhai Vir Singh himself. See Harbans Singh, *Bhai Vir Singh. A Short Biography* Delhi: Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, 1990, p. 19.

While this list, along with the thematic divisions noted above is by no means exhaustive, it does give an insight into the immense interest and numbers of writings focusing on Sikh women or issues relating to Sikh women.

For a brief but useful overview of the content of the titles listed, see Barrier, *The Sikhs and their Literature*, pp. 5-58.

Anonymous Publications: *Adhuri Vidya Jind Da Khun* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1909; *Agyakar* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1911; *An Mulli Tahlan* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1900; *Atam Ghat* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1900; *Bachche Palan Dian Mattan* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1911; *Bhuyangan Pukar* Kairon: Singh Sabha, 1908; *Bhuyangan Virlap* Amritsar: Khalsa Bhuyangan Diwan, 1908; *Bibi Bhain* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1900; *Eh Tan Garki Ai* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1899; *Garib Kaur* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1916; *Ghar Suar* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1901; *Gharvich Suar* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1900; *Grahi Sikhya* Amritsar: Panjabi Prachar book Agency, 1910; *Hai Hai Bachchi Tun Kithon?* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1897; *Heroism of Sikh Women; Martyrdom of a Sikh Youth; Bhai Har Pal; Bhai Madho* Amritsar: Khalsa Agency, 1906; *Hir Ware Shah De Phal* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1898; *Ik Kanniyani De Dukhre* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1899; *Istri Bharta* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1900; *Istri Sambodh* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1906; *Istriani Liye Amrit Di Lor* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1898; *Kalhini Diurani* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, n.d.; *Karam Kaur* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1918; *Nashang Kaur Kikur Laj Kaur Ban Gai* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1901; *Nisang Kaur* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1906; *Pati Brit Dharam* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1897; *Prem Patola* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1904; *Rani Rup Kaur Te Tikka Manna Singh Ji Da Sangram, Arthat Jang Marauli* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1903; *Sade Ghrandi Dasha* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1911; *Saphal Gur Parb* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1909; *Shrimati Golar Kaur* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1910; *Shrimati Ranjit Kaur* Amritsar: Charan Singh, 1914; *Siapa Da Siapa* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1900; *Singhani Prabodh* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1906; *Sudeshi Nunh Sarsari Nazar* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1911; *Sukhwati Ke Chintamati Arthat Bal biwah De Dukhre* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1901; *Sundar Istri Te Sohna Mahal* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1907; *Zaina Da Virlap* Amritsar: Khalsa Tract Society, 1913.

The notion of Sikh martyrs in the context of brutal Mughal rule in particular caught the imagination of numerous writers.¹⁴⁴ Stories of Sikh women who persevered in their faith despite atrocities committed by the Muslim barbarians were held high as appropriate ideal for the Sikh reformed mindset. Their stories were to serve as role models for contemporary Sikh women. Further, Sikh distinctiveness as well as nationhood became inextricably entwined with this 'Sikh' understanding of martyrdom. As one writer claimed:

Blessed above every other nation, however, are the people whose women can lay claim to martyrdom equally with the men and have sacrificed their holy and precious lives for the sake of their country. Our mothers, who could outlive even their Spartan sisters, gave us no cause for shame even when the Sikhs were being subjected to the bitterest persecutions by those who wielded authority at the time....It is, however, to be regretted that the stories of these women are enveloped in obscurity. This pamphlet is an attempt at removing that obscurity, and will contain the stories of the bravery and contempt of life displayed by a band of Sikh women and children.¹⁴⁵

Graphic details painting the selfless deeds of Sikh women of yore were elucidated. In one such example, when executioners carried out the orders of the Mughal governor Mir Mannu (1748-53), and killed the infants of the captured Sikh women, their "gory corpses were thrown into the laps of the latter or suspended from their necks." Instead of buckling under the Governor's brutal pressure, these women were grateful for the opportunity they had been given.

¹⁴⁴ Although in a different context, a similar trend was taking place in British heroic writings of the late Victorian era. The imperial hero in the name of his exalted calling to military triumph and conquest was to be courageous and committed, even to his death; "[f]ollowing the Christian paradigm, he secured his ultimate conquest through martyrdom." John M. MacKenzie, "Heroic Myths of Empire," John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Popular Imperialism and the military. 1850-1950* Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1992, p. 113.

¹⁴⁵ Bhai Amar Singh, *Anecdotes from Sikh History. No. 4, Stirring Stories of the Heroism of Sikh Women and the Martyrdom of a Sikh Youth* Lahore: The Anglo-Sanskrit Press, 1906, p. 6.

What reaked it if their darling babes, who were the very light of their eyes, had been killed in a most merciless manner? The poor things had met their death in the cause of the Sikh religion, and they were glad of this. They thanked God that their children had no chance of ever being called unworthy, and had tasted of the cup of martyrdom in their very infancy.¹⁴⁶

Persistence in the Sikh faith, in spite of husbands being tortured and children dying of starvation, chastity and honour upheld despite tyrannical threats, hard labour in the face of hunger, this was the substance of true Sikh womanhood.¹⁴⁷ This was also what ultimately was held to distinguish Sikh women from their Hindu and Muslim counterparts.

When attempting to understand the immense needs of the Sikh reform movement to create role models for Sikh women, the prolific writer Bhai Vir Singh (1872-1957) deserves particular mention. Educated by the Missionary High School in Amritsar and well aware of the ways and means of the Christian missionary endeavour, he gleaned a good deal of information with regard to the matter of successful proselytising activity.¹⁴⁸ Following the example of the Ludhiana Mission Press he set up a similar venture named the Wazir Hind Press in 1892. By 1894 Bhai Vir Singh had inaugurated the Sikh Tract Society along the lines of the American Tract Society.¹⁴⁹ He became perhaps the most important spokesperson for the Singh Sabha movement and produced a monumental volume of literary works that gave voice to the movement's concerns, particularly with regard to

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 15, 17.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 7-20.

¹⁴⁸ The official language in Punjab, Urdu was the language of choice and means for the upwardly mobile middle class. However the successful proselytizing tactics of the Christian missionaries, who insisted on vernacular usage so as to be able to reach the maximum number of people and thus utilized Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script wrought the initial impetus of the reformers to champion Punjab as well. Bhai Vir Singh remained the foremost proponent of Punjabi as well as being responsible for a great proportion of literature stemming from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

women. An immense number of tracts on the proper status, behaviour, attitude of Sikh women followed. Further, Vir Singh dedicated four of his best known works to the piety and heroism of Sikh womanhood. The novel *Sundri* written in 1898 depicted the life of a brave young Sikh heroine;¹⁵⁰ *Bijai Singh* delineated the process whereby a young woman

¹⁴⁹ Attar Singh, "Political Change and Punjabi Literature in the Nineteenth Century," Indu Banga, ed., *Five Punjabi Centuries. Polity, Economy, Society and Culture, c. 1500-1990. Essays for J.S. Grewal* Delhi: Manohar, 1997, p. 547.

¹⁵⁰ While Bhai Vir Singh's *Sundri* has been hailed as the original Punjabi novel, Attar Singh maintains that the earliest novel in the Punjabi language remains *Jyotirudae*, an anonymous work published by the Punjab Text Book Committee in 1882 by the Ludhiana Mission. Though written in Punjabi the novel appears to be a translation from Bengal, though there is no trace of the original. In an interview with Joginder Singh Rahi of Guru Nanak Dev University who has studied the document in great detail, Rahi purported that Bhai Vir Singh would have been aware of the novel. Rahi's view is substantiated by Attar Singh who notes that *Jyotirudae* was likely the model utilized by Vir Singh in the creation of his own works. Ibid., p. 538. In a number of ways, *Sundri* is essentially an attack on the notions found in *Jyotirudae*. The general thrust of *Jyotirudae* is an attempt to show the superiority of both the 'West', including western ideological thought, institutions, and family structures, and Christianity, in contrast to their corresponding aspects of the 'East'. The book's primary attack is upon Indian womanhood; significantly, the central character of the novel is a woman named Basant. Indian women, according to the author, are plagued with dual subjugation; the patterns of extreme male domination of society and the general backwardness of India placing women in particular in a disadvantageous position. Child marriage is especially censured by the writer, who takes great pains to contrast negatively the situation of Indian brides with that of their British counterparts, particularly with regard to marriage; not surprisingly, the English are characterized as marrying at a much later age. Further, British women are enabled to choose their life partners; Indian women have no choices in their married lives. The author suggests strongly that the British came to India to 'free' Indians at large from their permanent state of lawlessness, and Indian women in particular from servility and backwardness. The writer especially points to the educational opportunities offered to the Indians by the British Government and Christian missionaries. Though the author does not portray the main protagonists as converting to Christianity, they are nonetheless enlightened characters, having imbibed the essential, liberating aspects of western thought.

The heroine of the story, Basant, is a 'victim' of child marriage whose husband dies at an early age of malaria. According to 'Hindu' custom, she is cut off from society, burdened at a young age by the constraints of purdah. The secondary protagonist is a man who is educated by the missionary establishment. Given the influence of his Christian education, he is liberated from the perverse customs surrounding him and marries Basant. Ultimately then, had the man *not* been educated in 'Western' Christian thought, the woman would have remained a victim until the end of her days.

Bhai Vir Singh takes aim at a goodly number of these assertions in his first novel. His main protagonist too is a woman. *Sundri*, who is about to be married, ultimately chooses to remain single; Vir Singh appears to be countering *Jyotirudae*'s contention that Indian women have no choices in terms of marriage options. *Sundri* rides free and without the constraints of purdah. Vir Singh, in contrast, always conceals the Hindu and Muslim women in the novel. Further, the earlier novel takes great pains to show Christian thought in particular and western influences in general as transforming positively the 'lawlessness' of Indian society. For Bhai Vir Singh, it is Sikhism that produces truly moral and exemplary women and men. It is the ideal of service that is utterly integral to Sikhism, which is lacking in the self-centred individuality inherent in Western thought. Further, while *Jyotirudae* points to the beneficial influences of Christianity, the protagonists maintain their Hindu identity. While the intent of the novel is doubtlessly to proselytize, it is executed in an indirect and somewhat subtle manner. Bhai Vir Singh's objective on the other hand is unmistakable and bluntly rendered; Muslims and Hindus are called to the superior tenets of Sikhism.

who through her pious example impelled her Hindu husband to convert to Sikhism. *Satwant Kaur*, the writer's third novel told the story of an ideal Sikh girl who was captured and then serve as a slave in a Muslim household in Kabul. Through the force of her piety Satwant Kaur won over the lady Fatima; in time she escaped and returned to India in the guise of a young man. *Rana Surat Singh* was an epic poem describing the immense devotion and love of Rani Raj Kaur for her husband Rana Surat Singh.¹⁵¹

Bhai Vir Singh's first novel *Sundri* remains his most successful work. As with numerous other women-focused writings of the period, the novel is situated during times of Mughal persecution of the Sikhs. According to Bhai Vir Singh, the "purpose kept in view for writing this book is to educate the Sikhs about their history and to inspire them to become true adherents of their religion."¹⁵² Based on a popular folksong of a young recently married Hindu girl who was abducted by a Mughal chieftain, the girl attempting to save her honour decided to kill herself on her funeral pyre. At the last moment however, her brother reached the pyre and saved his sister from the flames. Vir Singh ingeniously adapted this tale and forged a new version of the story within a decidedly reformed Sikh milieu.¹⁵³ The heroine, the abducted Surasti though stemming from a Hindu household was

Finally, while *Jyotirudae* proposes that English is the medium for the liberation and moral enlightenment of Indian society, Vir Singh strongly advocates Punjabi as crucial to the reformation of Sikh society. I am indebted to Dr. Rahi for his helpful insights and comments on *Jyotirudae*. Private interview, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, April, 1997.

Jyotirudae is now kept in the Rare Book Section of Guru Nanak Dev University Library.

¹⁵¹ Contemporary editions of the novels are as follows: *Sundri* Gobind Singh Mansukhani, tr., Delhi: Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, 1988; *Bijai Singh* Devinder Singh Duggal, tr., Delhi: Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, 1988; *Satwant Kaur* Ujagar Singh Bawa, tr., Delhi: Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, 1988; *The Epic of Rana Surat Singh* Gurbachan Singh Talib, tr., Chandigarh: Publication Bureau Panjab University, 1986.

¹⁵² Vir Singh, cited by S.S. Kohli, "Bhai Vir Singh's Novels," Gurbachan Singh Talib and Attar Singh, eds., *Bhai Vir Singh. Life, Times & Works* Chandigarh: Publication Bureau, Panjab University 1973, p. 148.

¹⁵³ J.S. Guleria, "Introduction," Bhai Vir Singh, *Sundri* Gobind Singh Mansukhani, Tr., Delhi: Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, 1988, pp. viii-ix.

secretly a devoted Sikh.¹⁵⁴ Her brother Balwant Singh, her saviour in the story was also a Sikh; correspondingly, he was the only 'true' man in the family who was enabled to exhibit utmost bravery in the face of danger.¹⁵⁵ Whilst expounding on the grave sin of *sati*, Balwant Singh pulled his sister to safety and took her back to her ancestral home. The family however was horrified and frightened of the Moghul's wrath. Balwant Singh, insulted at his Hindu family's cowardice instead retreated into the jungle with Surasti, only to be met with carnage. His Sikh brothers had been overtaken by a bloodthirsty band of Turks. Viewing the bloody remains, Surasti was

fired by a religious zeal and felt that there was nothing better for her to do than serving the Sikh soldiers whom had risked their lives for their faith. She felt convinced that her brother had acquired the courage of his conviction and noble demeanour because of his Sikh faith and living with the Sikhs. He had grown into a noble person. Why could not she be as brave as her brother... She began to reflect on the role of women – Why should not women participate in the struggle for the defence of morality and religion? If all women could not do so, at least she could set an example of courage by following her worthy brother.¹⁵⁶

And thus began Surasti's life with the roving band of Khalsa men. Surasti was formally baptised into the faith and renamed Sundri Kaur. After her initiation into the Khalsa fold, Sundri dedicated her life to caring for the men surrounding her. On occasion she too, "Durga-like" took up the sword in the defence of her faith.¹⁵⁷ Her extreme attitude of

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

Vir Singh explains that while on the funeral pyre, Surasti determined to die reciting Sikh scripture, the *Japji*.

¹⁵⁵ According to Anup Chand Kapur it was common for Hindu families to dedicate their eldest son to Sikhism. These sons were brought up as *Keshdhari* Sikhs, Sikhs who observed the outward forms known as the 5 K's. In Kapur's family, though orthodox Hindus his father, grandfather and great-grandfather were Sikhs, as was his eldest brother. Thus, when Bhai Vir Singh introduces Balwant Singh as a Sikh from a Hindu family he is reproducing in fiction a common custom among the Hindus of Punjab. See Anup Chand Kapur, *The Punjab Crisis. An Analytical Study* Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd., 1985, p.iii.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

¹⁵⁷ "In her extreme rage, the lioness – Sundri – promptly drew the sword from her sheath and stood up with the naked sword as if Durga has risen to destroy the demons... Durga-like Sundri dealt him such a sword-stroke with both her hands that right from his shoulder to his waist, his body was cut – like to position of a Hindu sacred thread – and he fell to the ground... The lion-hearted lady threw away the sword and untying

mercy towards any wounded person however led to her downfall. For stopping to help a wounded Pathan, Sundri was wounded by a fell stroke of his sword. Sundri eventually died a martyr for her faith, prostrated before the Sikh Holy Scriptures. Vir Singh continued with a word for Sundri's contemporary sisters:

O Sikh maidens of today, born with a silver spoon in your mouth and living in luxury and comfort! The daughters, sisters and mothers of the poor and rich Sikhs! Look at the faith and the plight of your forerunner Sundri. She never loses her faith. She takes a risk with her life, but does not give up her virtue. In times of trouble and calamity, she remains firm and sticks to the doctrines of Sikh religions. Just look at yourselves and find out for yourself if you are damaging the Sikh community or not!... Be brave and truthful Sikh ladies like Sundri; be virtuous like her and make yourself and children true Sikhs, otherwise you will prove to be, for your husband, the pernicious creeper which dries up the plant and then itself perishes."¹⁵⁸

Bhai Vir Singh easily breaks the continuity of the historical narrative as he pauses to address the contemporary situation and impress on his readers the need to follow the example of these imaginary but 'truly Sikh' characters. In other words, Sundri has become the site of 'pure' Sikh woman's identity construction.¹⁵⁹ She is also symbolic of a recovered and purified Sikh tradition. However, even as Sundri is illusory, so too is the unadulterated, 'pure' tradition that she represents.¹⁶⁰ In the words of Eric Hobsbawm, Bhai Vir Singh is here actively "inventing tradition."¹⁶¹ Moreover, Sundri and other Sikh protagonists are flawless, paragons of virtue and bravery, supernatural even. The reader is caught up in a timeless fluidity between fiction and reality, historical fact and sheer

the Amir's horse from the tree trunk, mounted it and turned the reins toward the upward course of the river..." Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 99-100.

¹⁵⁹ Certainly, the process of creating the 'ideal feminine' was not unique to the Tat Khalsa and Bhai Vir Singh in particular. The feminine ideal also fit snugly into the nationalist discourse as it did into other religious reform groups such as Dayanand's Arya Samaj.

¹⁶⁰ See especially "A New Social Imagination: The Making of the Tat Khalsa," Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, pp. 305-377.

¹⁶¹ See Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Tradition," Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, especially pp. 1-6.

fabrication. The protagonists are not transformed; they are however the conduits of transformation. As such they serve as archetypal figures, a fundamental requirement in the worldview the Tat Khalsa was in the process of creating. For the Singh Sabha reformers were well aware of being caught up in a 'crisis of authority'. Hindu ideals in the form of archetypal figures had traditionally sustained the imagination of the Sikhs, serving both as authority and as fundamental bond between the two communities. The creation of alternate Sikh heroes and heroines were thus necessary to fulfil the elementary needs of a worldview intent on the creation of Sikh distinctiveness. For their creator, Sundri, Balwant Singh and other players became the necessary surrogates for the pantheon of models offered by Hinduism. The Hindu image of Durga was no longer necessary for the Sikhs: she was replaced by Sundri, ever virtuous, devoted and courageous. The transformation of Surasti's name to Sundri is also significant in this regard. For the name Surasti as derivative of the Vedic goddess Sarasvati, the bestower of knowledge and learning is far too intimately connected to the very pantheon Bhai Vir Singh is actively rejecting.¹⁶² However, in the very rejection and subsequent equation of Durga with Sundri and Sarasvati with Sundri, the latter becomes perpetually pedestalled. In *Rana Surat Singh* there is a literal rendition of this process; the saintly hero who has died a martyr's death, Rana Surat Singh is installed as a statue in his widow's garden. To the statue Rani Raj Kaur pleads: "Pray, will you bend your head, my husband darling, And let me put these garlands around your neck? High is your turban, And tall you stand, Out of reach of this feeble woman." The illusion however cannot be maintained. "Something inside her snapped. And dazed she fell to the ground,

¹⁶² I am indebted to Nikki Singh's observations of the Surasti/Sarasvati connection. See Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh, *The feminine principle in the Sikh vision of the Transcendent* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 190.

cold like stone. A lifeless image lay in front of a lifeless image – A statue prostrate in homage before a statue.”¹⁶³

According to Victor Turner, the passage from traditional archetype to a novel inception, or, from conventional paradigm to its alternative is fraught with difficulty. “The danger is, of course, that the more persuasive the root metaphor or archetype, the more chance it has of becoming a self-certifying myth, sealed off from empirical disproof. It remains as a fascinating metaphysics.”¹⁶⁴ In the case of Sundri in particular, while Vir Singh is attempting to address the profound vacuum of Sikh female role models, a new goddess who is a natural extension of the old paradigm that is supposedly being displaced is born. Accordingly, Sundri is described as “not an ordinary woman; you are a goddess.”¹⁶⁵

What is lost in the process in the case of Vir Singh’s first novel, is precisely the humanity of Sundri as potential figure of relationality, of role model. In other words, Sundri has been transformed from feasible, useful model to archetype or goddess. Yet ‘in-the-flesh’ role models are essential in that “much of the fascination in reading novels and autobiographies or biographies lies in the models they provide for the most central of human tasks, the discovery of self-identity.” Sallie McFague further notes that role models, “unlike discrete metaphors, are systematising, organising grids or screens, offering complex

¹⁶³ Rana Surat Singh, Harbans Singh, tr., cited in G.S. Khosla, “The Dramatic Element in Bhai Vir Singh,” G.S. Talib, A. Singh, eds., *Bhai Vir Singh*, pp. 130-131.

¹⁶⁴ Victor W. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974, p. 29.

¹⁶⁵ Bhai Vir Singh, *Sundri*, pp. 24-25.

The passage continues: “But you must always have the courage of a man to face this kind of hard life.” In this case, the displacement of the traditional with a novel interpretation has an added and significant twist. Elevation to the level of goddess includes an additional element of that which is essentialized as ‘manly’ behaviour, courage.

Simone de Beauvoir has aptly summed up this process of the divinization of women: “Man wishes her to be carnal, but he would also have her smooth, hard, changeless as a pebble.” Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* New York: Bantam Books, 1968, p. 179.

and detailed possibilities for analogical transfer to another life.”¹⁶⁶ Historical models and role models in general are important for this process of identity construction. According to one critic, Bhai Vir Singh’s protagonists are devoid of this self-identifying possibility. They are

ideal characters who look like “types” and on whom the circumstances have no effect... Such things do not happen in the ordinary course of life... On the other hand the writer is forced, by his urge to propagate the Sikh ideals, to bring in such incidents, acts and speeches as seem unnatural, incredible and deliberately interspersed in order to suit the plot and characters.¹⁶⁷

Ostensibly speaking from a feminist perspective, Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh

extensively analyses the writings of Bhai Vir Singh; in particular she examines his contributions to female emancipation in light of modern feminist thought. According to Singh:

The identification of the poet [Bhai Vir Singh] with the female and the creation of female protagonists as the paradigms of morality, courage, spirituality, and philosophical quest manifest not only the tenderness of Bhai Vir Singh’s poetic perception but also his, that is to say, the Sikh, worldview in which women enjoy great esteem. These characters *are not abstractions of an “eternal feminine.” Each is a living and breathing individual. They are not fairyland characters, but human beings of flesh and blood.* Each in her own and separate way is a model worthy of emulation by women as well as men [*italics mine*].¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology. Models of God in Religious Language* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982, pp. 67-68.

¹⁶⁷ S.S. Kohli, “Bhai Vir Singh’s Novels,” G.S. Talib, A. Singh, eds., *Bhai Vir Singh*, pp. 149-151. I quote the passage at length, in light of the rare instances that Bhai Vir Singh’s writings have received any substantive criticism by Sikh scholars. Volumes that indiscriminately champion all aspects of Vir Singh’s writings instead abound. See Ibid.

See especially Lt. Col. J.S. Guleria, ed., *Bhai Vir Singh. The Sixth River of Punjab* Delhi: Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, 1984.

Perusal of the contents of this volume illustrates the veneration Sikhs extend to Vir Singh. For example: ‘The Universal Man’, ‘Pious Homage’, ‘In Footsteps of His Great Master’, ‘Bhai Vir Singh was not an Individual but an Institution’, ‘The Poet-Saint’, ‘A River of Culture and Learning’, ‘A Legend’, ‘Many Faceted Literary Titan’, ‘Surgeon of Souls’.

¹⁶⁸ Nikki Singh, *The feminine principle*, p. 155.

For Nikki Singh, the choice of Sundri as principle character, points to Bhai Vir Singh's radical break with popular attitudes toward the inequality of womanhood.¹⁶⁹ Sundri, according to Nikki Singh "is the incarnation of all that is best in Sikh life and tradition, yet she does not remain a paragon of excellence or a distant goddess to be worshipped on a pedestal." Sundri, "on the contrary, is a living person, living in actual life truths and morals enjoined by the Sikh faith. She is a person in flesh and blood who gallops freely with men."¹⁷⁰ Needless to say, Sikh women during times of Mughal rule or for that matter during the early twentieth century of Vir Singh did not 'gallop freely with men'; neither did women 'choose' between living at home or roving about the countryside alongside their male companions. Further, Singh purports that Sundri and her creator for that matter, are directly in line with modern feminist thought that seeks to provide a holistic model for both men and women, "opening up new avenues for self-empowerment and transcendence."¹⁷¹ Yet it must also be underscored that these radical and enlightened individuals furthering the cause of Sikh womankind are flights of fiction, mere figments of Bhai Vir Singh's imagination. It would appear that given overall perceptions that Sikh history was utterly deplete of 'in-the-flesh' female role models, reformers sought literary characterisations for the transformations they envisioned for Sikh females. Flying in the face of all evidence from the Singh Sabha period, Nikki Singh insists that Bhai Vir Singh's *Weltanschauung*, essentially that of the Singh Sabha movement maintained that

women were the protagonists who alone could bring about the much-desired change and transformation of their society. Physically very beautiful, spiritually highly refined, existentially deeply intense, ethically

¹⁶⁹ As already noted, Vir Singh's novel is most likely an attempt to counter the anti-Indian bias of the earlier novel, *Jyotirudae*. The novel also served as Bhai Vir Singh's model; it too had a female as its main protagonist.

¹⁷⁰ Nikki Singh, *The feminine principle*, pp. 203-204.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

most noble, and mystically so exalted, the women in his vast array of literary creations...live palpably and energetically. They search for their own identities, and discover their selves through their own individual journeys without any male instructors...Without a male to validate her, she exists harmoniously in a constellation of relationships...*she* in all her roles is equally important in her connection with the Divine.¹⁷²

In focusing on facile, scrupulously chosen aspects of Bhai Vir Singh's writings, as opposed to the larger structures prudently upholding the patriarchal worldview of the day, Nikky Singh presents a singularly one-sided, even distorted literary and historical perspective. Needless to say, one is left with the impression that hers is but an additional appeal to traditional Sikh apologetics, neatly aligned with the 'principle of negation' outlined earlier, though cloaked in the jargon of Western feminist thought.¹⁷³ For undeniably, in line with traditional hyper-masculine Sikh values as well as appropriated Victorian sentiments such as the 'helpmate', Bhai Vir Singh and the reform movement in general maintained a consistent position regarding the 'proper' place of their womenfolk at the hearth. Thus the characters and the circumstances prescribed by Vir Singh are essentially untenable, for the most part only adding to the antithetical nature of the reform endeavour. For the creation of the various protagonists as archetypal, in essence, the inception of *new* goddesses flew in the face of precisely what the Singh Sabha reformers sought so actively to expunge in Sikh society – the existing heterogeneity within the female milieu.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 248.

¹⁷³ For a more extensive analysis of Nikki Singh's approach, see D.R. Jakobsh, "Gender Issues in Sikh Studies: Hermeneutics of Affirmation or Hermeneutics of Suspicion?," Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier, eds., *The Transmission of Sikh Heritage in the Diaspora* New Delhi: Manohar, 1996, p. 53.

The Political Milieu: Agitation and Allegiance:

As noted earlier, the Singh Sabha reform endeavour, while similar in most respects to that of the Arya Samaj, was dissimilar in a number of aspects. Along with the language issue, Punjabi versus Hindi, and the creation of new, alternative role models, Singh Sabha reformers on the whole were distinct from their Arya counterparts in terms of their conspicuous efforts to inculcate categorical loyalty to their British rulers into their educational schemes. For increasingly, though far removed from the highly developed nationalism lending ferment to the political milieu in Bengal, British rule was also being assailed in Punjab. A goodly number of factors gave rise to this new development. As already noted, due to a massive increase in agricultural prices and land values in particular, Punjab agriculturists were faced increasingly with indebtedness. Taking advantage of the situation, urban moneylenders furnished the landowners with easy credit in return for land pledges. The Punjab Alienation of Land Act of 1901 was put in place by the Government to effectively halt the increased land holdings of the urban populace and thereby stabilise the holdings of the peasantry. The official stance maintained that only through Government intervention could rural satisfaction and support for the Raj be sustained.

To secure the contentment of the masses is our first duty in India: in it lies our safety. As long as they are loyal to and contented with their rulers, the internal peace of the country is secure, and the professional agitator powerless. And most of all is the loyalty and contentment of the sturdy yeomanry from whose ranks we draw our native soldiers, the safe foundation upon which our rule can rest secure.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Memorandum on restriction of the power to alienate interests in land, p. 17, in Government of India, Public Proceedings, 1895, October 72-73A, cited in Norman G. Barrier, *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900* Monograph and Occasional Papers Series, No. 2, Duke University: Program in Comparative Studies on Southern Asia, 1966, pp. 37-38.

This volume remains the most comprehensive work on the Land Alienation Bill.

Through the Act the population was divided into what were called agriculturist and non-agriculturist tribes. Jats, Rajputs, Arains, Gujars as well as Muslim religious elites were placed into the first category. Non-agriculturists were forbidden to acquire permanent land in the rural areas. On the rural front, this "measure not only halted the increasing expropriation of impoverished landowners but encouraged inter-communal political co-operation by giving concrete expression to the Muslim, Hindu and Sikh cultivators' common economic interests."¹⁷⁵ However, while the Land Alienation Act halted the passing of land into the hands of moneylenders, it failed to solve problems the root problems leading to rural indebtedness.¹⁷⁶ What it did successfully, was to open the controversy between agriculturists and non-agriculturists. For the solidarity encompassing communal lines in the rural areas was in radical contrast with the intense rivalries between communities in the cities; there, the various reform groups were striving to *fortify* communal identities.¹⁷⁷ According to Darling, the Land Alienation Act only

¹⁷⁵ Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj, 1849-1947* Delhi: Manohar, 1988, p. 56.

¹⁷⁶ Darling described the massive indebtedness of the agriculturists as follows: "Nearly half the mortgages were made by sonless proprietors who were often gamblers and spendthrifts, and that, excluding loans for the repayment of old debt...of the amount borrowed was spent of wine, opium and gambling (39.5 per cent), marriage (18 per cent), and litigation (4.5 per cent)." *The Board of Economic Enquiry, Punjab, Rural Section Publication* – V, 1925, pp. 20, 24, 25, cited in Malcolm Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* London: Oxford University Press, 1928, p. 51.

With regard to the high indebtedness for marriage costs, Darling points to the radical disparity between males and females in the province. For "the difficulty," according to Darling, "is that out of a population of less than 21 millions there are two million more males than females. Even in more advanced surroundings the result of this would be demoralizing, but in a country where the village woman is regarded as little better than a chattel, the purchase of brides is inevitable." This was particularly the case for the Sikh Jat: A Muslim, according to Darling, would pay four or five hundred rupees to "get what he wants," but the Sikh Jat "has to pay one or two thousand...[for] the shortage of girls is greater with him than with any one else." Darling, *The Punjab Peasant*, pp. 52-53, 54-55.

On the other hand, litigation, also an important factor in the massive debt burden of the agriculturists, in the western districts "practically turn[s] on the question whether the mother or the uncle of a fatherless girl is entitled to the profits of mating her." *Shahpur Gazetteer*, 1917, p. 75, cited in *ibid.*, p. 54. See also Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs. Volume 2: 1839-1988* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 151-156.

¹⁷⁷ Needless to say, the Bill also sowed the seeds of communal dissent among the rural populace. The Bill subdivided members of the Jat caste or tribe by their religious affiliation; land transfers between Hindu Jats and Muslim Jats could be restricted. According to Sir Harnam Singh the Council Member representing

added to the rivalry in the cities, for the "townsman is inclined to convert it into a political grievance."¹⁷⁸ The Government however, regarding the peasantry as the only true ballast of the Raj succeeded in maintaining loyal ties with the rural population.¹⁷⁹

In February 1907 the Punjab Legislative Council passed the Colonisation of Lands Bill. The Bill affected most significantly the new landowners who were uprooted from Central Punjab and enticed to the Canal Colonies by the Government.¹⁸⁰ The new proprietors had either been given their land by the Punjab Administration, or, had paid a nominal fee for the landholdings. Cattle, implements and building materials were also advanced to these new cultivators at very low interest rates. Water was initially supplied without cost, and subsequently at moderate rates.¹⁸¹ However, along with land holdings came a good number of stipulations that were carefully monitored by appointed Canal Officers. The officers, to maintain control over the Colonies, put an informal system of penalties for infractions of these regulations in place. By 1903 however, colonists had successfully challenged the legality of this system through the courts; they had also founded a newspaper to express their dissatisfaction with the system. The Punjab Colonization Bill was an attempt to legalise the fine system and thereby strengthen the control of the Canal Officers over the colonists.¹⁸² Contrary to the principles of peasant proprietorship held high

Punjab, the erroneous division of these agriculturalists would turn brother against brother and intensify communal unrest. See Barrier, *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900*, pp. 73-74.

¹⁷⁸ Darling, *The Punjab Peasant*, p. 186.

¹⁷⁹ Ravinder Kumar notes that the Land Alienation Act did not curb urban economic growth. Surplus capital was relocated instead to cities, reflected in the dramatic growth of Joint Stock Companies from 50 in 1901 to 155 in 1913. See Ravinder Kumar, "The Two Revolutions in the Punjab," *Punjab History Conference*, p. 156.

¹⁸⁰ The Punjab Government transformed the extensive but barren crown land in Western Punjab by digging canals and thereby allowing for land to be irrigated. The peasantry brought in from Central Punjab were the means by which this transformation was made possible. See Satya M. Rai, "Agrarian Movement in the Punjab, 1906-09," *Punjab History Conference. Eighth Session. Proceedings* (December 1973), p. 133.

¹⁸¹ The Chenab Colony, begun in 1887 was considered a particular ideal of Punjab's administration and the 'paternalism', which guided the designs of Government. See Jones, *Arya Dharm*, pp. 269-270.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 270.

to this point, the Colonisation of Lands Bill was based on the assumption that land was ultimately the property of the Government; the agriculturist thus was demoted from the highly valued position of ownership to that of tenant. Further, the Government also proposed to modify the Canal Colonies' tenures and increased the water rate in the Bari Doab.¹⁸³ At the same time there were rumours of further legislation to protect the landowners from exploitation by the money lending, urban classes. Urban Hindus in particular saw this as another unfair attempt by the Administration to limit their economic base. In an effort to protect urban interests, the urban classes began to mobilize. The Indian National Congress saw the Land Alienation controversy as a fortunate opportunity to enlarge its membership base among rural communities.¹⁸⁴ In January 1907, one hundred thirty-nine Punjabis had attended the Congress meeting in Calcutta, the largest delegation ever sent from Punjab. For a new wave of consciousness was overtaking the country in the wake of the Japanese victory over Russia, as well as the Partition of Bengal.¹⁸⁵ The Colonization of Lands Bill, the increase of water rates in the Bari Doab and the Amendment to the Land Alienation Act proved to be the combined stimuli that united the rural and urban Punjabis in an effect anti-Government stance.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ The increase that was instituted in November 1906 was as high as fifty percent in some instances, affecting landowners throughout the districts of Lahore, Amritsar, and Gurdaspur. See *ibid.*

See also Rai, "Agrarian Movement in the Punjab," *Punjab History Conference*, pp. 134-135.

¹⁸⁴ Barrier, *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900*, pp. 39-40.

¹⁸⁵ Japanese victory over Russia in 1904, was viewed by educated Indians, particularly by the growing number of nationalists, as a victory of the 'Asiatic' over the 'white man'. Further, by August 1905, news of the proposed partition of Bengal reached Punjab. The Swadeshi movement was activated in the wake of Partition news given Bengal's enthusiasm for Swadeshi. Swadeshi Sabhas subsequently sprang up in nearly every Punjabi town and city. Certainly, the Swadeshi movement was not novel to the twentieth century. Before the surge of the movement in Bengal the call for indigenous products over those imported from Europe had been inaugurated by a number of educated Punjabis as early as the 1880's. However, the movement was revived in 1905 as a vehicle for agitation against the Government. See Jones, *Arya Dharm*, pp. 255-256, 259.

As noted earlier, the Namdhari Sikhs in the mid-eighteenth century also advocated the rejection of imported goods. See Chapter Four.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 269-270.

A number of meetings were held to protest these actions; students in schools and colleges took an active part in the political outcry. Other urban groups, already dissatisfied with the Raj, also took advantage of the situation. The *Tribune* and *Punjabee* were sued for libel by English officers and the editors of *Hindustan* and *India* were arrested; the involvement of the national press led to calls to the Punjabis to join the growing Swadeshi movement as part of the larger, national agenda.¹⁸⁷ The dynamic leadership of Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh stirred up the masses; Ajit Singh in particular called on the peasants as the 'real' rulers of the country to unite. 'Pagri-Sambhal O'Jatta' 'O Peasant, guard your turban, your honour' was his stirring call to action.¹⁸⁸ However, it was the mobilisation of the rural classes, particularly with regard to the 'sturdy' Sikhs who formed the bulk of the Indian Army and had hitherto professed their steadfast loyalty to the Raj, which greatly perturbed the British Government. Sir Denzil Ibbetson, surveying the increasingly volatile situation notes:

One striking and exceedingly dangerous feature which has been observable everywhere is that special attention has been paid to the Sikhs and in the case of Lyallpur, to the military pensioners and that special efforts have been made to procure their attendance at meetings, to enlist their sympathies and to inflame their passions... The very sturdiness of the Punjabi, which makes him more difficult to move than the Bengali, makes the matter far more serious when he is moved and 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.¹⁸⁹

Also alarming to the authorities was a demonstration by students at Khalsa College in Amritsar, the stronghold of the Sikh middle class.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ R.K. Sharma, "The Unrest of 1907 in the Punjab," *Punjab History Conference. Sixth Session. Proceedings* (March 1971), pp. 311-312.

¹⁸⁸ Rai, "Agrarian Movement in the Punjab," *Punjab History Conference*, p. 135.

¹⁸⁹ Minute by Sir Denzil Ibbetson, in *Autobiographical writing of Lajpat Rai* Jullundur, 1965, Appendix II, p. 231-236, cited in *ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

¹⁹⁰ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs. Volume 2*, p. 158.

Ultimately, the Arya Samaj was blamed for the political turmoil.¹⁹¹ Attempting to deal with the increasingly volatile issue, the authorities began to ban meetings and speakers. Further, among others, officials arrested Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh; the latter were subsequently deported to Burma. This only led to calls for an All India agitation. Finally, paying scant attention to Imperial honour, Lord Minto, the Governor General vetoed the Land Colonization Bill and postponed water rate increases on the Bari Doab Canal. Calm reappeared almost immediately in the rural areas, followed by surge of appreciation for the Raj. In the cities, members of the Arya Samaj in particular were left with the full weight of government apprehension toward them as the apparent organisers of the disturbances. According to Ibbetson, "wherever there was an Arya Samaj it was the centre of seditious talk..."¹⁹² Leaders of the Samaj hastened to make amends; the hostile world of British mistrust and discrimination was simply too hazardous. A delegation met with Denzil Ibbetson, insisting that while some 'extremists' had taken part in the agitation "the Arya Samajists as a body had nothing to do with the later disturbances, that the Samaj was an organisation which had for its sole object the religious educational advancement of its members..."¹⁹³

The Rhetoric of Reform, Education and the Politics of Patriotism:

In sharp contrast to other urban elites taking part in anti-Government agitation, Singh Sabha leaders for the most part stayed outside the fray. While other organs were actively censured for inflaming the masses, the *Khalsa Advocate* was merely warned in June

¹⁹¹ Ibbetson warned his officials against the employment of Aryas because of their seditious nature, and urged them to dismiss Arya employees "at the least sign of disloyalty." Confidential circular 715, May 7, 1907, PGP 10/B, cited in Jones, *Arya Dharm*, p. 273.

¹⁹² *Tribune*, May 28, 1907, cited in *ibid.*, p. 275.

of 1907 about the ramifications of contributing to the political turmoil of the day, particularly with regard to Sikh sepoys.¹⁹⁴ For the most part, the mouthpiece of the Chief Khalsa Diwan was remarkably quiet with regard to these events.¹⁹⁵ Distancing the urban Sikhs from the rural element, one writer disclaimed the Sikh masses as “an ignorant and idle people. There are comparatively few among them who take any real interest in the welfare of their community.”¹⁹⁶ Well aware of their favoured position in the eyes of the British and the need to stay in that “position of predominance” so the Sikh community could progress, reformers loudly insisted that the “educated classes owe their very existence to British rule and would literally go to rack ... [if] the protection of the British *raj* was withdrawn.”¹⁹⁷ While there were hints of dissatisfaction with certain Government actions leading to the unrest, reproach remained carefully couched in unmitigated loyalty to the Raj.¹⁹⁸ Further, if blame could at all be placed for the events taking place in the Colonies, the Arya Samaj was pointed to as solely responsible.¹⁹⁹ Within a short number of years the *Khalsa Advocate* had distanced the Sikhs completely from those events, insisting that “we

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Shyamala Bhatia, *Social Change and Politics in Punjab*, p. 331.

For an excellent summary tracing the involvement of the British government and publications stemming from Punjab, as well as specific laws governing publication of material during the early to mid-twentieth century, see N. Gerald Barrier, “Banned Literature in Punjab, 1907-1947,” W. Eric Gustafson, Kenneth W. Jones, eds., *Sources on Punjab History* Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1975, pp. 45-84.

¹⁹⁵ While Singh Sabha leaders on the whole did not officially support the anti-Government events of 1907, there were a number of Sikhs that did so wholeheartedly. Ajit Singh, the revolutionary leader of the movement was a Jat Sikh; two Sikh periodicals, the *Panth* and *Punjab* were two mediums that did give voice to the political concerns of the day. According to Joginder Singh, even Bhai Vir Singh, the editor of the *Khalsa Samachar* obliquely criticized the Government through his imaging of Guru Gobind Singh as the expeller of tyranny and injustice and in his asking Sikhs to be ready to rise and “dispel the trouble from the country.” Joginder Singh, “The Sikhs and the Anti-British Agitation in the First Decade of Twentieth Century,” *Punjab History Conference. Twenty-fourth Session. Proceedings* (March 1991), pp. 340-342. While there were a number of Sikhs from the new middle class that took part in the anti-Government agitation of 1907, on the whole, their numbers were few; particularly those associated closely with the Chief Khalsa Diwan. The authorities were convinced that the Arya Samaj *not* the Singh Sabha was a ‘political’ body and that the Samaj was at the heart of the turmoil.

¹⁹⁶ *Khalsa Advocate*, November 23, 1907.

¹⁹⁷ *Khalsa Advocate*, September 12, 1908.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

Sikhs took no part whatever in the unrest and improper agitation of 1907” and condemned those who caused the British to suspect Sikh loyalty.²⁰⁰

Certainly, loyalty to the Raj was something the Singh Sabha reformers wished to instil in their youth. Hence, the “dastardly actions of those misguided youths” of Khalsa College who had taken part in the commotion of 1907 were severely censured; moreover, reformers attempted to distance themselves from their actions.²⁰¹ Loyalty to the Raj was central to female education as well; to beget loyal children, mothers first needed to be firmly loyal. Education would lead to children imbued with “patriotic zeal” leading to “honourable member[s] of society.” The uneducated on the other hand were “many weltering sores” who retard “social progress and weaken...national strength.”²⁰² And British authorities kept a watchful eye on the development of education, particularly among females in the province.²⁰³ For the most part, they were well satisfied with the growing movement among the Sikhs, particularly the direction taken by the Ferozepur School. Officials heartily supported the primarily religious and domestic, non-political training given to the girls.²⁰⁴ As for the Arya Samaj advances in female education, officials were not nearly as appreciative.²⁰⁵ Certainly, Arya leadership in the 1907 disturbances did little to

¹⁹⁹ *Khalsa Advocate*, April 4, 1908.

²⁰⁰ *Khalsa Advocate*, January 27, 1911.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Khalsa Advocate*, May 2, 1908.

The victory of Japan over Russia constituted an oft-repeated example of how the upliftment of womanhood could lead to astounding results. Japan’s educational methods were fastidiously reported, particularly with regard to female education. See *ibid.*

²⁰³ Lieutenant-Governor Louis Dane, in an address to the Ferozepur school noted that education was the key to the Jat population and their loyalty to the Crown. *Khalsa Advocate*, January 27, 1911.

²⁰⁴ See Sohan Singh, *Truth and Bare Truth about the Sikh Kanya Maha Vidyala*, pp. 4-5.

²⁰⁵ Annie Besant, observing the various efforts in Punjab with regard to female education noted that “I know only of one body which is energetic in this field and that is the Arya Samaj.” Annie Besant, *For India’s Uplift* Madras, G.A. Natesan, 1917, p. 220.

further British support in this regard.²⁰⁶ One official remarked that if "the government is not quick, it will find the women of India educated by the Arya Samajists. Our position in the country will be almost hopeless if the women are trained up in hostility to us."²⁰⁷

Although Government policy attempted to promote unmitigated support for female education in light of their 'civilizing mission', British designs were not entirely manifest. In reality what was pivotal for British officials was not education of women per se, but a particular type of education that was to produce a specific type of woman. The Arya Samaj was viewed as a highly threatening body in terms of its strained loyalty to the British regime. As such it became a political threat. Its female educational endeavours also came to be perceived as anti-British and thus easily maligned by the Government.

In contrast, the Sikhs had a great deal to lose in opposing the Government. The middle class in particular, given its distinct minority status and the anti-urban tone of a number of Government decisions, did not wish to lose the Sikhs' traditional favoured position with the British.²⁰⁸ Protection of Sikh communal interest lay not through

²⁰⁶ As noted earlier, the Swadeshi movement became an important element of the turmoil of 1907. According to Meredith Borthwick, the Swadeshi movement in particular acted as a major catalyst in the awareness of women in Bengal. Courage, heroism, physical fitness came to be accepted as 'female virtues' if they served a political, nationalistic purpose. See Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal*, pp. 347-348.

²⁰⁷ Martin Gilbert, *Servant of India, 1905-1910* London, 1966, p. 97, cited in Shiv Kumar Gupta, "Arya Samaj: A Potent Factor in the National Movement for Raising Womanhood," *Punjab History Conference. Twenty-fourth Session. Proceedings* (March 1991), p. 280.

²⁰⁸ By 1911 cracks appeared in the unmitigated support of the British for the Sikhs. D. Petrie, the Assistant Director of Criminal Intelligence for the British Government compiled a secret C.I.D. Memorandum on developments in the Sikh political arena. His conclusions were ultimately damning of the Sikhs and issued as a forewarning to the Government. The Sikhs and most particularly what he termed the 'neo-Sikh' party, namely the Tat Khalsa reformers because of their preferential treatment under the Raj were suffering from "wind in the head." Petrie warned that while ostensibly a movement solely devoted to religious reform, "the cloven hoof of politics has too frequently been shown" among the reformers. Under favourable conditions the Sikh reform movement could easily identify and even merge with the overtly politically Arya Samaj movement, the differences between the two being "at best superficial and artificial." C.R. Cleveland the Director of Criminal Intelligence, while acknowledging the contributions of his assistant also played down Petrie's apprehensions of the Sikhs. Without doubt, it was of immense importance that the picture of Sikh loyalty hitherto upheld by the British be maintained; to admit otherwise would be to admit to blunder in this regard. See D. Petrie, "Secret C.I.D. Memorandum on Recent

participation in measures of agitation but through closer collaboration with the colonial masters.²⁰⁹ The stance taken by the Tat Khalsa leadership over the events of 1907 however did little to enhance their reputation among the peasantry. In standing fast with the Government throughout the agitation, Singh Sabha leaders effectively turned their backs on very real issues facing the rural populace and on the populace itself. They thus jettisoned the opportunity to induce the peasantry to accept Tat Khalsa reforms.²¹⁰ The reform initiatives of the Sikhs continued to stay, for the most part within the bounds of the urban population;²¹¹ the peasantry had little use for an abstract ideology that that could not translate into practical measures during times of adversity. By the early 1900's, Singh Sabha activities and ideology were already being characterized by the peasantry as 'Singh Safa', 'safa' being a pointed reference to the rampant destruction caused by the plague epidemic of 1902.²¹² While the strongholds of the Arya Samaj remained in the cities as well, the influence of Dayananda's creed did move beyond these centres. This was the case particularly in the Canal Colonies after the

Developments in Sikh Politics, 1911," reproduced in *Punjab Past and Present* Vol. IV, 1920, pp. 343, 325, 319 and 'Introduction' by C.R. Cleveland, p. 301.

The notion of Sikhs and Hindus consolidating forces was not only a possibility in the minds of the British; Baba Gurbakhsh Singh, the predecessor to Baba Khem Singh Bedi when elected to preside at the Punjab Hindu Conference of 1910 also advocated a unification of the two bodies. True reform in Punjab could only be possible if energies were not squandered by ongoing disputes between Hindus and Sikhs. *Khalsa Advocate*, November 4, 1910.

²⁰⁹ *Khalsa Advocate*, January 27, 1911.

²¹⁰ When Bhai Thakur Singh of the Sikh Ferozepur institution was queried about the reforms having taken place due to female education, he noted that reforms regarding child marriages for instance, were confined to educated families. By and large the urban populace reflected the measures of reform upheld by the Tat Khalsa. See Caveeshar, "The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala," Ganda Singh, ed., *The Singh Sabha and other Socio-Religious Reform Movements*, p. 120.

²¹¹ There were a great number of negative assumptions of the rural Sikh elements on the part of the urban elite. Bhai Thakur Singh purported that the girls "from the rural districts are rather dull of understanding...after some time when their rustic scales fall off, they too become acute and clever." See Sardul Singh Caveeshar, "The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala Ferozepore," Ganda Singh, ed., *The Singh Sabha and other Socio-Religious Reform Movements*, p. 117.

²¹² See Harbans Singh, "Origins of the Singh Sabha," Harbans Singh, N. Gerald Barrier, eds., *Punjab Past and Present. Essays in Honour of Dr. Ganda Singh* Patiala: Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, 1996, p. 281.

events of 1907. Given Sikh predominance in the area, Singh Sabha reformers cried foul, warning their "guileless brethren" to be wary of "the net which...is being woven for them."²¹³ Ultimately, Tat Khalsa failure to make common cause with their rural co-religionists only paved the way for the educational and ideological advance of the Arya Samaj. In this case, Sikh colonists chose to send their offspring to a new Arya school inaugurated in the Chenab Colony as opposed to the Lyallpur school of the Singh Sabha.²¹⁴

In line with Sikh reformers' vested interests, loyalty to the Crown had become the novel measure of true faithfulness to Sikh ideals.²¹⁵ Similar to British Evangelical ideals combining patriotism, hyper-masculinity and godliness, Sikh reformers' carefully formulated expressions of loyalty were closely intertwined with highly specific allocations of 'true' manliness and femininity, communal progress couched in the language of 'patriotism' and a novel construction of 'pure' Sikhism.²¹⁶ It was through the training of young Sikhs, both males and females who were taking part in the Tat Khalsa educational initiatives that these reformers spared little effort to devise ways and means to formulate these ideals. Given the heightened communal awareness already distancing the various

²¹³ *Khalsa Advocate*, April 4, 1908.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Similar to The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) inaugurated in England in 1844, a group of Sikh students initiated The Sikh Young Men's Association modeled after the YMCA Chapter in Lahore. Comparable to the YMCA movement's objectives, the Sikh Young Men's Association not only wished to promote a new understanding of true, educated 'masculinity' but also to encourage patriotic zeal amongst its members.

For additional information on the birth and subsequent growth of a number of groups for boys and young men in Britain in the nineteenth century, see John Springhall, "Building character in the British boy: the attempt to extend Christian manliness to working-class adolescents, 1880-1914," J.A. Mangan, James Walvin, eds., *Manliness and Morality. Middle-class masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987, pp. 53-54.

For more information on the Sikh Young Men's Association, see Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, pp. 412-413.

reform groups from one another, Singh Sabha leaders sought additional, concrete measures by which Sikhs were to be distinguishable from the wider Hindu populace. A thorough rejection in some cases, or an ingenious restructuring of popular customs and religious rites was essential to reform efforts. A newly forged historical and theological framework gave credence to the reformers' claims of radical distinction between the Hindu and Sikh community.

The Arya Samaj also had its own men's association known as the Young Men's Arya Association. See J.N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* London: The MacMillan Co., 1924, pp. 120-129.

Chapter Six:

Redefining the Ritual Drama: The Feminization of Tradition

Alongside Singh Sabha educational objectives came an equally important and perhaps even more far-reaching goal. As noted, Sikh identity formation was central through Singh Sabha educational schemes; this construction came to be furthered by a displacement and re-organisational process of tradition, particularly women's traditions in the form of rituals, identity markers, and rites pertaining to notions of sacred space and time. In particular, colossal efforts were made to define that which was 'Sikh' and that which constituted 'un-Sikh' tradition. At times this included the actual *production* of novel Sikh identity markers and rituals. One important example of this process was the passing of the Anand Marriage Act of 1909, itself standing as a *rite de passage* of Sikhism in the early twentieth century.¹ For the Anand Marriage Act came to represent Sikhism's distinction from the wider Hindu culture more than any other single event during the reform endeavour of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This chapter focuses the lens of ritual transformation during the Singh Sabha period on gender politics. As opposed to a concise detailing of the rituals in question, this study will analyse the gender politics that came to reign supreme in the larger

¹ Both the Nirankari and Namdhari sects with important variations originally practiced Anand Karaj or the Anand marriage ceremony. The Namdharis continued the traditional Vedic custom of burning a fire during the marriage ceremony as well as including readings from the Sikh sacred scriptures. Nirankaris however, replaced the sacred fire with the Guru Granth Sahib. See K.S. Talwar, "The Anand Marriage Act," *Punjab Past and Present* Vol. II, (October 1968), pp. 402-403.

Anand Karaj came to be adopted by the Singh Sabha reformers and upheld as the only true marriage ceremony to be utilized by the Sikhs. Instead of circumscribing the sacred fire, central to the Hindu marriage rites, the couple was instead to circle around Sikh sacred scripture. Similar to Hindu marriage ceremonies, this was known as the *lavan* ritual. As the rite stands today, with each round of the Guru Granth Sahib the ragi or scriptural reader sings a verse of Guru Ram Das' Suhi Chhant 2. Finally, six stanzas of the *Anand Sahib*, 'Song of Joy' composed by Guru Ram Das are sung, and the ceremony comes to an end with the distribution of *karah prasad*, the sacramental confection of the Sikhs. See W.H. McLeod, 'Anand Karaj', *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism* Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements, Series No. 5, London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1995, pp. 35-36.

social, political and discursive structures that were in the process of defining the ritual drama of the Sikhs in colonial Punjab.²

The Anand Marriage Bill: Gender Politics, Rhetoric and Reason:

The Anand Marriage Bill was introduced into the Legislative Council of the Viceroy by Tikka Sahib of Nabha, the appointed Sikh Member of the Imperial Legislative Council on October 5, 1908 and set off a massive uproar within the Sikh community as well as outside of the Sikh community proper.³ Earlier, Tikka Sahib had composed a letter along with a draft bill outlining the reasons for the necessity of the Bill that was forwarded to the Home Department. It in turn sent it to the Government of Punjab for its opinion on the subject. The provincial Government was clearly not interested in furthering the cause of the Honourable Tikka Sahib, questioning his motives and maintaining that "in the absence of any established necessity for legislation, the Lieutenant Governor, would be adverse to the adoption of any such action."⁴

² Paul Radin utilizes the phrase 'ritual drama' to delineate the performance of ritual in terms of individual admission to spheres of restricted membership. Paul Radin, *Primitive Religion. Its Nature and Origin* New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1957, p. 289.

³ The marriage rite takes its name from 'Anand' or 'Song of Joy' composed by Guru Amar Das at the birth of his grandson. See Max Arthur Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion, Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors* Vol. II, Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1993, p. 117, first published in 1909. In its statement of 'objects and reasons', the bill read: "The object of the Bill is to lay at rest doubts which may be raised as to the validity of the marriage rite of the Sikhs called 'Anand'. This form of marriage has long been practised among the Sikhs but there are good reasons to believe that in the absence of a validating enactment doubts may be thrown upon it, and Sikhs may have to face great difficulties in the future, and incur heavy expenses on suits instituted in the Civil Courts. It is also apprehended that in the absence of such a law, some judicial officers may be uncertain as to the validity of this orthodox Sikh custom. It is desirable, therefore, that all doubt should be set at rest for the future, by passing this enactment, which merely validates an existing rite and involves no new principles." Reproduced in *Khalsa Advocate*, November 7, 1908. For the full text of the original wording of the Anand Marriage Bill, see *ibid*.

⁴ Demi-official, E.D. Maclagan, Chief Secretary to the Government of Punjab, to G.B.H. Fell, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 10 April 1908, cited in K.S. Talwar, "The Anand Marriage Act," *Punjab Past and Present*, p. 405.

The question was subsequently brought up again under Sir Louis Dane, the succeeding Lieutenant Governor who took a somewhat different view of the proposed legislation from that put forward by his predecessor.⁵ The reasons given by Sir Louis Dane pertained especially to reports of Arya Samaj attempts to challenge the validity of Sikh marriages in law courts. According to the reports of the day: "These very people have not hesitated to call the issues of Sikhs who have united themselves in wed-lock in accordance with the ceremony of Anand, bastards and thus barred from inheriting the property of their progenitors."⁶ Couched in the polarized and increasingly vehement communal politics of the day, as well as highly publicized calls alarming the public with regard to costly litigation possibilities if the Bill was not passed, proponents initially found ready support for the Anand Marriage Bill among the populace. The acclamation however quickly dissipated as the actual wording of the Bill came to be analyzed by the Select Committee of the Council and as the varied and vested interests of different parties came to the fore. Those of the wider Hindu community in particular who were against the Bill argued that "[t]he Sikhs and Hindus are so mixed up in family and in social relations that the attempt of those who wanted to make out two communities has miserably failed."⁷ Most particularly, opponents reacted to claims of the rite's antiquity that

⁵ Demi-official, E.D. Maclagan, Chief Secretary to the Government of Punjab to G.B.H. Fell, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 31 July, 1908, cited in *ibid.*, pp. 405-406.

⁶ *Khalsa Advocate*, November 7, 1908.

Choudhri Ram Bhaj Dutt is the individual singled out as responsible for labeling Sikhs who had solemnized their marriages as *haramzadas* [illegitimate progeny] because the form lacked legislative recognition. See *Khalsa Advocate*, October 16, 1909.

The controversy surrounding Anand marriages did not originate in 1908 and 1909. In 1899 the *Arya Gazette* queried its readership: "Is it not time for the believers in the Vedic Faith to consider whether such marriages should be regarded lawful by the society, as also whether we should be present at marriages at which instead of the Divine knowledge poetry of human composition is sung." Cited in *The Khalsa*, September 20, 1899.

⁷ *Panjabee*, n.d., reproduced in *Khalsa Advocate*, June 5, 1909.

The *Panjabee*, (1904-1911) was an organ originating with the more militant sections of the Arya Samaj who believed that *The Tribune*, the 'Bible of the educated Hindus' was failing to keep pace with the changing political mood of Punjabis, particularly with regard to increasing resentment against British

were furthered by proponents of the Bill. Sikh supporters of the Anand ceremony insisted that the marriage tradition dated back to the time of Guru Amar Das.⁸ The custom then “continued to be observed slowly but steadily by the followers of the Gurus. No doubt it did not make much noise in the world but it soon became an established custom among the Sikhs and all true believers in the Gurus would not celebrate marriages in any other form other than this.”⁹ Once again, reformers pointed to the time of Maharajah Ranjit Singh and the ensuing ‘Dogra’ influence to track the demise of this ‘time-honoured’ rite. Proponents also insisted that there was an unbroken line of those celebrating marriages according to Anand. These included the Nirankaris, Namdharis, Bandeis (those following Banda Bahadur) and Bihangams (Nihang Singhs).¹⁰ Supporters also turned to the *Prem Sumarg*, the code of conduct that was increasingly touted as authoritative among the Sikhs, pointing to the term ‘Anand’s’ usage in the sense of marriage in the document.¹¹

The inclusion of the Namdharis as significant representatives of the Sikh community was ridiculed by the *Panjabee* given earlier Singh Sabha attempts to distance themselves from

rulers. The launching of the *Panjabee* gave a new direction to politics in Punjab. See Shyamala Bhatia, *Social Change and Politics in Punjab, 1898-1910* New Delhi: Enkay Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1987, pp. 249-250.

⁸ Max Arthur Macauliffe, the famed historian of the Sikhs who was highly influenced by the Singh Sabha reform endeavour in his rendering of Sikh history was on the one hand cautious about the historical usage of Anand, and on the other unreserved about its utilization. With regard to the actual usage of Anand, Macauliffe notes that it “is now repeated on occasions of marriages and rejoicings, also before large feasts, and at the preparation of sacred food” [italics mine]. On the other hand he towed the Tat Khalsa line with regard to its historicity among the Sikhs, insisting that Guru Gobind Singh presided at the marriage of the daughter of Ajab Singh, by “Sikh marriage rites known as Anand.” See *The Sikh Religion* Volume II, pp. 117, Volume V, pp. 108-109.

⁹ *Khalsa Advocate*, November 7, 1908.

¹⁰ Speech of the Hon. Sirdar Sundar Singh Majithia at the Viceroy’s Legislative Council, reproduced in *Khalsa Advocate*, September 4, 1909.

¹¹ As already noted, the Namdharis in particular utilized the *Prem Sumarg* primarily to support their own vision of reformation of the Sikh tradition, particularly with regard to the changes in the rituals that they introduced. Singh Sabha reformers subsequently claimed the document as an important source of information regarding early nineteenth century Sikh practices. Contemporary historians, S.S. Hans in particular, view the *Prem Sumarg* as a late nineteenth century forgery. See Chapter Four.

Kuka activities. This had included well-publicized denouncements of Namdhari theology and practice.¹² Regarding this avid enfolding of the Namdhari sect, the *Panjabee* further critiqued: "We may go further, that even now they are marked out from the rest of the Hindu and Sikh community by some observances peculiar to them."¹³ Critics of the Anand Marriage Bill charged that instead of having been in practice throughout Sikh history, the ceremony had *originated* with these fringe groups and was being borrowed from them by the Tat Khalsa. According to these voices of opposition there was simply no evidence of the Sikh Gurus as having initiated or followed the Anand marriage order, given the lack of references to Anand marriage in classical Sikh texts.¹⁴

The fact that the Anand Bill did not specify the form of the marriage ceremony caused opponents to question the very Bill itself, given the striking similarity of the Namdhari practice to traditional Vedic marriage rites. Still others insisted that a "very large number of Sikhs do not approve of the Bill which is supported only by a few individuals of the new School. The orthodox Sikhs not only do not look upon it with any favour, but regard it as harmful to their best interests."¹⁵ The *Punjabee* further charged that the Anand ceremony had hitherto been confined to individuals who had less than honourable reasons getting married; legislation thereof would only lead to a proliferation of such unions.¹⁶ Other opponents of the Bill, well aware of the benefits of couching their arguments in the ever volatile question of inheritance warned: "[I]f the Bill is introduced in the Council, becomes law, any Chief, Sirdar, Jagirdar or any other Sikh may marry a foreign or a Muhammadan girl...and the offspring born of such

¹² See Chapter Four.

¹³ *Panjabee*, n.d., replicated in *Khalsa Advocate*, June 5, 1909.

¹⁴ See W.H. McLeod, *Sikhism* London: Penguin Books, 1997, p. 78.

¹⁵ *The Tribune*, September 16, 1909, cited in *Khalsa Advocate*, October 2, 1909.

¹⁶ *Panjabee*, n.d., cited in *Khalsa Advocate*, April 3, 1909.

unions will be considered legitimate. The States, Jagirs, and the landed property of the Sikhs, will, by influx of time, pass into the hands of those who will not naturally remain Sikhs.”¹⁷

For, they continued,

[t]he undefined term ‘Sikh’ however, enables them to call themselves Sikhs. They go through the so-called Anand ceremony to which the Bill gives legal sanction. This ceremony does not lay down that the couple will have to make a declaration that they belong to no other faith or that they believe in certain well-known dogmas peculiar to the Sikhs. The Bill will, therefore, encourage people to achieve their object by unfair means without making them the units of a social organism to which the Sikh belong.¹⁸

To this observation the avid proponent of the Anand Marriage Bill, Bhai Lakshman Singh insisted that only *with* the passing of the Bill, which would sanction unions between Sikhs alone a new state of affairs would come into being. “The woman, being duly baptized, will feel a natural interest in the safeguarding of the state of property. Lewdness and debauch will receive a check...In a word, the new Sikh law will have made it impossible for a Sikh young man to take a non-Sikh woman to wife.”¹⁹

Opponents of the Bill repeatedly pointed to the inappropriate motives of Tikka Ripudaman Singh of the Princely Nabha family as having been “actuated, in presenting the Bill to the Viceroy’s Council, by a desire on his part or that of his brother Sikh Princes and

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Khalsa Advocate*, October 9, 1909.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The Bill however, made no stipulation of baptism for what constituted a ‘Sikh’; the clause “any marriage between persons not professing the Sikh religion will not be legal” was considered sufficient for the purposes of the Bill. The practice thus continued that the Anand ceremony came to be utilized by a number of different groups for different reasons, including Arya Samaj members of inter-caste marriages. Reformers in this case insisted that upholding the tenets of the Arya Samaj was no bar to being a Sikh. See *Khalsa Advocate*, July 12, 1913.

In another controversial case the Anand rites were utilized to solemnize the union of a schoolteacher and his young student. See *Khalsa Advocate*, September 20, 1913.

For other cases of what were called ‘irregular marriages’ see *Khalsa Advocate*, October 2, 1909, June 28, 1913.

notables to contract 'honourable alliances with European and Eurasian girls'.²⁰ Taken aback by these charges of 'un-patriotic motives', Tat Khalsa members distanced themselves from the Honourable Member, criticizing him for not consulting with representative Singh Sabha leaders before bringing the Bill to the Legislature.²¹ The public was duly notified that the Bill itself only came to the notice of Singh Sabha leaders *after* its introduction to the Council.²² Still, Lakshman Singh in particular maintained that "even supposing the insinuation to be a correct one I can say that the majority of the Singh Sabhas have accepted the Bill in good faith."²³

Most significantly, those who supported the general jist of the Bill nonetheless argued about the actual naming of the Bill, calling for changes from the 'Anand Marriage Bill' to 'Sikh Marriage Bill'. This led to a proliferation of attempts to classify what constituted 'a Sikh'. Some very vocal proponents insisted that the term 'Sikh' be defined as one who followed the baptismal injunctions of Guru Gobind Singh, namely, *kesdhari* Sikhs. For

by widening the connotation of the word Sikh we would be throwing the gates wide open to so many weaklings who dare not take Amrit. It is much better that we should be few but Sikhs through and through than many drifting straws. Social purity in every respect is the bedrock on which the communal fabric may be permanently built. No one should in my opinion, be allowed to

²⁰ K.A., October 2, 1909.

Early support for the Anand Marriage Bill also focused on this specific reason for the introduction of the Bill. One contributor noted that "it is preposterous that the punishment of an enlightened native chief for obeying the dictates of his heart should be a red stain of bastardy on his progeny. It is hoped, therefore, that the Tikka Sahib of Nabha will receive the support of all the Phulkian." Earlier the same writer noted that the late Maharajah of Patiala wedded a foreigner named Florence Bryan. Further, the Maharajah of Jind married a Eurasian woman and the Maharajah of Kapurthala a Spanish dancer. "Both these Chiefs are very much in love with their foreign wives and are naturally anxious that no suggestion of the bar sinister should smirch the escutcheons of their children..." *Khalsa Advocate*, November 28, 1908. According to the Rajput Princess Brinda who had married the Tikka Raja of the Kapurthala dynasty, the five other wives of the Raja of Kapurthala, all of high castes, were highly incensed with the marriage of the Raja to the Spanish dancer. See Brinda, *Maharani. The Story of an Indian Princess* (As told to Elaine Williams) New York: Henry Hold and Company, 1954, p. 112.

²¹ *Khalsa Advocate*, October 16, 1909.

²² *Khalsa Advocate*, October 23, 1909.

²³ *Khalsa Advocate*, October 16, 1909.

marry in Sikh form unless by accepting Amrit he outwardly manifest by his intention of abiding by the rules of the community whose form he has adopted on the most solemn occasion.²⁴

This caused an outcry from the Sikh orthodoxy. Bhai Avtar Singh, long associated with the late Sir Khem Singh Bedi argued against changing it to 'Sikh' marriage, because of its utilization "by a very small minority in the Sikh community."²⁵ The question of identity increasingly came to be central to the very question of the Bill, for according to one contributor: "[T]here is a large section of Sikhs called *Sahjdhari* Sikhs who are quite indistinguishable in their appearance from, and yet are a very important section of Sikhs quite distinct in their religious beliefs and practices from, the Hindus, whether Arya Samaj or Sanatanists, Vaishnavites or others."²⁶ Rifts began to make themselves known within the Singh Sabha community as well. The Khalsa Diwan, Lahore as the "oldest registered Sikh Association and the founder of Khalsa College" began to call for the Bill to be *dropped* in its entirety. The Diwan insisted that the Bill "does not yet meet the actual requirements of the case and will always be found a source of unnecessary and sometimes ruinous litigation." It pointed to the "great irritation among different sections of the Sikh community" as indicative of the ineffectualness of the Bill. Further, the Lahore faction insisted that

it is not apparent that the Bill has been introduced by the so-called Reform party among the Sikhs; for there is no clause providing against the pernicious practices of infant marriage and polygamy among the Sikhs. But alas, our reformers have no desire for mitigating those evils which are sucking into the very vitals of the community.²⁷

Calls from outside the Sikh community concurred with these concerns, calling for amendments to the Bill in the spirit of reform. The *Pioneer* charged that "[h]ere is an opportunity for the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Bhai Avtar Singh was Sir Khem Singh Bedi's secretary. See *Khalsa Advocate*, Feb. 6, 1909.

²⁶ *Khalsa Advocate*, September 25, 1909.

Sikh leaders to put their heads together and to have the Anand Marriages Bill so broadened and modified that it may give equal rights to women and raise her to that position which she occupies in all the civilized nations of the world, and thus establish social equality among themselves which is a keynote of Sikhism.” It continued to champion for clauses insisting on monogamy, legalization of customary divorce, consent of the parties and registration of marriages. This would “prevent useless litigation which often leads to murders and injuries.”²⁸

To these charges as well as criticism of the Bill becoming instead of a “Marriage Bill” a “Muddle Bill,” Bhai Lakshman Singh ingeniously turned the argument upon its head:

I repeat, it is too much to expect that the Anand Marriage Act will serve the purpose of a Sikh marriage Act even if so named... A *Sikh Marriage Act* ought to be of such a nature as to be worthy of the intelligence and good name and fame of a community which has had such noble and high minded leaders as our great Gurus and whose Scriptures are full of lofty ideals. It ought to provide for a) Inter-marriage b) Monogamy c) Remarriage of widows and d) Divorce in certain well-defined cases. It ought also to guard against early marriage and late marriage. It may be even necessary to include therein some rules on inheritance... If the effort of the Sikh reformers in this direction fail and the Bill becomes law in its present shape, I do not think it will deserve to be called a ‘Muddle Bill’. As I have said elsewhere in this letter it will be a decided gain to our cause and will be a step in advance.²⁹

The Khalsa Diwan, Lahore in turn was vehemently ridiculed and characterized as “the Sikh god in Lahore” and a “mere bubble.”³⁰ Certainly the rift among the Singh Sabha caused extraordinary alliances. The ‘true’ members of the Singh Sabha were embracing the objectives

²⁷ *Khalsa Advocate*, October 16, 1909.

²⁸ *Pioneer*, February 6, 1909, reproduced in *Khalsa Advocate*, February 13, 1909.

The *Panjabee* concurred and added that it is “your duty to say that your community is prepared to take one step at least forward in advancement of social reform which may tend to secure the rights of the weaker sex... Then indeed this legislation will be worthy of your professions and worthy of the mighty Sarkar whose aid you are seeking.” The *Panjabee*, October 16, 1909, cited in *Khalsa Advocate*, October 23, 1909.

²⁹ *Khalsa Advocate*, October 23, 1909.

³⁰ *Khalsa Advocate*, October 30, 1909.

of those who had only a short while earlier experienced their wrath, namely, the Amritsar Singh Sabha with its earlier association with the ruling classes and religious orthodoxy.³¹

After a full year of deliberation and minute changes made by the Select Committee in charge of the Bill, Sirdar Sunder Singh Majithia moved that the Bill be made law.³² In his speech to the Imperial Legislative Council, the Honourable Sardar Majithia pointed out:

I am sure Your Excellency and my Hon'ble Colleagues will agree that a proselytising religion like that of the Sikhs which draws converts from all castes and creeds cannot be ruled for ever by the Shastric Laws... The explanation of the sacred and solemn import of marriage and of the duties of married life and the personal and spiritually solemn contract between the parties made in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib ji which generally forms part of the Anand ceremony of marriage raises it far above the level of other ceremonies which have degenerated into empty rituals and unmeaning recitations so far as the persons principally affected are concerned. The reduction of the marriage expenses and the simplification of the whole ceremony is a moral gain which I venture to say is no small value.³³

He also addressed the concerns of another member of the Select Committee, the Honourable Justice Shankara Nair of the Madras High Court, who objected again to the exclusion of clauses relating to the protection of females - those pertaining to age limit, the prohibition of polygamy, divorce proceedings and marriage registration. To these objections Sardar Majithia noted:

³¹ Both representatives of the Viceroy's Legislative Council had close affiliations with the once powerful Amritsar Singh Sabha, which had come under vitriolic fire from the 'Tat Khalsa' of Lahore. Lakshman Singh responds to the historic tensions between the two groups and notes: "I am glad time should have shown how mistaken I was in my estimate of the Hon'ble Sirdar Sunder Singh Majithia and his following whose strength it was my aim to break." See *Khalsa Advocate*, October 16, 1909.

³² Changes to the wording of the Bill included an alternation in Clause 5 of the Bill which read: "Nothing in this Act shall be deemed to validate any marriage between persons who are related to each other in any degree of consanguinity or affinity which would, according to the personal law of the Sikhs render a marriage between them illegal." The term 'personal law' was instead changed to 'customary law' given the precedent set by the well known Majithia Will case, where the Privy Council decided that 'Sikh personal law' referred to Hindu law. See the proceedings: "Anand Marriage Bill" *Khalsa Advocate*, October 30, 1909.

³³ Ibid.

The opinion... is worthy of all respect and is probably shared by a large number of enlightened members of the Sikh community. But social reform among the Sikhs is not confined to an educated few; it affects the entire mass of the Sikh population and as long as there is not a general desire on the part of the whole Sikh community for such social legislation as is indicated by the Hon'ble Justice Nair it will not be right for us to ask for social legislation of the kind. Reforms like these are certainly dear to our heart but these ought to be carried for a sufficient length of time before their recognition can be sought for at the hands of the Government. It would not do to force reforms which may be considered as mere innovations by those for whose benefit they may have been intended. Let us hope that with the expansion of female education amongst the Sikhs the desire for a higher kind of marriage law will grow and express itself and the present Act may serve as a frame work for building up a marriage law worthy of a god-fearing and progressive community like that of the Sikhs.³⁴

To objections with regard to the actual rendering of the marriage rite, Sir Herbert Risley, also of the Select Committee insisted that Sikh, as well as Hindu marriages were far too "fluid and variable" to define precisely and moved that the Bill be accepted without a precise delineation of the ceremony.³⁵ Sir Louis Dane, Lieutenant Governor of Punjab then gave his final pronouncements. Well aware of the dissenting voices within the Sikh community, Louis Dane noted:

[The] experience gained in the controversy which has arisen over the measure shows how careful we must be not to take public utterances of a reforming party as opinions of the whole of the community.... At the same time, I must admit that my sympathies are largely with the promoters of the Bill, for the reason that it marks an important step in social reform and that it may bring about a possible, nay a probable decrease in marriage expenditure which is one of the main causes of the indebtedness in this province. I join Sardar Sundar Singh in regretting that it was not possible in this measure to raise the age of marriage under the Anand ceremony, and to provide a system of marriage registration.... In conclusion... the Tikka Sahib's Bill, with such minor amendments as have been suggested above, has behind it the popular support of the vast majority of the Sikh community, that it in no way infringes the civil, social or religious rights of the minority who are opposed to it, that it affords the basis for a valuable social reform in the direction of the reduction of marriage expenses... and may prevent very costly and widespread litigation...³⁶

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

The Bill was passed.

These statements have been quoted at length because they provide valuable insight into the forces at work behind the passing of the Bill into law. The discourse is of pivotal importance in the discussion of the 'women's question', an issue loudly proclaimed by the British Government as central to their reform initiatives. For the Bill was indeed a propitious opportunity to address precisely those forces that sustained the precarious position of women in Sikh society. Moreover, in light of continued opposition to the Bill, aside from criticism directed at the ineffectiveness of the Bill with regard to the 'women's question', it is important to examine circumstances surrounding the Anand Marriage Act. Why did the Government pass a Bill that so clearly caused a great deal of consternation both to large numbers of Sikhs and to Hindus? Indeed, an understanding of the passing of the Anand Marriage Bill into Act necessitates its contextualization within the wider framework of Punjab politics, both communal and administrative. Events that had transpired a year before the introduction of the Bill in 1908, namely the rumblings of discontent among the rural Jat population played no small part in this judicial decision. As already noted, blame for the previous altercations between the rural populace and government was placed squarely at the feet of the Arya Samaj. British apprehension towards the Samaj coloured any response to activities taken by the body, including its sustained attack of the Anand Marriage Bill. Thus, while forwarding sound reasons for amendments to the Bill on the one hand, or to calls for the outright dropping of the Bill on the other, the Government paid scant attention to any suggestions that even resembled those of the Arya Samaj. Ultimately, the acrimonious remarks ostensibly made by a member of the Samaj hailing the progeny of Anand unions as *haramzadas* [illegitimate] brought about

the initial, positive change in the Punjab Government's stance toward Tikka Sahib's Bill. Further, well aware of the inroads made by the Arya Samaj, "the militant Hindu sect" against which the Singh Sabha movement was reacting, but also upon which, according to British reports, the Sikh reform movement was modelled was indeed cause for worry. The similarities between the two groups were well known to authorities, aside from abstention from tobacco and the wearing of the five K's by the Tat Khalsa reformers. These were viewed as "at best superficial and artificial differences."³⁷ According to the special report submitted by D. Petrie, the Assistant Director of Criminal Intelligence who reported on the activities of the Tat Khalsa, a "union between the two is by no means unthinkable."³⁸ Certainly the British had little desire for the military prowess of the Sikhs and the remonstrative, political acumen of the Aryas to mobilize and thus be pitted against the Government. It was thus of primary importance to ensure that the Tat Khalsa Sikhs remained autonomous from the Samaj. The passing of the Anand Marriage Bill, despite legitimate claims and objections toward it by the Arya Samaj was a advantageous measure taken to safeguard both British and Sikh interests through the deepening of the communal rivalry between the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha movement.

Secondly, for the British a 'purified' Sikh identity was pivotal in checking the absorption of Sikhism into the wider Hindu fold. As noted earlier, the need to foster this Sikh identity began initially through the regulations put forth in the Indian Army,³⁹ each recruit and soldier was required to be baptised according to the prescriptions of Guru Gobind Singh. Accordingly, "Sikhs in the Indian Army have been studiously 'nationalised' or encouraged to

³⁷ D. Petrie, "Secret C.I.D. Memorandum on Recent Developments in Sikh Politics, 1911," *Punjab Past and Present*, Vol. IV-II (Oct. 1970), pp. 307, 319.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

regard themselves as a totally distinct and separate nation; their national pride has been fostered by every available means..."⁴⁰ For British authorities a relapse into Hinduism and "re-adoption of its superstitious and vicious social customs" could lead only to the loss of Sikh martial instincts and his ability as a fighting machine.⁴¹ According to Max Arthur Macauliffe the process of 'hinduization' had another, even more ominous result: Upon meeting with several young Sikhs of the Guru lineage who insisted on making no distinction between themselves and Hindus, Macauliffe noted that the loyalty toward the British, so clearly associated with 'true' Sikhs had all but disappeared. They were "ignorant of the Sikh religion, and of its prophecies in favour of the English, and contract exclusive social customs and prejudices to the extent of calling us Malechhas, or persons of impure desires, and inspiring disgust for the customs and habits of Christians."⁴² The "magical effect" of baptism in the making of a 'purified' Sikh identity and consequently, the effectiveness in producing the Sikh military machine as well as inculcating loyalty to the Crown, was widely accepted by the authorities.⁴³ Without doubt, the Tat Khalsa movement's objectives were closely aligned with those of the British in attempting to crystallize a distinct identity for the Sikhs. Petrie noted that "in so far as the movement [Singh Sabha] tends to consolidate the Sikh nation and to enable it to present a solid front to external aggression, it must command the most unqualified approval, for it has already been shown that Government cannot view with indifference the disappearance of the Sikhs as a distinct national identity."⁴⁴

³⁹ See Chapter 3.

⁴⁰ D. Petrie, "Secret C.I.D. Memorandum," *Punjab Past and Present*, p. 309.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Max Arthur Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. I, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

Petrie's report on the Tat Khalsa relied heavily on Macauliffe's just published volumes.

⁴³ D. Petrie, "Secret C.I.D. Memorandum," *Punjab Past and Present*, pp. 308, 342.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 321.

For the Tat Khalsa mindset, insinuations of impropriety regarding the very rationale for the Bill as introduced by Tikka Sahib of Nabha, nor the threat of increasing rifts in the Sikh community could outweigh their pivotal concerns regarding the legislation of Sikh identity as distinct from the wider Hindu community. The highly publicized Majithia Will case that had finally come to an end only a short while earlier after numerous years in the courts had proved to be a massive blow to the efforts of the reformers to distinguish Sikhs from the wider Hindu community. Dyal Singh Majithia's wife, Bhagwan Kaur and his closest agnatic relative, Gajinder Singh had in a lengthy court case challenged Dyal Singh's will, claiming that since Dyal Singh Majithia was not a Hindu, Hindu inheritance laws could not apply to him as a Sikh. The Privy Council ultimately disagreed, insisting that although Majithia was a Sikh, Hindu law in essence covered the Sikhs.⁴⁵ The Anand Marriage Bill in the ensuing rhetoric came repeatedly to be pitted against the Majithia case and became for the reformers, a legislative battle to be won at all cost.⁴⁶ For it proved, beyond the grand orations of the Tat Khalsa reformers and beyond the claims of those who opposed the sanctioning of this distinction, that Sikhs were *not* Hindus and that Hindu laws did *not* apply to Sikhs, particularly with a rite as central as that of marriage. The courts finally recognized the Sikhs through the passing of the Anand Marriage Bill as having a legitimate and distinct identity. And with the increasing consolidation of Sikh identity came added political clout. For the direct proportion of representation and power to numerical strength had become a central concern for Tat Khalsa reformers. They were aided in their endeavours to augment their numbers by the British Government whose census officials were instructed to further the Sikh nation by demarcating

⁴⁵ See Madan Gopal, "Legacy of Dyal Singh Majithia," *Punjab Past and Present* Vol. XXVI-I (April 1992), pp. 156-183).

⁴⁶ *Khalsa Advocate*, October 9, 1909.

individuals who claimed to be *both* a Sikh and a Hindu, as a Sikh.⁴⁷ The Anand Marriage Bill although in many ways widening the rifts in the Sikh community, did manage as a co-operative effort between the Government and a segment of the Singh Sabha reformers to bring the distinct identity of the Sikh nation to a more substantial level through the legislative process.

As regards the Government, a third pivotal reason for passing the controversial Bill was in the maintenance of political stability among the powerful Sikh elite. Objections to the passing of the Anand Marriage Act were thus minimized as the Court followed the bidding of the Tat Khalsa, by now newly forged as the 'true' Tat Khalsa. Sir Louis Dane's regret at the actual introduction of the Bill is evident in his closing remarks:

It is perhaps unfortunate that Tikka Ripudaman Singh should have raised the question at all, but as he has done so, and as he is supported by the great body of his co-religionists and *as it would probably cause serious popular discontent if no action is taken in the matter of the Bill*, the Lieutenant Governor considers that it should be passed into law. [italics mine].⁴⁸

Certainly, the fear of the Tat Khalsa mobilizing against the Government was first and foremost in the acquiescence to the demands of the new but powerful elite. As Louis Dane had aptly pointed out, these reformers were highly organized and remarkably effective in their zeal to mobilize public opinion in favour of the Bill: "The word goes forth and petitions, practically identical in substance, pour in from all parts of the world." Those who opposed the Bill, delineated by Dane as "the conservatives" responded at a much more ineffectual pace and

⁴⁷ *Khalsa Advocate*, November 11, 1910.

In an effort to balance admission to centres of higher learning, particularly with regard to the Sikhs, Government regulated access according to communal representation. Sikhs thus had an advantage over other groups in gaining admission to colleges and Medical Schools. *The Akali* noted that in an effort to secure admission, even *patits* [apostates] declared themselves to be Sikhs. *The Akali*, July 28, 1920, cited in Amarjit Kaur, "The Nascent Sikh Politics: 1919-1921," Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, Department of History, 1992, p. 267.

See also Kenneth W. Jones, "Religious Identity and the Indian Census," N. Gerald Barrier, ed., *The Census in British India. New Perspectives* Delhi: Manohar, 1981, pp. 73-102.

manner.⁴⁹ Questions of litigation and decreased marriage costs, though highly lauded both by reformers and the Lieutenant Governor were subsumed, at least for the Government by the larger issue of political stability. For as Louis Dane himself noted, since the "Anand ceremony is not necessarily proceeded by a formal betrothal, it is more difficult to prove such marriage than an ordinary Hindu marriage of orthodox type."⁵⁰ Precisely because these marriages could not be proved, litigation procedures could possibly even *increase* among the Sikhs. And yet, despite the pitfalls inherent in the Bill, its proponents repeatedly pointed to the alleviation of high marriage costs and litigation patterns among the Sikh through the measures introduced by the Bill.⁵¹ The rhetoric surrounding the Bill was based on the notion that the Anand Marriage Act would provide the necessary mechanism to alleviate the problem of indebtedness.⁵² The critical issues ignored by the Act, the actual form of the marriage,⁵³ age limits, polygamy

⁴⁸ *Khalsa Advocate*, October 30, 1909.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ The Anand Marriage Ceremony could be conducted without the services of Brahmins, who were increasingly presented as responsible for escalating marriage costs. Nonetheless, Anand marriages continued to be conducted by Brahmins. See *Khalsa Advocate*, June 21, 1913.

⁵² According to Malcolm Darling writing almost twenty years after the passing of the Anand Marriage Act, wedding costs and general indebtedness had only *increased* among the Sikhs. Weddings had become more costly for the Sikhs since they had become major feasts that continued for days. See Malcolm Lyall Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* London: Oxford University Press, 1928, pp. 245-248. Earlier, Falcon had noted that *bride prices* were responsible for the inordinately high marriage costs among the Jats. "In former days it was considered very disgraceful to sell a daughter and a man would have been excluded from his caste for doing so; now there is not so much delicacy, and it is not uncommon for a man to pay a sum of money in public before witnesses for a girl, taking a bond in return until the marriage comes off, and a family now-a-days will not give a daughter in marriage to another without either money or an exchange by which they get a daughter in marriage to a son of theirs. The Jats mostly take money and the price of a girl is now very high, so that many men have to remain single." R.W. Falcon, *Handbook on Sikhs for the use of Regimental Officers* Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1896, p. 49.

Litigation as well had not subsided with the passing of the Bill, given the still pertinent issue of far fewer females than males particularly among the Sikhs. This led to increased bride prices and concerns with regard to inheritance. Accordingly, "a large number of lawsuits, civil and criminal, practically turn on the question whether the mother or the uncle of a fatherless girl is entitled to the profits of mating her." *Shahpur Gazetteer*, 1917, p. 75, cited in Darling, *The Punjab Peasant*, p. 54.

⁵³ The actual form of the Sikh marriage ceremony received no attention by the legislative process. Parry describes a Sikh marriage conducted by a Sikh Granthi, which however still revolved around the sacred fire pit. See R.E. Parry, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* London: Drane's, 1921, p. 33.

restrictions, divorce regulations and forced marriages, these became relegated by both the British Government and the Tat Khalsa reformers to the side-lines.⁵⁴ For the British Government, the widening of the gulf between the Tat Khalsa and the Arya Samaj, the continued 'purification' of Sikh identity, and fears of political instability through the instigation of the Tat Khalsa subsumed any concerns for the alleviation of detrimental customs affecting Sikh womanhood. For Sikh reformers, at least a small though vocal and highly effective faction within the movement, the women's question was deemed insignificant in light of the larger cause, the recognition of the courts regarding the distinctive, national identity of the Sikhs.

R. Radhakrishnan has aptly interrogated how the politics of nationalism consistently subordinated, if not terminated women's politics in India.

Why does the politics of the 'one' typically overwhelm the politics of the other? Why could the two not be coordinated within an equal and dialogic relationship of mutual accountability? What factors constituted the normative criteria by which a question or issue is deemed 'political'? Why is it that nationalism achieves the ideological effect of an inclusive and putatively macropolitical discourse, whereas the women's question – unable to achieve its own autonomous macropolitical identity – remains ghettoized within its specific and regional space? In other words, by what natural or ideological imperative or historical exigency does the politics of nationalism become the binding and overarching umbrella that subsumes other and different political temporalities?⁵⁵

⁵⁴ According to Falcon among the "better class of Sikh" betrothals often took place "in the year of infancy, and marriage at eight to ten years of age." See R.W. Falcon, *Handbook on the Sikhs*, p. 51. The Census of 1910 indicated that incidence of polygamy was inordinately high among the Sikhs. With regard to early marriages, Hindus had higher rates of marriage of girls less than 15 years of age, but Sikhs followed closely behind in terms of numbers. Sikh reformers however insisted that "by deliberations, the community can be educated in a better way in social reforms than by putting down the social evils through legislative measures." *Khalsa Advocate*, December 12, 1914. Further, forced widow remarriage in order to maintain family land rights were common practice among the Sikhs. See article by Sant Nihal Singh, *The Times of India*, n.d., reproduced in *Khalsa Advocate*, March 24, 1911.

⁵⁵ R. Radhakrishnan, "Nationalism, Gender, and the Narrative of Identity," Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger, eds., *Nationalisms & Sexualities* New York and London: Routledge, 1992, p. 78.

In the case of the Anand Marriage Act, the 'women's question' did not in and of itself further the designs of the Tat Khalsa reformers with regard to their aim for legislative distinctiveness. Reforms pertaining to the status of women were thus adroitly avoided.

The discourse surrounding the Anand Marriage Bill is significant precisely given that Singh Sabha reformers as central to their objectives so loudly proclaimed the amelioration of female status. Needless to say, here was the opportune moment to make significant changes to deeply ingrained social attitudes and practices that had negative consequences for women in Sikh society. But the opportunity was not taken, in spite of repeated calls for amendments to the Bill. For an understanding of the motives spurring on the Singh Sabha reformers, questions pertaining to Sikh womanhood must necessarily be contextualized within the overarching question of national identity - Sikh national identity. As Radhakrishnan notes with regard to wider issues of Indian nationalism, "the women's question...is constrained to take on a nationalist expression as a prerequisite for being considered 'political'."⁵⁶ For the Tat Khalsa reformers, women's politics became an issue only as an added bulwark when larger questions such as Sikh religious identity came to the fore. Apart from Singh Sabha educational initiatives, 'reform' was restricted ultimately to matters pertaining to religious distinctiveness or Sikh nationalism.⁵⁷ The Anand Marriage Act achieved political and judicial recognition of Sikh distinctiveness; that, in and of itself was a sufficient end for the Tat Khalsa

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ As already noted however, Singh Sabha education initiatives ultimately had the intent of producing 'true' Sikh women who would take up their proper place in the home, and conduct their duties in the home in a proper manner befitting an educated woman. According to the Singh Sabha world view, the "softer and weaker sex rules over the stronger...call them ignorant and superstitious, or designate them with whatever bad name you like...[I]f you wish to push on your cherished object you must bring your women to the same level of enlightenment in which you are environed...When her education as required is finished she turns out a competent housewife, efficient teacher of her children and good counselor to her husband, relatives and friends. Her prejudices vanish and the task of social reform is facilitated and easily accomplished." *Khalsa Advocate*, June 30, 1911.

reformers.⁵⁸ Widely publicized calls for alleviating the status and situation of Sikh women thus ultimately remained in the realm of rhetoric. Instead, in an effort to promote Singh Sabha political designs, the amelioration of women in Sikh society became subsumed by outward and judicial distinctiveness between Hindus and Sikhs.⁵⁹ Those indicators of particularity did little to challenge deeply ingrained attitudes toward women; nor did they have a transformative effect on those Sikh customs that were pivotal in circumscribing the status and situation of women in Sikh society, namely, the marriage practices of the Sikhs.

Extending Male Control:

Ultimately, the private realm was to remain as it was, untouched by the foreign ideas that were viewed as encroaching upon Sikh womanhood. Although denouncing purdah as a 'un-Sikh' evil custom, Tikka Sahib of Nabha insisted that there was a difference between purdah and the sacred, private place of womanhood in the home. "That privacy in the home of course, must be kept sacred. No stranger, not even a relative, should be allowed to intrude upon her privacy except by a special sanction of herself and her guardians... The sacred privacy of woman must be maintained."⁶⁰ Tikka Sahib's concern with the sanctify of privacy stemmed from Punjabi joint family systems requiring women to cover themselves in the presence of an elder, a superior, or a stranger. This also included any intercourse between

⁵⁸ According to Bruce Lawrence, the "mindset of the modernist bias", generally perpetuated by indigenous elites in colonized countries and clearly at play during the Anand marriage controversy included notions of "quantity over quality, change over continuity, commercial efficiency over human sympathy..." See Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God. The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age* San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989, pp. 97-98.

⁵⁹ Petrie noted that there "has been a great awakening of inter-communal jealousy and there is no community that is not fired with the idea of consolidating and improving itself to the utmost of power." Petrie, "Secret C.I.D. Memorandum," *Punjab Past and Present*, p. 320.

a daughter-in-law and a father-in-law and, in some cases between a wife and her husband's elder brother. Darling noted however that the rigorousness of the custom was slowly loosening its hold on the Punjabi populace.⁶¹ This translated, for the reform agenda into no small measure of alarm. The apparent loosening of the customs that demarcated 'women's space' from that of the wider society as well as newly appropriated notions of the 'gentle helpmate' came increasingly to be rendered by what has been delineated as the "new patriarchy" into tighter *control* of women and their activities.⁶² These *restrictions* instead

⁶⁰ Tikka Sahib of Nabha, reported in *Khalsa Advocate*, June 30, 1911.

⁶¹ Darling related the following anecdote with regard to the customary confines between members of Punjabi joint family members: "A Sikh Jat relates how one night his sister's father-in-law arrived at her house unexpectedly when her husband was away and after all the servants had gone to bed. Not a word was exchanged between them, and he could no more ask her for food than she could offer it: so he went supperless to bed..." The severity of the custom was however slowly being eroded. See Malcolm Lyall Darling, *Wisdom and Waste in the Punjabi Village* London: Oxford University Press, 1934, pp. 308-309.

Archana Varma gives further insight into the relationships between male and female family members in the early twentieth century, drawing her information from individuals who had immigrated from a village named Paldi, Hoshiarpur district to Paldi, British Columbia. Describing the segregation between males and females within the family home in Punjab she notes: "On one side was a *sawat* or sitting room meant only for family men and their visitors from the village or outsiders, where they could smoke *hookah*, use all kinds of language and discuss political and other baradari (caste) issues and subjects. This area was so segregated from other parts of the *ghar* that even eatables were taken in the *sawat* by men themselves." Varma continues: "Punjabi women especially after marriage, generally remained secluded in a *ghar* and in most cases the senior men of a *tabbar* and *parivar* [kinship relations based on blood ties] did not hear the voice of young brides or daughters-in-law or come face to face with them for years." Based on a conversation with an elderly male who had immigrated to Canada from the village during the early years of the twentieth century Varma further notes: "In some cases...in Paldi women themselves did not see the faces of certain men in the family even until death." Varma maintains that Punjab rural women after marriage "wore *ghunghat* (veil) in the presence of older and senior men and replied in subdued voices if asked a question or sometimes just moved their heads in reply. They were protected from strange men, before and after marriage, and generally treated as special possessions to be guarded because a Punjabi's family *izzat* in the baradari (caste) and its kinship relationships revolved around the exchange of women through marriages and exposing them to others put a family's honour at stake." Archana Varma, "Status and Migration among the Punjabis of Paldi, British Columbia, and Paldi, Punjab," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Burnaby, B.C.: Simon Fraser University, Department of History, 1994, pp. 63-64.

⁶² Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question," Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women. Essays in Colonial History* New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990 pp. 243-245.

Chatterjee maintains that the *new* patriarchy of the new middle class of Indian, the stronghold of the nationalist cause, was sharply distinguished both from the social order of modern western society *and* the patriarchy of indigenous tradition. Women and the home became the symbol of all that was considered 'spiritual' in Indian society; the virtues associated with both necessitated guarding from excessive 'westernization' at all cost. While the new order also adopted elements of 'tradition' as imprints of its

came to occupy a central place in the imagination of reformers. Accordingly, Neki Parcharak Committees, or Social Reform Committees were to be set up in every village. While ostensibly doing away with “sinful acts” such as the selling and purchasing of daughters and female infanticide, these committees also included in their mandate a wide number of restrictions pertaining to the women’s customs:

- a) they were to put an end to ear piercing for boys and nose piercing for girls.⁶³
- b) women’s ornamentation in general was to cease.⁶⁴
- c) drinking and nautch girls at weddings were to be done away with.⁶⁵

indigenous cultural identity, it was a “deliberately ‘classicized’ tradition – reformed, reconstructed.” Ibid.

Travelers to Punjab, particularly the women of Bengal, were astonished by the apparent unconstraint of Punjabi women. The ‘Brahmo puritanism’ accompanying a goodly number of the wives of professionals was acutely disturbed by Punjabi women bathing naked in the rivers and lakes; so too by the singing of obscene songs by women at festivals and weddings. *Bamabodhini Patrika*, 8, 100 (December 1871), cited in Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 235.

Lakshman Singh also notes that his mother and her close associates daily walked to the river Leh to bathe. See Ganda Singh, ed., *Bhagat Lakshman Singh*, pp. 11-12.

Needless to say, condemnation of the practice of nude bathing for women came to be condemned as immoral by the ‘new patriarchy’ of Punjab society.

⁶³ The concerns with regard to ear and nose piercing did not originate with Neki Parcharak Committees. According to reformers, time honoured Sikh Rahit, namely the *Prem Sumarg* strictly prohibited the boring of ears and noses. See *Khalsa Advocate*, August 15, 1904.

Harnam Kaur also addressed the issue of women’s ornamentation. Adornment of jewelry was a device utilized by the male-dominated society surrounding women to enslave them. Just as a bull was controlled with an iron ring through its nose, so too were heavily laden Indian women controlled by their men folk. Further, women in ‘advanced’ countries had no need to pompously display their jewels and justly ridiculed Indian women for doing so; thus ornamentation was simply an indication of the ‘backwardness’ of Indian women in comparison to their western counterparts. Ultimately, Harman Kaur insisted, jewels in and of themselves did not lead to true happiness in a marriage; a woman could be laden with gold and still not please her husband. Only true inner ornamentation would lead to true conjugal satisfaction. Upon hearing Harnam Kaur’s admonitions, her biographer notes, several women took off their jewelry and donated them to the coffers of the Boarding House. See Suraj Singh, *Sri Mati Bibi Harnam Kaur*, pp. 132-135.

⁶⁴ According to an early twentieth century observer, jewelry was an essential aspect of Sikh women’s attire. Parry noted that that were “heavily decorated with silver bangles of all sizes and shapes. The nose is always pierced and contains some ornament. The ears and neck are covered with heavy silver bangles and chains. The ankles are generally hidden by heavy silver anklets.” See R.E. Parry, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, p. 24.

⁶⁵ Nautch girls or ‘dancing’ girls were an important aspect of celebration in Punjab. They were professional musicians, women who often wore seductive clothing, danced provocatively, and sang ribald songs, particularly at weddings. They were entitled to a great deal of autonomy and subsequent immunity

d) the "practice of singing immoral songs and speaking abusive terms by the females should be unconditionally stopped."⁶⁶

Eventually, Singh Sabha concerns with women's outward appearances also came to include prohibitions against females wearing make-up and the utilisation of sufficient thickness of cloth in the tailoring of women's clothing; clothes were to be in no way see-through.⁶⁷

from the traditional restrictions placed upon female Punjabis. Dancing girls were common in the court of Maharajah Ranjit Singh; during festivals he encouraged them to dress in military garb (they were described by Jacquemont as Amazons), ride on horses and form his bodyguard. According to Soltykoff who toured Punjab in the mid-nineteenth century, courtesans and dancing girls also walked freely in the court of Maharajah Sher Singh while his wives lived in strict accordance to the rules of purdah. See H.L.O. Garrett, trans., and ed., *Punjab a Hundred Years Ago. As Described by V. Jacquemont (1831) and A. Soltykoff (1842)* Punjab Government Record Office, Monograph No, 18, n.d., reprinted by Patiala: Punjab Languages Department, 1971, pp. 54, 104.

The independence and unconstraint of these women was not to be condoned by the educated and gentrified Sikhs. Nautch girls at wedding celebrations provided an element of boisterousness and abandonment to the affair, which according to the Tat Khalsa reformers was instead to be carried out in solemnity and austerity.

⁶⁶ See "The Neki Parcharak Committee First General Meeting," *Khalsa Advocate*, July 7, 1911. To what extent and form this initial meeting of the Committee continued beyond the first is unknown. The focus on women and women's activities is however indicative of the increasing concern to do away with traditional 'women's customs'.

⁶⁷ *The Vidya*, March 5, 1920, *The Punch*, May 23, 1920 cited in Amarjit Kaur, "The Nascent Sikh Politics: 1919-1921," p. 60.

According to Darling, the veil utilized by women was undergoing a subtle change. "Once so thick that nothing could be seen through it, and so full that it could envelop the whole head, it is becoming semi-transparent and, if it is long enough to be drawn across the face, it is sufficient." Darling, *Wisdom and Waste*, p. 309.

Needless to say, the concern for women's clothing was not restricted to the Sikh reform endeavour. S.C. Bose, loudly condemning late-nineteenth century Bengali men in Calcutta for their imitation of European dress also insisted that the women of Bengal "adopt... a stouter fabric for their garment in place of the present, thin, flimsy, loose, sari." He approved that "a few respectable Hindoo ladies have of late years begun to put an *unghia* or corset over their bodies," but continued that their "under vestments are shamefully indelicate." Bose maintained that changes should be introduced "in the dress of their women folk, which private decency and public morality most urgently demand." According to Bose, well-covered female bodies "go hand in hand with religious, moral and intellectual improvement. The one is essential to the elevation and dignity of female character as the other is to the advancement of the nation in the scale of civilization." S.C. Bose, *The Hindoos as They Are: A description of the manners, customs, and inner life of Hindoo society in Bengal* Calcutta, 1881, pp. 194, 195, cited in Bernard S. Cohen, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 138.

J.N. Farquhar made positive reference to this new trend among the Bengali elite, noting that "they invented a new and becoming dress, more suited for outdoor wear and social intercourse than the rather scanty clothing of the stay-at-home Bengali wife," [italics mine]. See J.N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* The Hartford-Lamson Lectures on the Religions of the World, London: The MacMillan Co., 1924, p. 48.

The discourse surrounding women's ornamentation is significant in the context of the larger cause of reform; women were called upon to contribute to the cause beyond their *duty* as honorary teachers through donations of their jewelry. Examples of those who contributed in this manner were widely lauded as exemplary women whom other women were charged to emulate.⁶⁸ Further, repeated calls for women to follow the new regulations put in place by the reformers with regard to the abandoning of jewelry became increasingly regulated; by the tenth Sikh Education Conference Sikh females were "strictly prohibited from coming laden in ornaments and dressed in showy suits."⁶⁹

Though the issue appears to be easily relegated to immaterial and superficial regulations, the discourse takes on significance when the *role* of jewelry for women in early twentieth century Punjab is added to the equation. According to one account:

A woman's social standing, unless she is a widow, is largely determined by her jewels... And it is not only her social but also her material position that is affected. In a country in which women are bought and sold it can be understood that her position is highly insecure. A quarrel may lead to separation, or her husband's death may leave her in unprotected and penniless anxiety, therefore, it is always to have something that may be retained in her personal possession against the uncertainties of fortune, and nothing serves this purpose so well as jewellery.⁷⁰

Given the sacrosanct position of the male over that of the female in terms of inheritance laws as well as separation customs in Punjab, the ownership of jewelry imbued women with both a tangible and intangible form of material wealth, power and status. In some cases, jewelry

It must however be noted, that Sikh women in Punjab did not wear saris; Falcon described the dress of Punjabi women as such: "Musalman women wear trousers of striped stuff of dark blue or green, loose at the top and tight at the ankle. Hindu Jat women, when married, wear the same style of trousers with a petticoat (ghagra) generally of red or madder brown, over the trousers." Sikh women were so closely aligned with Hindu women that Falcon makes no distinction between them in terms of their dress. Blue cloth however, was strictly prohibited for Sikh women as it had long been associated with the order of the Khalsa. See R.W. Falcon, *Handbook on Sikhs*, pp. 47, 59.

⁶⁸ *Khalsa Advocate*, March 21, 1908, May 15, 1909.

⁶⁹ *The Punjab Darpan*, n.d., relayed in *Khalsa Advocate*, March 24, 1917.

served as collateral in exerting power over and manipulating male family members.⁷¹ Well aware of female resistance to male control in the areas of religious reform, Tat Khalsa initiatives in essence began to curtail any economic agency that females may have had over males.

According to Judy Whitehead, control of the body, particularly women's bodies is indicative of another, wider agenda:

Since the human body is simultaneously a physical, symbolic and emotional phenomenon, a measure of control over it is a crucial adjunct to any assertion of authority. Forms of bodily discipline connect the individual body to the wider body politic, allowing for a constant interchange of meanings between the social world and the 'natural' world of the body. Discussions over changing forms of bodily regulation can reveal the class distinctions underlying the ongoing formation of nationalist gender identities.⁷²

In light of Whitehead's perspective, Singh Sabha endeavours to restrict both women's bodies and women's actions is highly illustrative of their initiatives to carve out a distinct Sikh identity within the wider political and religious milieu. Maintaining that stronghold necessitated increased control over those elements that were traditionally outside of their domain of authority. This included an appropriation of the power to name, order and classify while also defining the rules by which women were to live. Accordingly, the feminine identity sought was not a symbol of women's making in the way that masculinity was a symbol of men's making.⁷³ Perhaps even more importantly, the persistent calls for maintaining the sanctity of the home combined with a newly forged agenda of regulating women's behaviour points to a

⁷⁰ Darling, *The Punjab Peasant*, p. 62.

⁷¹ Darling notes how "Sikh women would not agree to a smaller allowance of jewelry unless their bibulous husbands consented to a smaller allowance of drink." Darling, *Wisdom and Waste*, p. 296.

⁷² Judy Whitehead, "Modernizing the motherhood archetype: Public health models and the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929," Patricia Uberoi, ed., *Social reform, sexuality and the state* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996, pp. 187-188.

selective move *beyond* mere rhetoric to an active structuring and management of class identity.⁷⁴ Indeed, the Anand Marriage Bill, despite the avid opposition to its passage and precisely because of its ensuing passage proved that the most vocal, the 'true' Tat Khalsa were indeed the new powerbrokers of Sikh society. This position necessitated safeguarding; the arrangements put in place to ensure preservation of social and political control translated into an elaborate strategy that included bodily and sexual restrictions of females.⁷⁵ Stallybrass and White throw light on this strategy, delineating it as a form of identity construction; identity created through a process of negation of threatening domains. In essence:

Manners, regulations of the body thus become the site of a profound interconnection of ideology and subjectivity, a zone of transcoding at once astonishingly trivial and microscopically important. Traversed by regulative forces quite beyond its conscious control, the body is territorialized in accordance with hierarchies and topographical rules... which come from elsewhere and make it a point of intersection and flow within the elaborate symbolic systems of the socius.⁷⁶

For Singh Sabha reformers the 'threatening domain' of female space was traditionally outside the spectrum of male authority, but the perceived need to consolidate their hard wrought positions of power necessitated an attenuation of male control. This include above all, the removal of traditional women's customs that inconvenienced the honour of Sikh men in general

⁷³ Mercilee M. Jenkins, Cheris Kramarae, "A Thief in the House: Women and Language," Dale Spender, ed., *Men's Studies Modified: The Impact of Feminism on the Academic Disciplines* Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981, p. 12.

⁷⁴ Judy Whitehead, "Modernizing the motherhood archetype," Patricia Uberoi, ed., *Social reform, sexuality and the state*, pg. 205.

⁷⁵ Radhakrishnan notes that ever encroaching controls over women was an essential aspect of the nationalist movement at large; the focus on the 'inner' world, the home, womanhood was a selective coping mechanism in coming to terms with the 'West'. "In the fight against the enemy from the outside, something within gets even more repressed and 'woman' becomes the mute but necessary allegorical ground for the transactions of nationalist history." See R. Radhakrishnan, "Nationalism, Gender, and the Narrative of Identity," Andrew Parker, et al, eds., *Nationalisms & Sexualities*, p. 84.

⁷⁶ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1986, pp. 89-90.

and the Tat Khalsa reformers in particular. It also attended to those elements of feminine tradition that diminished the authority and status of the husband.⁷⁷

Secondly, the restrictions were largely confined to those within the Singh Sabha reformers' own social parameters, particularly with regard to notions of home and privacy that were posited by the leaders of the Tat Khalsa. They did not, nor did they attempt to include the peasantry; in rural areas the public field of work for a woman from the cultivating classes was in fact an extension of her private area.⁷⁸ For the female peasant, the field was as essential to her identity as was the home. And reformers by no means wished to tamper with the 'sturdy Jatni' who was considered to be outside the pale of the refined urban ethos; moreover, she necessitated safeguarding as she contributed so well to the economic well being of Punjab. The by-now securely positioned elite however attempted to forge and thereby control a concrete, physical identity for *their* womenfolk, those largely confined to urban areas and associated with male members of the Tat Khalsa.⁷⁹ For the legacy of colonial rule to create classes conducive to its rule and who in turn developed officially sanctioned ideologies led for the most part to an expansion of already existing unequal relations within the various sections of Punjabi society. No where is this more evident than the palpable distancing between the Sikh urban, educated elite and the rural peasantry. Douglas Haynes' analysis of the notion of "negotiated hegemony" is particularly helpful in understanding the political and rhetorical shifts in the achievement of power. 'Negotiated hegemony' allows for explanations of these shifts

⁷⁷ See Kenneth W. Jones, "Socio-Religious Movements and Changing Gender Relationships Among Hindus of British India," James Warner Bjorkman, ed., *Fundamentalism, Revivalists and Violence in South Asia* Delhi: Manohar, 1988, p. 54.

⁷⁸ Prem Chowdhry, *The Veiled Women. Shifting Gender Equations in Rural Haryana, 1880-1990* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 385.

⁷⁹ With regard to the spread of reform in the nineteenth century, Jones maintains that restrictions placed on women's festivals and rituals were limited to women of the educated class. See *ibid.*, p. 53. Little had changed in this regard by the early twentieth century.

beyond the processes of 'westernization' and 'modernization'; it thus moves beyond ambiguous assumptions of western superiority and allows for a more applicable explication of the revisions in both value and power systems.⁸⁰ He notes that since viable access to the political language of both the imperial rulers and the native population at large remained confined to a select few, mediators, the educated elite with a knowledge of both kinds of discourse quickly moved into positions of power and prestige.⁸¹ While British administrative policy was particularly attentive and supportive of the aspirations of the Sikh peasantry, ultimately those who had "shaped their values and self-images in reference to political languages derived from their rulers' culture," and had "made recourse to a vocabulary and symbols that had meaning to their rulers" became hegemonic in the political arenas of the day.⁸² Despite overt British policy in Punjab to advocate the cause of the 'sturdy' Jat peasantry, the position of authority acquired by the educated elite was both necessary and inevitable.⁸³

Sangari and Vaid insist that gender politics must be acknowledged as pivotal to this very process of differentiation, since "*defining gender seems to be crucial to the formation of classes and dominant ideologies*" [italics mine].⁸⁴ Thus the restrictions on women put in place by the reformers largely served to bolster the shift in their class identity. In other words, novel

⁸⁰ Douglas E. Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual and Colonial India. The Shaping of a Public Culture in Surat City, 1852-1928* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, pp. 23, 7-8.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 25.

⁸² Ibid., p. 11.

⁸³ Haynes thus notes that proficiency in the language of the rulers' became perhaps the most important aspect of the educated elite's rise to power. For "language tends to define the bounds of potential debate and conflict. Specific kinds of political discourse have built-in assumptions about the nature of power and justice. Language furbishes conventions which govern the performance of political acts; it supplies the categories, grammar, and principles through which political assertions are articulated and perceived; it provides yardsticks by which claims to authority and justice are measured and disputed. It defines the terrain of political debate, including some matters as legitimate points of discussion and excluding others." See *ibid.*, p. 22.

patterns of control over Sikh womanhood, particularly those closely aligned with male reformers constituted an important aspect of the position of hegemony negotiated and highly coveted by the Tat Khalsa reformers. It is within this context that the restrictions on women's dress and women's activities at large can be understood, particularly with the renewed focus on female customs such as the 'singing [of] immoral songs and speaking [in] abusive terms'. As with the previous complaints of 'irrational' female activities voiced by the Amritsar Dharm Sabha, here too the honour of these new elites was at stake.⁸⁵ With regard to injunctions regarding marriage celebrations, Tat Khalsa reformers posited ideal ceremonies that were "sober and solemn at once" with "no exhibition of ornaments and clothes...no expensive conservative ceremony, no fireworks and nothing of the sort at all."⁸⁶

Assuredly, the concern for rigorous austerity at the time of weddings was not new to the early twentieth century. An early advocate of Sikh reform, Narain Singh Nanda's censure of women's contributions to wedding ceremonies in the late nineteenth century was also indicative of the general attitude towards women's unrestrained frivolity during times of celebration.

We notice that at the time of weddings all women, young and old, start singing such deplorable songs that they would put even the devil to shame. The Bhands [entertainers] who are notorious for using abuse and obscenities in their performances would find it hard to compete with the shameless language of these songs. What is amazing is that these lewd compositions are sung by women in the presence of their male kin and family patriarch, in front of whom they would normally go veiled. This

⁸⁴ Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, "Recasting Women: An Introduction," Sangari and Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women*, p. 5.

⁸⁵ See Chapter Four.

⁸⁶ An observer is describing a wedding having taken place "strictly according to Sikh rites" in Gujranwala. See *Khalsa Advocate*, September 4, 1909.

despicable behaviour is most regrettable and reformers must take urgent steps to stop these bawdy songs.⁸⁷

Puritanism, asceticism and restraint, characteristics that in time would become the “hallmark of the Tat Khalsa” were part of a strategic “blueprint for a new culture” that sought to envelop private space beyond the regulation of public space.⁸⁸

Popular Female Traditions and the Gentrified Imagination:

Tat Khalsa envisioning of the ‘new culture’ was extended far beyond concerns regarding women’s ornamentation, dress, taunts and lewd singing at weddings. The gentrified Singh Sabha imagination attempted to dismantle virtually all forms of popular religious practices heavily relied upon by the vast majority of the Sikh population. Largely influenced by the reform ethos of their predecessors, the Namdhari Sikhs as well as an enlightened, rationalised, and purified Sikhism infused by western ideology, Tat Khalsa reformers began to advocate an *authentic* tradition thereby “for the first time label[ing] many of the current beliefs and practices among the Sikhs as acts of deviance and expressions of a superstitious mind.”⁸⁹ Sikhism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was teeming with life if one looks to the religious sensibilities of the peasantry. Heterogeneity reigned

⁸⁷ *Khalsa Akhbar*, 28 August 1886, p. 2, cited in Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries. Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 313.

According to Darling, the repeated censure of “a certain type of song at wedding and fair” was beginning to take effect “in a minor way...At a marriage in the north-west, men and women used to sing them in antiphon, but now, if sung at all, *it is mostly done by the men when no women are present*” (italics mine). Darling, *Wisdom and Waste*, p. 302.

Clearly, an important mode of expression for women had here been appropriated by males.

⁸⁸ Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 313.

supreme in what Oberoi delineates as *Sanatan Sikhism*, which included a myriad of orthodox, popular, and village traditions: nature worship, witchcraft, spirits and spirit possession, miracle saints, goddess worship *as well as* devotion to the Sikh gurus, shaped the “enchanted universe” of the majority of rural Sikhs.⁹⁰ Central to this cosmology was a complex and highly defined understanding of sacred time and place. For the rural populace whose very existence was dependent on changing seasons and agricultural rhythms, calendrical festivals, pilgrimages and rites that corresponded to nature’s cycles were crucial signposts in time’s sequence.⁹¹ Yet while sustained by these notions of sacred time and space, this elusive universe went far beyond specific rites or mere localities to a larger, far more generalized “*mode of understanding*” that included parodies, curses, oaths, abusive laughter, unconstrained dancing

⁸⁹ Harjot Oberoi, Popular Saints, Goddesses, and Village Sacred Sites: Rereading Sikh Experience in the Nineteenth Century,” *History of Religions* Vol. 31, Number 4 (May 1992), p. 365.

⁹⁰ See Oberoi, “An Enchanted Universe,” *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, pp. 139-203.

⁹¹ According to Oberoi, calendrical festivals and monthly rituals can best be understood by reference to the lunar calendrical system. Lunar-solar days often signified the celebration of various festivals or fairs. Baisakhi, the major summer festival marked for the peasantry the approach of harvest and an opportunity to celebrate the beginning of a new agricultural cycle. Local festivals honouring goddesses, particularly those responsible for smallpox and other diseases were also held with the advent of the new lunar year. During the monsoon season, Gugga Pir and reparation to ancestors took place. The increase in the number of snakes during the rainy season was an auspicious moment to invoke Gugga Pir for protection. Diwali was the next major festival to be marked; it also represented for the rural populace a time of anticipation, as the peasantry was occupied with the sowing of crops. Holi was the festival that concluded the annual festival cycle in spring. Holi celebrations allowed for a time of ritual inversion. Existing norms could be turned on their heads without consequences. Colours were thrown on superiors; customary reticence towards women was dispensed with. Alongside the sacred calendar were festivals corresponding to the different phases of the moon; festivals, fairs and visits to shrines marked the movement of the moon’s cycle. See Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, pp. 182-190.

Oscar Lewis also notes that festivals served the important task of strengthening family ties, particularly the connections between female members. Marriage customs dictated that daughters and sisters leave the familial home; festivals were occasions where family members sent gifts to daughters. See Oscar Lewis, *Village Life in Northern India. Studies in a Delhi Village* New York: Vintage Books, 1965, p. 238.

and profanities.⁹² Mikhail Bakhtin has circumscribed this cosmology as the amorphous

‘world of the carnival’.⁹³ It can be further explicated as the realm of the

topsy-turvy, of heteroglot exuberance, of ceaseless overrunning and excess where all is mixed, hybrid, ritually degraded and defiled... Carnival laughter, then, has a vulgar, ‘earthy’ quality to it. With its oaths and profanities, its abusive language and its mocking words it was profoundly ambivalent. Whilst it humiliated and mortified it also revived and renewed.⁹⁴

Needless to say, the ‘world of the carnival’ was assailed by the Tat Khalsa reformers as diametrically opposed to true Sikh ideals; rigorous attempts were made to eradicate all aspects of the carnivalesque from the tradition they were redefining. And understandably so, for this variable set of symbolic practices, images, discourses and imaginations was alternately employed by the disempowered in an ingenious enterprise of “symbolic inversion and cultural negation.”⁹⁵ It is in this context that the espousal of traditions alternately known as ‘little’, ‘popular’, or inimically as ‘superstitious’ when the ‘great’ ones are already established can best be understood. While according to Robert Redfield both traditions are interdependent and “can be thought of as two currents of thought and action, distinguishable, yet ever flowing into and out of each other,” in many ways popular traditions fulfilled specific needs within societies

⁹² Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, pp. 6-19.

⁹³ See Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* tr. H. Iswolsky, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968, p. 10.

⁹⁴ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p. 8.

⁹⁵ Barbara Babcock, ed., *The Reversible World. Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978, p. 14, cited in *ibid.*, p. 17. ‘Symbolic inversion’ according to Babcock refers to “any act of expressive behaviour which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, social and political.”

In reference to the ‘low’ folk-humour of the French Renaissance, Bakhtin maintains that the world of the carnival is rooted in an understanding that established authority and truth are relative. For it is only within a relativized understanding of authority that acts of inversion and negation are relevant and possible. See M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 10.

that could not be satisfied by the major religion.⁹⁶ Women in particular claimed calendrical festivals as their own; not only did they play important ritual roles during the celebrations, they were also given the rare opportunity to congregate with women from other localities.⁹⁷ Further, as Richard Brubaker has described, within the village cosmology "things mingle and merge that are normally kept apart; things carefully regulated overflow their usual bounds. And on the level of symbolism pervading these events it is perhaps above all the relations between what is male and what is female that surge beyond all restrictions."⁹⁸ In this context, regulation and routine are ostensibly turned head over heels: women taunt the very men before whom they normatively live in servility; the goddess is dominant and male deities are submissive to her wishes;⁹⁹ while females are typically subordinate to males, they gain sustenance in the knowledge that their goddess is all-powerful.¹⁰⁰ Further, alongside

⁹⁶ Robert Redfield, *The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture* Chicago and Toronto: Phoenix Books, The University of Chicago Press, 1960, p. 42.

⁹⁷ Oscar Lewis, *Village Life in Northern India*, pp. 237-238.

⁹⁸ Richard L. Brubaker, "The Untamed Goddesses of Village India," Carl Olson, ed., *The Book of the Goddess. Past and Present* New York: Crossroads, 1983, p. 156.

⁹⁹ According to Oscar Lewis the principal deities worshipped by women throughout Northern India are female; stories told at women's celebrations focus on female deities; the deities most concerned with the personal matters of life, childbirth, sickness and health are goddesses. Lewis postulates that this widespread pattern may reflect an ancient pre-Vedic cult. See Oscar Lewis, *Village Life in Northern India*, p. 238.

For a discussion of the feminine aspects of popular rites, see Sohinder Singh Bedi, *Folklore of Punjab* Folklore of India Series, New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1971, pp. 23-33.

¹⁰⁰ The supreme goddess Mahadevi, alternately known as Durga, Kali, Kalka, Mahesri or Bhiwani was a particularly important aspect of Sikh religious practices in the nineteenth century. According to Kinsley, Durga, "[a]lthough she is created by the male gods and does their bidding and although she is observed and applauded by them, she (along with her female helpers and attendants) fights without direct male support against male demons – and she always wins." Kinsley continues that Durga in many respects violates the Hindu ideal of womanhood. "She is not submissive, she is not subordinated to a male deity, she does not fulfill household duties, and she excels at what is traditionally a male function, fighting in battle. As an independent warrior...she reverses the normal role for females and therefore stands outside normal society." Further, the goddess is also manifested in lesser deities like Sitala Devi, Mansa Devi and Naina Devi. With regard to these deities, Kinsley purports that village goddesses are highly ambivalent in nature, manifested in sudden outbursts of rage and are relatively independent from male consorts. See David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses. Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986, pp. 97, 201-202. For a discussion of the central though highly ambivalent position of Durga in the Sikh tradition see Doris R. Jakobsh, "Gender Issues in Sikh Studies: Hermeneutics of Affirmation or Hermeneutics of

women's rites and practices within the milieu of popular religious customs, with the practice of spirit possession in particular comes a unique opportunity for the powerless sector to "voice its dissent and articulate needs normally suppressed." For this worldview is built upon the sustained belief that the encroachment of normative social conventions can be transferred to supernatural forces.¹⁰¹

Certainly what can be delineated as the 'poetics of inversion' that were associated with the popular religious realm was an anathema to the male reformers of the upper echelons of Sikh society - the learned, the distinguished, and indubitably, the powerful.¹⁰² Conversely, those aspects of 'little' traditions that allowed for the inversion of dominant structures were mechanisms of empowerment for the *disempowered*, a grasping of *voice* for the voiceless.¹⁰³ It was in essence, a finely tuned though amorphous instrument utilized by those who could not find occasions of deviation, role reversal and ensuing negotiations within traditional religion. Prem Chowdhry's analysis of popular cultural activities practised by women in Haryana is particularly helpful in this regard.

Suspicion?" P. Singh and N. G. Barrier, eds., *The Transmission of Sikh Heritage in the Diaspora*, especially pp. 57-63.

¹⁰¹ Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 61.

¹⁰² The attack on women's popular customs was certainly not confined to the Sikh reformers. The Arya Samaj was also consistent in its attempts to eradicate the singing of 'indecent songs' at ceremonies or festivals. See Chowdhry, *The Veiled Women*, pp. 394-395.

¹⁰³ Nikki Singh's main objective in a recent volume is to present to her readers the feminine dimension within both scripture and other literature. Needless to say there was little written by the adherents of popular religion who were largely illiterate and ill inclined to document their religious practices. And yet by following the path carefully charted out by traditional Sikh apologetics, in glossing over the practices of the majority of the Sikh peasantry, Nikki Singh also chooses to bypass the worldviews, the realities and the everyday practices of rural women in particular. Certainly popular cosmology lends itself to a gold mine of female images and practices. According to Brubaker, "with few exceptions - Indian village goddesses are not anyone's wives...they are independent, they are powerful, and they can be hazardous to one's health as well as ultimately healing." To include this cosmology into a feminine-focused discussion would first of all offer varied and wide ranging religious images and experiences, and would secondly *acknowledge* and give voice to those who have never been heard. See Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh, *The feminine principle in the Sikh vision of the Transcendent* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, Brubaker, "The Untamed Goddesses of Village India," Carl Olson, ed., *The Book of the Goddess*, p. 149.

All these occasions provide opportunities for joyful gatherings of women, very often exclusive ones, to dance and sing songs drawing on the reservoir of their deeply felt and commonly experienced emotions, specially dealing with human relationships, extending from birth, adolescence, marriage, and copulation to death. In these women-centred activities women can most freely express themselves both physically and verbally and voice their criticisms as well as aspirations and self-awareness. This is all the more so because under a highly restrictive and rigid code of moral behaviour which condemns and denigrates a talkative female (with the exception of the oldest among them), they are never allowed to speak freely or openly; thus these songs remain central to their self-expression.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps most significantly, many of these popular songs were specifically directed toward the sexual inadequacy of the male populace whose very self-image depended upon their virility and hyper-masculinity.¹⁰⁵

Further, the unlettered had little awareness or use for the communal rife increasingly shaping urban society; popular religious customs allowed for a glorious mingling of heterogeneity, fluidity and tolerance. Fairs, festivals, visits to shrines while providing many peasants, particularly home bound females their initial glimpses into the wider world, also rendered another equally important service.¹⁰⁶ According to Oberoi, the prime significance of these gatherings was the enhancement of a sense of solidarity among rural communities: "By their very nature melas as a motley assemblage of people from different neighbourhoods, villages and regions, diluted the codes of class, caste and

¹⁰⁴ Chowdhry, *The Veiled Women*, p. 393.

Sumanta Banerjee in delineating the popular cultural forms of lower class women in nineteenth century Bengal shows that not only did these songs and dances offer women a dissenting space, but also allowed for temporary expressions of revenge against those who normatively wielded power over them. See Sumanta Banerjee, "Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal," K. Sangari and S. Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women*, pp. 127-179.

¹⁰⁵ Chowdhry, *The Veiled Women*, p. 395.

¹⁰⁶ According to Lewis, fairs provided occasion for social interaction in a larger regional setting. Pilgrimages took people outside of the village while other festive occasions brought outsiders into villages. See Lewis, *Village Life in Northern India*, p. 239.

religious differences. In these an individual could not stand apart, he had to blend into the crowd.”¹⁰⁷

Obviously, the continuance of Tat Khalsa hegemony hinged precisely upon the suppression of the multifarious aspects of popular custom; these were referred to as superstitious, immoral, leading to libertine behaviour and definitively outside the expectations of those within the Sikh community.¹⁰⁸ Since women were pivotal participants in the various procedures under girding these ‘superstitious’ rites, they were expressly targeted in the Tat Khalsa endeavour to overturn the practices associated with popular religious traditions.¹⁰⁹ This trend is best characterized by the ‘moralizing’ writings of the day. The popular author Bhai Vir Singh through his zealous attempt to construct a ‘feminine ideal’ took careful aim at the ‘degenerate’ customs practised by

¹⁰⁷ Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, pp. 189-190.

¹⁰⁸ In the early twentieth century, the Tat Khalsa movement continued its assault upon the ‘un-Sikh’ elements that had a fast hold on their community. “Hindu-Sikhs” were portrayed as “fickle” followers of Muslim Pirs who gather “poor simple Hindu females...with their babes and infants” to beg the Pir to intercede for them and their children. *Khalsa Advocate*, September 30, 1916.

With regard to the ‘Hindu’ Holi festivities, reformers not only condemned the immorality of the celebrants, they also solicited considerations of *sanitation* in an attempt to curb the highly celebratory affair: “To allow the illiterate masses to enjoy the festivities in filth, drink and immoral practices against laws of sanitation, hygiene and morality is most absurd. The young boys learn so much wickedness in one week that no amount of zealous work of teaching religious and moral lessons throughout the ensuing whole year can eradicate from their minds...In the Holee days no lady can visit the great Gurdwara [Anandpur]...This court of censure has become so weak that it can not keep under moral restraints the illiterate masses who assemble there in the time of Holis.” Well aware of the persistence of the festivities among the masses who had little use for the ‘enlightened’ perspective of the educated elite, reformers instead turned to the Deputy Commissioner, Mr. C.M. King who was in charge of sanitation projects to officially rectify and legislate the matter. See *Khalsa Advocate*, March 21, 1914.

¹⁰⁹ Particularly during marriage festivities where the obstruction of evil influences was perceived as crucial to conjugal happiness, women ensured that specific rites be carried out and articles be prepared in an effort to thwart malevolent spirits. Barstow describes a number of these customs to ward off evil influences from marriage ceremonies. The ‘Kangna’ referred to a string band in which various articles counteracting malevolent spirits was prepared by seven women and worn on the bridegroom’s right wrist; a ‘Baddhi’ was a similarly prepared band that was tied to the groom’s right ankle. Both were worn by the bride as well, but on the left wrist and right ankle. Another precaution taken was the wearing of a knife by the bridegroom, also believed to ward off evil spirits. See A.E. Barstow, *Handbook on the Sikhs* New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1984, pp. 153-154, (first published 1899).

women. Ultimately it was upon Sikh womanhood that the responsibility was squarely placed for the debasement of Sikhism from its original state of purity.

Look at yourself and see whether or not the decline of the Sikh nation is caused by your very own hands. Leaving your God and your true Gurus, you worship stones, trees, idols, tombs and saints. Forgetting Sikh religion, you rot in another religion. Turning your back on the true Gurus you teach someone else's religion to your offspring too. Your children will grow to be half baked like you – Sikh on the head, Brahmin around the neck and Muslim below the waist.¹¹⁰

Vir Singh continues with a warning: "If you turn you face against Guru Gobind Singh and adopt devious ways of worshipping another deity, your children will be cowards like jackals, and evil will become a part of your character. You will lose all respect in the eyes of others and your honour will vanish."¹¹¹ Cowardice, a certain outgrowth of 'un-Sikh' customs was diametrically opposed to traditional values of true manliness and courage; the recurrent themes of respect and honour on the other hand had become the trademark catch-words with regard to the feminine ideal the Singh Sabha reformers were advocating.

The professionals responsible for the generation and transmission of the 'little' traditions, a number of who were women were also attacked. Fundamental to the objectives of the Tat Khalsa reformers was the displacement of the "cultural mediators" who instructed and performed in the myriad of tasks, practices and rites sustaining popular religion.¹¹² These cultural transmitters, increasingly depicted as derelicts, cheats and

¹¹⁰ Bhai Vir Singh, *Sundari*, Amritsar 1972, quotation translated by S.S. Dulai, "The Political Novel in Panjabi," *Contributions to Asian Studies*, Vol. 6, 1975, p. 51, cited in Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 311.

¹¹¹ Bhai Vir Singh, *Sundri*, Gobind Singh Mansukhani, tr. New Delhi: Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, 1988, p. 114.

¹¹² See Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 265.

A number of professional groups played central roles in mediating cultural conventions in the arena of popular culture and religion. Bards, genealogists, healers, shamans, storytellers, minstrels and cultural bearers such as the Nais and Mirasis were patronized throughout Punjab. Nais in particular were

ultimately culpable for the high costs and degenerate condition of ceremonies and festivities were to be dispensed with and replaced by properly regulated Sikh emissaries.¹¹³ Significantly, in an attempts to contravene in the domain of the cultural mediators, Singh Sabha reformers called upon *women* to replace paid musical professionals; their *gratuitous* services were to be put to use during wedding, birth, and initiation celebrations to do away with the “exorbitant remuneration” demanded by musicians.¹¹⁴ Needless to say, the replacement of musicians with properly trained females would also check the impropriety and vulgarities associated with this class of professionals - music was to be restricted to the singing of sacred hymns. According to the reformed mindset, “the teachings of our Gurus do not confine the singing of *Shabads*, which are nothing other than prayers to the merciful Father, to any particular class of men. Hence, the [female] sex can also discharge this duty.”¹¹⁵ For the rising fortunes of the Singh Sabha and the decline of key groups traditionally responsible for the transmission of culture were closely interconnected.¹¹⁶ Resolutely, Tat Khalsa initiatives continued to combat any manner and rite within the wider tradition that was ‘un-Sikh’ and contaminated by what they considered to be ‘outsiders’ customs. Girls’ schools were called upon to train female

considered to be essential during marriage proceedings. They opened negotiations between two families, played the role of messenger and harbinger of betrothals and were seated at places of honour during wedding celebrations. The role of the Nai’s wife was to accompany the newly married couple to the husband’s home. See *ibid.*, pp. 336-340.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

See also *Khalsa Advocate*, July 7, 1911, where “foolish parents” are described who entrust marriage arrangements to Nais, as “greedy as the latter always are, they affianced the poor girls to unsuitable matches.” Further the Singh Sabha mouthpiece attacked the “vagrant loafers in the garb of mendicants” who frequented festive occasions.

¹¹⁴ *Khalsa Advocate*, August 5, 1910.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, pp. 352-353.

students “to render this divine service.”¹¹⁷ By 1920 a necessary prerequisite of teachers included competence in harmonium playing, presumably to further the musical abilities of female students and thus to ensure the complete dissolution of the class of cultural mediators.¹¹⁸

Creation and Revision – The Feminization of Ritual:

In an attempt to divert the customs of women that were avowedly contaminating the purity of Sikhism, Singh Sabha reformers introduced a novel agenda for including females within the heretofore exclusively male ordinances of the Tat Khalsa. The rite of baptism for males and the corresponding outward symbolism of the Khalsa had increasingly become the central signifier in the discourse surrounding true Sikh identity. For the British administration, particularly the military establishment, baptism was viewed as indispensable in the creation of the ideal Sikh-fighting machine. For Tat Khalsa reformers, baptism by *khande di pahul* and its corresponding external signifiers was the foremost indicator of Sikh distinctiveness within the wider social and religious milieu. The Majithia court case along with the Anand Marriage Bill had produced a whirlwind of controversy precisely with regard to the question of Sikh identity. Traditional fractions within the Sikh community became increasingly polarised with calls for delimiting the definition of a ‘true’ Sikh on the one hand, and equally determined appeals for the expansion of Sikh identity on the other hand. The hegemonic Tat Khalsa position, benefiting greatly from the institutional support of the British Raj asserted that only those

¹¹⁷ *Khalsa Advocate*, August 5, 1910

baptised in accordance with the injunctions of Guru Gobind Singh were true Sikhs. However, Udasis, Mahants, Nirankaris and the Guru lineages continued to play a significant and highly esteemed role within the Sikh tradition of the nineteenth and twentieth century, despite their consistent refusal to acquiescence to the dominion of the Khalsa order and its identity markers. Furthermore, a large segment of the populace was simply indifferent to the symbolism of the Khalsa introduced by Guru Gobind Singh. The rejection of the Khalsa ideal by certain segments of Sikh society as well as the indifference of others was combated by the mandate of the British army to enlist only baptised Sikhs as well by the agenda of the Singh Sabha reform movement. Yet many, particularly those most at ease with the amorphous nature of popular religion in Punjab continued to consider the external markers and baptism of the Khalsa as extraneous to their everyday existence. But the Tat Khalsa struggle to promote a purified Sikh identity, patently spurred on by religious conviction but also by political considerations hinged precisely upon the unique symbolic prescription furnished by the institution of the Khalsa. To advance their objectives, those imbued by Tat Khalsa sentiment utilized varied but highly effective methods of persuasion. Singh Sabha trained preachers, educational objectives and literature produced under the aegis of the Tat Khalsa hearkened back to the once glorious tradition of the Khalsa and directed public attention to the benefits of adherence to authentic Sikh *rahit* under the British. With regard to the advantages inherent in the wearing of long hair for males, reformers ingeniously turned to images of 'true manliness' borrowed from a startling variety of sources. Heroes of yore, including the invincible Solomon of Hebraic glory were invoked in support of Guru Gobind Singh's injunctions of

¹¹⁸ *The Akali*, November 18, 1920, cited in Amarjit Kaur, "The Nascent Sikh Politics," p. 309.

uncut hair.¹¹⁹ Further, Tat Khalsa reformers attempted to challenge the sway of popular religious practices and superstitious customs that were deemed as alien to Sikhism in its true and unadulterated form. Having little effect on the wider populace, Singh Sabha reformers initially directed their attention toward the women folk within their own circles. In an attempt to distance the 'refined' from the illiterate masses, popular rites were ridiculed and denoted as indicative of the foolishness of the ignorant and uneducated.¹²⁰ Only with the eradication of irrational and essentially absurd practices, at least among the educated elite would the Sikhs as a nation ascend the steep slope of the civilizing enterprise.

Satisfied that Sikh males were well established within the social and religious milieu through traditional injunctions clearly directed toward them, the self-appointed guardians of the Khalsa ideal went to great lengths to delineate an appropriate place for women within the Khalsa order. Central to their objectives was the replacement of superstitious women's rituals with *proper* Sikh rites. To achieve this end Singh Sabha reformers were assiduous in charting out new territory for Sikh women. Though citing selective examples of heroic women within Sikh history and perhaps most importantly, the inherent equality of men and women within Sikh sacred scriptures as foundational to their efforts, Tat Khalsa reformers were nonetheless faced with an abstruse dilemma. For tradition was either conspicuously silent or overtly prohibitive with regard to the

¹¹⁹ *Khalsa Advocate*, May 1, 1915.

¹²⁰ According to Chatterjee, within the 'new patriarchy' the 'new woman' was projected as the reverse of the common, vulgar, quarrelsome woman who was utterly deficient of superior moral sense. See Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question," Sangari and Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women*, pp. 244-245.

For Sikh reformers, the regenerate, 'new' woman was contrasted with the bulk of the populace whose lives were ordered by attempts to align themselves with the natural world and the appeasement of malevolent gods and goddesses.

involvement of women within the Khalsa brotherhood. As already noted, women were clearly not included in the normative injunctions for the Khalsa brotherhood outlined in the earliest Sikh *Rahit-nama*. Most particularly, women were unequivocally excluded from the pivotal rite of *khande di pahul*. It is however conceivable that the rite of *charn-amrit*, the earliest symbol of devotion to the Guru among the Sikhs that was later transformed into the ritual of *charan di pahul* was viewed as an adequate vehicle of initiation for women's circumscribed entry into the Khalsa fold.¹²¹ Nonetheless, it is clear that even *if* women were given partial entry into the order of the Khalsa, their status remained subordinate to the Khalsa *ideal* that required initiation by *khande di pahul* and the wearing of arms. For given that the highly acclaimed external signifiers of the Khalsa revolved around traditional male emblems, namely that of weaponry, females customarily excluded from martial associations were naturally affixed in an ancillary position within the Khalsa order. In essence, the ideal was inadmissible to women.

Needless to say, Tat Khalsa reformers were in a difficult position; the tradition that was so congenial to the male ideal being sanctioned was singularly unobliging with regard to females within the Khalsa order, at least in terms of identity markers and rituals. Conceptually, both women and men were to be embraced within the Khalsa ideal, yet tradition offered scant latitude for recognizing women as equal partners within the order. Novel interpretations of history and satisfactory references were thus pivotal in providing historicity and the rationale for female baptism. Fortuitously Singh Sabha reformers were enabled to turn to the *Prem Sumarg* with its claims of antiquity also endorsed by the Namdhari movement. Baptism, according to the *Sumarg* was as essential for women as

¹²¹ For an analysis of the evolution of the rite of *charan-amrit* to that of *charan ki pahul*, see W. H.

it was for men;¹²² the rite was also to be identical for males and females.¹²³ Thus validated, Tat Khalsa reformers made pointed reference to the 'fallen' state of Sikhism as ultimately responsible for the dearth of properly baptized women within their ranks. However, factions within the reform endeavour suspended the possibility of a unified resolution to the question of female baptism. As opposed to the highly uniform particularities of the rite of baptism for men, the specifics of female baptism remained indeterminate and open to a myriad of interpretations and variations. These included the application of a one-edged sword in the stirring of sweetened water for women as opposed to the two-edged sword traditionally reserved for male baptism.¹²⁴ Still other innovations included a significantly shortened roster of scriptural readings in comparison to the prescribed readings for male initiates accompanying the preparation of amrit for the rite of initiation.¹²⁵ Further, instead of the prescribed 5 K's associated with male initiates, a small kirpan or iron bangle was to be worn by females.¹²⁶ Among the Nihangs both women and men were required to maintain the full injunctions of weaponry prescribed by

McLeod, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama* Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1987, p. 213, note # 39.

¹²² Randhir Singh, ed., *Prem Sumarg Granth* Jalandhar: New Book Company, 1965, p. 25.

I am grateful to W. H. McLeod for his observations, insights and translation of pertinent segments of the *Prem Sumarg*.

¹²³ J.S. Grewal, "The Prem Sumarg: A Theory of Sikh Social Order," Harbans Singh and N. Gerald Barrier, eds., *Punjab Past and Present. Essays in Honour of Dr. Ganda Singh* Patiala: Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, 1996, p. 170.

The emphasis on women's baptism is one of the most significant indicators of the *Prem Sumarg*'s composition during the mid-to-late nineteenth century as opposed to its claims of antiquity; earlier sources, particularly the *Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama* were unequivocal in insisting that women *not* be baptised by *khande di pahul*.

¹²⁴ Avtar Singh Vihiria, *Khalsa Dharam Shashtar* Lahore:, 1894, pp. 45-47, cited in Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, "Character and Impact of the Singh Sabha Movement on the History of the Punjab," Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Patiala: Department of History, Punjabi University, 1972, p. 134.

¹²⁵ See Uttam Singh, *Khalsa Sanskara Pustaka* Lahore: Arya Press, 1884, p. 68.

Uttam Singh does not specify which groups in particular advocated these revisions, but they are similar to those espoused by Baba Khem Singh Bedi in Falcon, *Handbook on Sikhs*, p. 58.

¹²⁶ However, women as well as men were to wear white clothes and the *kachh* [breeches]. See Uttam Singh, *Khalsa Sanskara Pustaka*, p. 68.

Guru Gobind Singh.¹²⁷ By far the most radical voice, Babu Teja Singh Overseer the leader of the Bhasaur Singh Sabha insisted that not only were women to receive baptism, but they were also to don saffron coloured turbans.¹²⁸ This became a pivotal mandate of the Babu; women who desisted in wearing the traditional male headgear were refused initiation into the Khalsa.¹²⁹

The voice of orthodoxy that was most authoritative for the general Sikh populace was that of Baba Khem Singh Bedi in the late nineteenth century.¹³⁰ However, similar to the very nature of Sanatan Sikhism espoused by Bedi, regulations outlining baptism allowed for varied and manifold interpretations of the rite. He conceded the need for women to be baptized within the Khalsa order but insisted that there be significant divergence between the actual form of baptism for women and men. By and large he advocated the usage of a one-edged sword for female baptism. If a two-edged sword was

¹²⁷ Uttam Singh purports that the Nihangs, the rigorous warrior-sect of the Khalsa known primarily for their blue garments and conspicuous steel weaponry both initiated women and required them to carry arms. See *ibid*.

¹²⁸ Teja Singh Overseer's demands that women wear a saffron turban is highly significant in light of traditional aversion among the Sikhs to the wearing of saffron coloured clothing. See Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes*, p. 697.

¹²⁹ N.G. Barrier, *The Sikhs and their Literature. A Guide to Tracts, Books and Periodicals, 1849-1910* Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1970, pp. xxvi-xxvii.

See also Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, pp. 345-346.

Although not willing to fully endorse the radical initiatives of Babu Teja Singh Overseer, the *Khalsa Advocate* describes the women of the Bhasaur group "in their picturesque attire with turbans as their headgear... Their distinctly 'manly' carriage and unfeminine behaviour were so striking that they irresistibly carried the mind back to the times when Sikh ladies stood shoulder to shoulder with their brothers and husbands in the fields of battle." *Khalsa Advocate*, April 29, 1910.

Sikh orthodoxy on the other hand was vehemently opposed to the development of females wearing turbans. The pujaris of the Golden Temple hindered the female students of Bhasaur from performing *kirtan* at this most revered of shrines. *The Akali*, June 11, 1920, cited in Amarjit Kaur, "The Nascent Sikh Politics," p. 174.

¹³⁰ With regard to the influence and authority of Baba Khem Singh Bedi over the Sikh populace, Falcon notes: "The above, as being the opinions of one who may be considered the head, from a religious point of view, of the Singhs, and as having been compiled with other Sikh authorities, is worth noting." R.W. Falcon, *Handbook on Sikhs*, p. 60.

used for women's initiation in the stirring of the sweetened water, the handle as opposed to the blade was to be employed. If the blade was utilized, distinctions were to be made between the back and the front of the weapon, the former applying to women. In addition sugar, as opposed to the traditional ingredient of *patasia* was to be used for the rite.¹³¹ Not surprisingly, the *rahit* accompanying women's differentiated initiation into the Khalsa order *also* reflected attitudes toward women of held by the Sikh orthodoxy and the wider populace; women, above all were to cheerfully obey their husbands.¹³²

The anthropologist Gilbert Lewis has attempted to explicate the parameters of that which constitutes ritual. According to Lewis ritual is exceedingly difficult to define in that its identification is inextricably bound not only to specific expressions and codes, but also to the ability to interpret what is being communicated. Ritual in essence can be

According to Lakshman Singh, Khem Singh Bedi wielded such power over the populace that his followers, after the rupture between the Amritsar and Lahore Singh Sabha and the ascension of the Lahore group, boycotted the movement in its entirety. See Ganda Singh, ed., *Bhagat Lakshman Singh*, p. 104.

¹³¹ *Sanskar Bagh* [Book of Observances], cited in Falcon, *Handbook on Sikhs*, p. 58.

With regard to the rite of *charan di pahul* traditionally associated with females, Falcon observes that the ritual continued to be utilized for birth observances as a general initiation into the faith of the Sikhs. When a child was born, the feet of the *manji* or stand upon which the Granth was kept were to be washed. The water was to be caught in an iron cup, mixed with *patasia* for a boy child and sugar for the girl and then given to the infant. For boys, the 'Bhagal Govind ka janua putr ka sabad' was to be read eleven times, then the 'Bhagotis sabad' eleven times, then the names of the ten Gurus were to be recited. This was to be followed by the prayer: "O god, by thy will a man Sikh has been born: may he be a doer of good works, be healthy and skilled in arms, pious, maintaining the Khalsa religion; in all things worthy of his ancestors, and continue the worship of the Guru." For a girl child, the following prayer was said: "O God, by thy will a girl child has been born, may she be good, pious, free from all wicked deeds, chaste, modest, sensible and charitable." See *ibid.*, pp. 56-59.

The variances between girls and boys rites, not only in the actual form of *charan ki pahul* but also in the different invocations point to the ingrained differentiation that was made between females and males. Prayers for boys included reference to the wearing of arms; modesty, piety, sensibility and charity were the attributes highly upheld for girls.

¹³² The *rahit* for women, according to the *Sansakar Bagh* were "to consider her husband as her god and obey his orders, keep him cheerful, not to associate with other men, to pay respect to her father-in-law and mother-in-law, not to wear blue pajamas, not to join in the women's mourning ceremony (of beating the breast and wailing), to give alms, not to worship Muhammadan or Hindu shrines, etc., to be modest and worship one God." See *ibid.*, pp. 56-59.

likened to a form of language, art, performance or a specific code of conduct.¹³³ Yet not just any formula of communication, action or behaviour can be construed as ritual; Lewis delineates what *is* essential to ritual:

To say the action is prescribed, that there is some ruling about the circumstances for its performance, moves closer to an answer... What is always explicit about ritual, and recognized by those who perform it, is that aspect of it which states who should do what and when. It is practical. It guides action. And phrases like 'prescribed routine', 'standardized behaviour', 'behaviour with incongruous rigidity', which appear in most of the definitions given... refer to this... The explanations for what is done may be clear, or complicated or uncertain, or multiple, or forgotten: but what to do is clear.¹³⁴

Further Lewis notes, to conform to a particularized ritual is to acknowledge that one is part of the specific group for whom the ritual has meaning.¹³⁵ By implication then, the *lack* of conformance to a particularized ritual would by the same token attest to restrictions placed upon comprehensive membership within the specific group. The argument can also be extended to explicate the status of a *segment* of the group within that of the larger body. For the purposes at hand it is useful in coming to a gendered understanding of the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in the context of group formation and identity. In particular, the parameters outlined by Lewis are helpful in understanding of the process of ritual formation put forth by the Tat Khalsa reformers within the context of the initiation rite. Clearly, in comparison to the highly standardized routine of initiation for males, female baptism even among those of the reformed Singh

¹³³ Gilbert Lewis, *Day of Shining Red. An Essay on Understanding Ritual* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 6-8.

Lewis' extensive fieldwork and ritual analysis is primarily based upon the myriad of rites and observances among the Gnaus in a West Sepik village, Papua New Guinea.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 11.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

Sabha mindset was *not* uniform, *not* precise and *not* explicit. The lack of 'prescribed routine' delineating women's initiation into the Khalsa order becomes significant in light of the highly acclaimed assertions of inherent equality of both men and women within the reformed worldview that the Tat Khalsa was attempting to restore.

Gilbert Lewis' clarification of the explicit separation between men and women in terms of ritual identity among the Gnau is particularly helpful in also understanding this divergence in ritual behaviour among the Sikhs.¹³⁶ Among the Gnau, children and women were not granted the equality or the responsibility that was accorded men. While Lewis maintains that there are a variety of influences shaping these gender differences, "rites have a special place in creating it and providing impressive direction to male aspiration. By excluding others, making some knowledge and experience esoteric, they find a justification for their capacity to act in these matters and enhance the value of what they do."¹³⁷ In essence, *control* of ritual knowledge and behaviour allowed for the creation of a tightly bonded brotherhood equipped to face the traditionally 'masculine' realities of war, disputes and defence. Similarly, the continued divergence between male and female baptism in the discourse of Sikh reform stemmed from a perceived need to control access to full-fledged and equal membership within the Khalsa order. For the militaristic, hyper-masculine roots of the Sikh initiation rite were pervasive; women had no place within the order at its time of inception or during its subsequent development. The propensity to demarcate women as 'different' and ultimately to exclude them from the consummate 'brotherhood' continued well into the twentieth century.

¹³⁶ See the chapters entitled "Views from one village," and "Pattern and motif," in *ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

Nonetheless, reformers were well aware of the incongruity between their interpretations and postulations of the Sikh tenets of equality and the divergence of practices and attitudes upholding the *secondary* ritual identity of women. Consequently, a committee was struck at the annual meeting of the Singh Sabha in Ferozepur in 1900 to come to a consensus on the matter of female initiation practices.¹³⁸ This prominent group of reformers passed a motion that the sole form of baptism to be endorsed by the Tat Khalsa was to be identical for both women and men. A carefully prescribed routine for women's baptism came to be ratified, at least for a minute sector of the Sikh populace. Not surprisingly, the variance of female baptismal arrangements already well established came increasingly to be presented as indicative of the degenerate state of contemporary Sikhism.¹³⁹ Nonetheless, despite the valiant efforts of these reformers, baptism for women, particularly the double-edged sword variety continued to be the exception rather than the norm.¹⁴⁰ This situation did not bode well for the members of the Tat Khalsa as

¹³⁸ The committee was composed of Giani Ditt Singh, Bhai Kahn Singh, Bhai Takht Singh, Giani Bhaghwan Singh, Giani Thakur Singh and Teja Singh Overseer. See Panch Khalsa Diwan, Bhasaur, *Khalsa Reht Parkash* Bhasaur, 1903, pp. 35-36, cited in G.S. Dhillon, "Character and Impact of the Singh Sabha Movement," p. 134.

¹³⁹ At a meeting of the Punjab Historical Society, February 28, 1914 a paper was presented on Sikh baptism by Rai Bahadur Pandit Sheo Narain. The author, fully endorsing the perspective of the Tat Khalsa noted that while the tradition had emerged of a double-edged sword being utilized for males and a single edged sword for females, this distinction was a *later* development. *Khalsa Advocate*, March 14, 1914.

¹⁴⁰ The *Khalsa Dharam Shastar* was an influential manual compiled under the auspices of Sodhi Ram Narain Singh, the head of the Anandpur Sodhi lineage and thus well outside of the aegis of the Singh Sabha reform movement. It continued to maintain that women were not entitled to a baptism identical to males because women were not warriors; the rite of *khande di pahul* was inaugurated to produce a warring race of men. See Sodhi Ram Narain Singh, *Khalsa Dharam Shastar* Amritsar: Sri Gurmat Press, 1908, pp. 122-123.

I am grateful to Mr. Himat Singh of Patiala, Punjab who gave a considerable amount of his time and energy in translating portions of this volume.

Barstow also notes that "[w]omen are not usually, but they are sometimes initiated in form as professors of the Sikh faith. In mingling the sugar and water for women, a one edged, and not a two edged dagger is used." See Barstow, Appendix 3, *Handbook on Sikhs*, p. 228.

the *true* guardians of the Sikh faith. Given their predicament, when newly prescribed and sanctioned female baptisms took place, they were often of the mass variety and thus highly publicized. Not surprisingly, their occurrence was acclaimed as indicative of reform achievements in alleviating the status of Sikh women.¹⁴¹

By and large however, women's initiation into the Khalsa order was not deemed as nearly as imperative as it was for men, even among the Tat Khalsa reformers. Harnam Kaur, one of the leading female promoters of Singh Sabha ideals only received initiation a number of years after playing an important role in the furtherance of Singh Sabha ideology.¹⁴² Still, contrary to Harnam Kaur's experience, her biography unequivocally maintained that baptism by *khande di pahul* for women was indeed imperative! Her biographer Surat Singh also insisted that the rite of initiation for females could be traced directly to Guru Gobind Singh and that both male and female Sikhs were obliged to observe the injunctions of the Khalsa through the maintenance of the 5 K's.¹⁴³ Not surprisingly, the position taken adeptly furthered a central Singh Sabha claim; Tat Khalsa reform initiatives were simply a *revival* of the basic tenets of equality integral to the Sikh tradition. The practical manifestation of true Sikh doctrines had however fallen into disuse given its contemporary state of debasement.¹⁴⁴

This volume was first published in 1899 but was substantially augmented in 1928 in order to "embody in brief outline the salient features of Sikh history in the first quarter of the present century, and in other ways bring it up to date." See *ibid.*, iii.

¹⁴¹ *Khalsa Advocate*, April 29, 1910, August 5, 1910.

¹⁴² While Harnam Kaur toiled for years for the Singh Sabha educational enterprise *without* having been initiated, it would have been inconceivable for her husband Bhai Thakat Singh not to have received *pahul*. By 1920 however, the situation had dramatically changed. While Singh Sabha educational institutions were still desperate for women teachers, by this time requirements for female applicants included proper initiation into the Khalsa order. See *The Akali*, November 18, 1920, cited in Amarjit Kaur, "The Nascent Sikh Politics," p. 309.

¹⁴³ Suraj Singh, *Sri Mati Bibi Harnam Kaur* Amritsar: Wazir Hind Press, 1908, pp. 30-37.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Bhai Vir Singh also addressed the issue of female baptism through his heroine Sundri. It was only upon being properly baptized by the Amrit ceremony that Sundri was equipped to face the hardships that awaited her. Moreover, her gesture of devotion had the important effect of mobilizing the entire community surrounding her to loftier heights of purpose: According to Vir Singh, "[t]his was the purity and excellence of character which the Guru had taught to the Sikhs. That is the reason why the community, overcome by the love of the Guru was ready to sacrifice itself."¹⁴⁵ Given that Sundri's life of exemplary service commenced with her baptism into the ranks of the Khalsa, Sundri regaled as the "holy goddess" was held up as the role model for contemporary women to emulate.¹⁴⁶ However, not content to merely proffer to his readers a novel vision of the effects of *proper* Sikh rituals, Bhai Vir Singh seized the opportunity to denounce all manner of custom, habit and dress of his female *contemporaries*:

O Sikh maidens of today...Just look at yourselves and find out for yourself if you are damaging the Sikh community or not! You have abandoned the *Amrit* and regarded the left-overs of robed Sadhus as part of Sikh religion...You have given up the recitation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib and disgraced your intellect by wearing threads said to be sanctified by *mantras* (talismans). You have become the butt of ridicule by replacing clean and thick garments with thin and flashy dresses... The true and unique Immortal God has been abandoned and you have taken the road to hell and persuaded your husbands and sons to follow the same foolish path. Just reflect for a moment on the calamities faced by Sundri... Remove the confusion from your mind and become pure Sikh women.¹⁴⁷

However, still not satisfied with the slow pace of disassociation between Sikh women and their Hindu counterparts in particular, Khalsa reformers continued their attempts to further extricate their females from the miscellany of identities that shaped Sikh women's

¹⁴⁵ Bhai Vir Singh, *Sundri*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

existence. In an effort to amplify distinctions between Sikh women and their co-religionists, Tat Khalsa reformers also came to address the patterns of female nomenclature that had traditionally served to distinguish Punjabi females from one another.

What's in a Name? Circumscribing Sikh Female Nomenclature:

Early sources delineating the injunctions of Guru Gobind Singh for his newly founded order asserted that not only were members of the Khalsa brotherhood to be recognized as such by outward symbolism and garb, they also placed considerable emphasis on the naming practices to be followed within the Khalsa. Those installed into the brotherhood were required to take on the surname 'Singh' and strictly prohibited from omitting the appellation in addressing another member of the brotherhood.¹⁴⁷ Needless to say, while a distinct naming practice for Sikh males was a prescribed and central aspect of Sikh identity, things were not nearly as clear for Sikh women. Injunctions regarding Khalsa naming conventions focused exclusively on males; ordinances wholly neglected naming specifications for Sikh women folk. Nonetheless, a tradition whose origin is highly obscure existed among a significant proportion of the Sikh populace, namely, the

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 99-100.

¹⁴⁸ See W. H. McLeod, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama*, p. 35, 408.

With regard to injunctions against calling a Sikh by half his name, the Chaupa Singh, Daya Singh and Mukht-nama Bhai Sahib Singh versions of rahit are in agreement. See Gurpreet Kaur, "Historical Analysis of Sikh Rahitnamas," Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Amritsar: Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, 1988, p. 368.

Nonetheless, the *hukamnamas* of Guru Gobind Singh addressed to 'my khalsa' indicate that not all individuals who comprised the 'Khalsa' had taken on the appellation 'Singh'. According to the authors, "though the *khalsa* was identified with the Sikh, it was not yet necessarily identical with the Singh.

usage of the appellation 'Kaur'. As the term 'Singh' meaning 'lion' was adopted from the Rajputs, so too was the name 'Kaur', a derivative of the Rajput term 'kanwar' customarily defined as 'prince' or 'bachelor'.¹⁴⁹ Early sources indicate that the name 'Kaur' was given to both males and females in Punjab. The appellation appears in both the *Adi Granth* and the *Dasam Granth*, the former utilizing the term in its traditional delineation of 'prince',¹⁵⁰ the latter referring to a woman's name during the time of Guru Gobind Singh.¹⁵¹ Given the paucity of sources that address Punjabi patterns of nomenclature

Nevertheless, all those who tasted the *pahul* were given the appellation of *Singh*." See J.S. Grewal and S.S. Bal, *Guru Gobind Singh. A Biographical Study* Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1987, p. 119.

¹⁴⁹ See, 'kanwar' and 'kaur', R.L. Turner, *A Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages* London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 170.

The appellation 'Kanwar' also refers to females in the present day. The highly publicized case of Roop Kanwar who was burnt to death on her husband's funeral pyre in the village of Deorala, Rajasthan in 1987 attests to its contemporary usage. See Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita, "The Burning of Roop Kanwar," *Manushi* No. 42-43, 1987, pp. 15-25.

The contemporary usage of the appellation 'Kanwar' takes on the feminine form with the second 'a' vowel being long; it can be translated as princess, virgin, unmarried girl or daughter. The second 'a' for the masculine form of 'Kanwar' is short and refers to 'prince' or 'son'. The respected scholar of Rajasthan Studies, Dr. Ann Gold also notes that 'Kanwar' is a common honourific 'middle' name for Rajput women; women of non-Rajput castes both high and low continue to use 'Devi' as a middle name. I am indebted to Dr. Gold for her assistance in pointing out the linguistic determinants of both the feminine and masculine forms of 'Kanwar'. Correspondence with Dr. Ann Gold, December, 1997.

See also the reference to Shobhag Kanwar, a high-caste Rajasthani woman in Gloria Goodwin Raheja and Ann Grodzins Gold, *Listen to the Heron's Words. Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994, pp. 164-181.

Bal and Grewal address Guru Gobind Singh's injunction regarding the appellation 'Singh', noting that the Guru, highly conscious of his *chhatra* lineage made a clear connection with his Khalsa following and kshatriya combative obligations. The appropriation of the term 'Singh', traditionally associated with the militant Rajputs corresponds to this implication. The Khalsa order however stood independent of the Brahmins and Brahmanical sanction. See Grewal and Bal, *Guru Gobind Singh*, p. 119.

¹⁵⁰ Guru Nanak's 'Rag Asa' refers to 'Koer' in the context of Babur's conquest of Punjab. The plight of the inhabitant, including princes' is described. See *Adi Granth*, p. 417.

I am indebted to Mohan Singh Johal, Secretary to the Vice-Chancellor of Punjabi University who was most helpful in discussions about the origins of 'Kaur' within Sikh history. He was a veritable font of information with regard to scriptural references.

¹⁵¹ The woman referred to is Bijay Kaur. See *Dasam Granth* Volume Two Amritsar: Bhai Chatar Singh and Jeevan Singh Publishers: 1988, p. 1053.

I am grateful for the highly instructional meeting with Satguru Jagjit Singh, the leader of the Namdhari Sikhs who pointed out the usage of 'Kaur' in the *Dasam Granth*. Private interview, Bhaini Sahib, District Ludhiana, Punjab, April, 1997.

An early example of 'Kaur' being utilized in the feminine was the Khatrani Rup Kaur who was avowedly the woman responsible for the composition of the *Charitra*, the 'Wiles of Women'. Tradition maintains

during the early and late Guru periods it is difficult to move beyond a mere verification of its usage for both males and females. It must also be noted that individuals, apart from those playing a central role in the formation of the Sikh panth or those of the upper echelons of society were seldom named in Sikh historical sources. This was particularly the case regarding the women of Sikh history.¹⁵² Questions regarding the application and incentive for the naming practices among the early Sikhs can thus at best be speculative. It does appear however that some variances in the usage of the name 'Kaur' emerged during the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries between the Jats and Khatri of Punjab. 'Kaur' continued to be utilized by both males and females of the Khatri caste, but by the eighteenth century exclusively referring to females among the Jats.¹⁵³

Appropriation of highly specific Rajput distinctions such as 'Kanwar/Kaur' and 'Singh'

that she attempted to seduce Guru Gobind Singh. See McLeod, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama*, p. 169, # 177.

¹⁵² For example, the early janam-sakhi literature, while claiming to be authoritative on the life of Guru Nanak, are at considerable variance with regard to both his mother's and wife's name. See Chapter Two.

¹⁵³ Ganesh Das' *Char Bagh-i-Panjab*, completed in 1849 makes repeated references a number of both Sikh and Hindu males who were given the name 'Kaur'. The work is by and large focused on the Khatri of Punjab before the rule of the British. See J.S. Grewal, Indu Banga, trs. And eds., *Early Nineteenth Century Panjab. From Ganesh Das' Char Bagh-i-Panjab* Amritsar: Guru Nanak University, 1975, p. 27.

In a number of instances the name appears to be utilized as 'prince'. See pp. 66, 82. In other cases the name was simply a middle or last name without any connotations of princedom. See pp. 19, 22, 42, 58, 69, 94, 95, 137. It was also the name of an Udasi Faqir of the order of Nanak; Udasis, similar to the bulk of the Khatri population refused to heed Guru Gobind's invitation to join the Khalsa brotherhood. See p. 76, *ibid*.

A central figure in the formation of the Khalsa order during the time of Guru Gobind Singh was Ram Kaur, a scribe and close associate of Guru Gobind Singh. After his baptism he was renamed Gurbakhsh Singh. See *Mukat-Nama*, *Rahit-Nama*, p. 16, cited in Ganda Singh, "Hair and Turban. Their Importance for the Sikhs," *The Punjab Past and Present* Vol. XVI-I (April 1982), No. 31, p. 202.

It cannot be said that Khatri women consistently adopted the name 'Kaur'. For most, at least among the upper echelons, 'Devi' the name customarily given to Hindu females continued to be utilized as a middle or last name by Khatri Sikhs as well as Hindus. One of the wives of Guru Gobind Singh, also of the Khatri lineage was Sahib Devan. The wife of Guru Gobind Singh's archrival however, also of the Khatri lineage was known as Punjab Kaur. See Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs. The Sikh Gurus, 1469-1708* Vol. I, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1984, p. 233.

The scant sources available certainly give little indication of uniform practices in this regard. It is most likely that women for the most part were only given a single name.

can most likely be attributed to active attempts by specific segments of the Sikh population during the mid-to-late Guru period to *rajputize* their identity.¹⁵⁴ This process of 'rajputization' becomes intelligible particularly in light of the elevation of the lowly Jat to a hegemonic position within the social hierarchy of the Sikh Panth, but the continued stigma attached to the Jat within the wider social arena.¹⁵⁵ By the nineteenth and twentieth centuries British assumptions pertaining to the 'manliness' of both the Rajputs and the Jats had accomplished a great deal in upgrading the status of the Jat; at least for the colonial masters the heritage of the Jats and the Rajputs were inextricably intertwined.¹⁵⁶ The common naming practices of the Jats and Rajputs presumably benefited colonial claims regarding this kinship.

Certainly it was the Jat populace that formed the bulk of the new order put in place by Guru Gobind Singh; Jat males in particular followed the injunction *en masse* to take on the appellation 'Singh'. As already noted, Jats, far more than the highly established and

¹⁵⁴ While the concept undergirding the actual process of 'rajputization' has been a pivotal aspect of my own thought processes regarding the origins and development of the name 'Kaur', I am grateful to Jeevan Deol for the feasible term 'rajputization' to better explicate this process.

Archana Varma's research among a low caste group, the Mahtons, who were also agriculturalists in Punjab but never attained the status of the Jat indicates a similar process of 'rajputization' to enhance their position. In seeking recognition, Mahtons adopted the designation 'Rajput Mahta Sikhs'. She further notes that some Jat villagers of Bains followed upper caste Rajputs in not practicing *karewa*. See Varma, "Status and Migration among the Punjabis of Paldi, British Columbia, and Paldi, Punjab," p. 39, 37.

¹⁵⁵ Widely known proverbs testify to the prevailing negative attitudes toward the Jat. In particular, Jats continued to be presented as crude and averse to education: "What does a Jat know about dainties? He might as well be eating toad-stools;" "A scythe has no sheath, a Jat has no learning." Proverbs also attest to traditional attitudes of superiority held by the Jat: "The Jat stood on his corn-heap and called out to the King's elephant drivers, 'Hi there, what will you take for those little donkeys?'" See Sir Herbert Risley, *The People of India* W. Crooke, ed., Second Edition London: W. Thacker & Co., 1915, pp. 309-310.

¹⁵⁶ According to Ibbetson writing in the early twentieth century, whatever the original lineage of both groups "the two *now* form a common stock, the distinction between the Jat and the Rajput being social rather than ethnic" [*italics mine*]. Jats however fell from their 'original' high status through their common practice of widow remarriage. See Denzil Ibbetson, *Panjab Castes* Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1993, pp. 100-101, (first published in 1916).

Ibbetson earlier maintained that the Jats and Rajputs "both sprung from a common Indo-Aryan stock..." Denzil Ibbetson, *Census Report*, 1881, para. 446, cited in Risley, *The People of India*, p. 93.

traditionally respected Khatri were in need of signifiers that connoted their rise in the social hierarchical patterns of the day. While Khatri were content to stay with the established customs of nomenclature, traditional biases against the inferior societal position of the Jats were compelling incentives to consolidate their hegemonic position within Punjab society by taking on distinctive Rajput and thus highly esteemed names.¹⁵⁷ It is entirely plausible that with the consolidation of Rajput martial identity through the inauguration of the Khalsa, particularly with the adoption of 'Singh' nomenclature for Jat males, the Rajput name 'Kanwar' and its Punjabi equivalent 'Kaur' was embraced as its natural ancillary for females.¹⁵⁸ By the eighteenth century this was particularly the case among women of the newly established aristocracy, the leadership of the misldoms that were largely dominated by Jat leadership.¹⁵⁹ Numerous records indicate that women of

See also B.S. Dhillon, *History and Study of the Jats, with reference to the Sikhs, Scythians, Alans, Sarmatians, Goths, and Jutes*, Gloucester, Ontario, Beta Publishers, Inc., 1994.

¹⁵⁷ Although the Jat Sikhs in particular had taken on traditional Rajput nomenclature, Rajputs themselves, highly fastidious in preserving their esteemed lineage retained their contempt toward the 'lowly' Jats. The Rajput Princess Brinda who married into the princely Jat Kapurthala family notes that other Rajputs were highly opposed to her marriage into Sikh royalty. The Kapurthala family on the other hand was elated by the match. Brinda writes of her new father-in-law: "Beneath his gleaming gold turban, crowned with an emerald tiara, his dark eyes flashed with the satisfaction of a leader who brought his house back into the dynasty of Rajput." See Brinda, *Maharani. The Story of an Indian Princess*, pp. 1-39, 98.

¹⁵⁸ Latif makes note of the of Guru Gobind Singh's adoption of the title 'Singh' heretofore exclusively assumed by the Rajputs, the foremost warrior-class among the Hindus. He notes, "[t]hus, the Sikhs felt themselves at once elevated to rank with the highest, and their leader opened to them the dazzling prospect of earthly glory, rousing their military valour and inciting them to deeds of courage." See Syad Muhammad Latif, *History of the Panjab From the Remotest Antiquity to the Present Time* New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers, 1994, p. 335, first published in 1889.

¹⁵⁹ After the death of Guru Gobind Singh, Banda Bahadur led the Sikhs in a number of uprisings against the Mughal authorities from 1709 to 1716. Fierce repression against the Sikh followed and the Singhs began a roving life of outlaws in small bands. By the early 1750s, the leaders of these bands began occupying pockets of land in the Bari Doab and gradually extending their domain through the plundering of additional territory. In 1765 Sikh rule was established; the new leaders were by and large of the common Jat stock and the territory under each of these independent leaders was known as a 'misl'. By the nineteenth century the various misls were subverted or subjugated by Ranjit Singh, who by the time of his death in 1839 had through a process of unification established the last and mighty Indian empire to be taken over by British rule. See J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of Punjab* The New Cambridge History of India, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 82-100.

See also Bhagat Singh, *A History of Sikh Misals* Patiala: Punjabi University Publication Bureau, 1993.

Sikh royalty were invariably given two names, the latter as 'Kaur'.¹⁶⁰ The usage of 'Kaur' for Sikh princesses, given the term's implications of royalty is highly understandable among the newly established Sikh nobility of Punjab. The naming practices of the elite however offer little insight into the patterns of nomenclature among the masses. While the signifier 'Kaur' among the females of Sikh royalty was eventually embraced by the wider populace as well, it is highly conceivable that single names were more common for women before and after the eighteenth century than dual names.¹⁶¹

Unfortunately the earliest attempt made to elucidate the linguistic conventions of Punjab offers little guidance or insight in this regard. The first dictionary of the Punjabi language published in 1854 by the Lodhiana Mission retained the princely definition of 'kaur' and its alternate reference to a *male* child.¹⁶² Although evidence points to the signifier being utilized by both Sikh males and females throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this inaugural *Dictionary of the Punjabi Language* makes no reference to its usage by Sikhs in particular. Nor does it refer to specific cultural conventions of the term as an addendum for females. The dictionary of Bhai Maya Singh of 1895 also refers exclusively to its masculine and princely delineation.¹⁶³ The latter definition is indeed surprising for by the late nineteenth century British accounts

¹⁶⁰ See for example, 'Genealogical Table', Latif, *History of the Punjab*, p. 335.

¹⁶¹ This was the case in Guru Gobind Singh's first two wives, Sundri and Jito and the majority of the women of the Guru lineage. By the mid-nineteenth century, even among the elite of Punjab women had only single names. The famed Sikh writer Giani Gian Singh's mother's name was 'Desan'. See Bhagat Singh, "Giani Gian Singh," *Punjab History Conference. Ninth Session. Proceedings* (April 1976), p. 180

¹⁶² L. Janver, ed., *Dictionary of the Punjabi Language* Delhi: Nirmal Pub. and Distributors, 1987, p. 109, (first published in 1854 by the Lodhiana Mission).

¹⁶³ Bhai Maya Singh, *The Punjabi Dictionary* Delhi: National Book Shop, 1992, (first published in 1895). The definition given by Maya Singh of Kaur is: "a boy, a son, a child; the title of a prince, the younger son of a kin, Kumar."

indicate that the customary usage of the appellation 'Kaur' for males had apparently ceased and it was henceforth consigned to an exclusively feminine signifier.¹⁶⁴

Needless to say, the scant sources available with regard to the appellation 'Kaur' as well as its wide though inconsistent application throughout Sikh history make a definitive explication of the normative naming practices among Sikh females impossible. Even the increasingly authoritative *Prem Sumarg* offers little insight in this regard; it does however point to the variability of female patterns of nomenclature among the Sikhs. Completely omitting mention of the appellation 'Kaur' in its injunctions, females after being initiated into the Khalsa order were instructed to add the epithet '*Devi*' alongside their given name.¹⁶⁵ Given the paucity and divergence of source material with regard to Sikh female naming practices, certitude can only be replaced by speculation. At best until the beginning of the twentieth century, 'Kaur' as a feminine epithet can only be delineated as indicative of a diffuse *cultural* identity but as having no definitive *religious* signification.¹⁶⁶ In light of Gilbert Lewis' delineation of ritual as *prescribed* behaviour,

¹⁶⁴ According to Rose the appellation 'Kaur' "could hardly be borne by a man." Rose, *The Glossary of the Tribes and Castes*, p. 551.

While 'Kaur' as a middle or last name for males ceased to be utilized by the late nineteenth century, it continued to be employed spuriously as a *first* name. The famed compiler of the *Guru Shabad Ratan Prakash*, a thesaurus of the *Adi Granth* published in 1923 underwent a name change from Puran Singh to Kaur Singh upon his baptism in 1906. Soon thereafter, he began to identify himself instead as Akali Kaur Singh Nihang. See Harbans Singh, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II Patiala: Punjabi University Press, 1996, pp. 463-464.

¹⁶⁵ Randhir Singh, ed. *Prem Sumarg Granth*, p. 25.

¹⁶⁶ The highly political Christian advocate for women Rajkumari Amrit Kaur who was a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi and was given the post of Health Minister in the Government of India Cabinet, was perhaps the most distinguished 'Kaur' dotting the political landscape of the early-to-mid twentieth century. Her father was ruler of Kapurthala but gave up the throne when he converted to Christianity in 1874. (According to John Lowrie, the British Government could not recognize the claim of a Christian in a Sikh state. The British administration compensated him by appointing him as Manager of Oudh Estate instead). See John C. Lowrie, "Some Christian Leaders in the Punjab," *Punjab History Conference. First Session. Proceedings* (November 1968), pp. 180-181.

Clearly, Kaur's continued usage of the appellation 'Kaur' as a Christian, despite its increasingly predominant usage among the Sikhs is indicative of the fluidity of communal distinctions in Punjab.

the designation 'Kaur' had no standardized import in a ritualistic sense. The appellation 'Singh' on the other hand *was* a specifically prescribed injunction and consequential to the rite of initiation; it was also central to the identity formation of Khalsa Sikhs at large. It would appear however that by the mid-nineteenth century the epithet '*Singhni*' had become the *linguistic* complement to 'Singh'.¹⁶⁷ Its linguistic correspondence must be stressed given the appellation's lack of ritual signification. While for males the name 'Singh' connoted initiation into the Khalsa, the position of women in the order remains obscure given the explicit mandate of the eighteenth century Khalsa brotherhood *not* to administer *khande di pahul* to the female sex. Further, prevailing conventions invariably restricted women *vis-à-vis* Guru Gobind Singh's central injunction with regard to the mandatory wearing of arms.

The diversity of women's naming patterns continued well beyond the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁸ There were however distinct rumblings of a shift in the significance of female

See also Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, *Woman in India* Congress Golden Jubilee Brochure No. 9, Swaraj Bhawan, Allahabad: All India Congress Committee, 1935; Amrit Kaur, *Challenge to Women* Allahabad: New Literature, 1946.

¹⁶⁷ In Janver's dictionary the term 'Singh' is translated as 'lion'. He also provides the ritual signification of the term; a 'Singh' is denoted as a follower of Guru Gobind Singh who has been formally initiated by *pahul*. The term 'Singhni' too denotes not only a 'lioness' but also a female Singh. See L. Janver, *Dictionary of the Punjabi Language*, pp. 55-56.

The terms 'Singhni' is not utilized in the earliest extant *Rahit* of the mid-eighteenth century. According to McLeod's translation of the *Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama*, female Sikhs are instead referred to as *Gursikhnis*. See McLeod, *Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama*, esp. pp. 40-41.

The precise notation of the *Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama* with regard to females is "*guru ki sikhani*". I am grateful to Dr. McLeod for his observation of the more explicit wording of the text. Private correspondence with W.H. McLeod, October, 1999.

¹⁶⁸ Names of prominent women among the Singh Sabha movement who collected funds for the victims of the Kangra Valley earthquake attest to this diversity. Of the ninety-nine names of women listed in the *Khalsa Advocate* less than half of the entries included the appellation 'Kaur'. The majority of women were reported as having only one name, or were noted as 'Singhni', or had two names other than the epithet 'Kaur'. This included names such as 'Dai' or 'Devi'. See *Khalsa Advocate*, May 6, 1905. Lakshman Singh sheds some light on the naming patterns of notables among the orthodox and aristocratic echelons among the Sikhs. The wife of Baba Khem Singh Bedi was Mata Bhan Dai; Bhan Dai instructed Lakshman Singh's mother Bhagatani Gurditti in Gurmukhi. Another prominent woman of the Sodhi lineage who started the Sodhi Gurbachan Singh Khalsa High School and held a position of

naming patterns among the Tat Khalsa reformers. The impetus for this change is not difficult to appreciate or to understand. While Hindu and Muslim women of Punjab were securely distinguished by appellations distinct to their communities such as 'Devi' or 'Begum' respectively, Sikh female identity remained indistinct and multifarious.

Lakshman Singh tells of an encounter that brings the distinctions between women of the Hindu and Muslim community based on the naming conventions of each community to light. The incident revolved around the 'language issue' in Punjabi schools, in this case, whether Sanskrit or Persian was to be taught. Bhagat Lakshman Singh was an avid promoter of Sanskrit and took it upon himself to convert students to the cause.

Addressing a Hindu boy, Lakshman Singh queried of him:

'[w]ill you give up Persian and take up Sanskrit instead?' 'Why should I? I am not going to turn into a Brahman priest', was the reply. I then turned to a Musalman child, 'Kaka', repeated I, 'Will you take up Sanskrit in place of Persian?' 'Am I a Hindu?' was this child's reply. I again turned to the previous Hindu child and said, 'Are you a Musalman, my boy? Yes you are. You see you are learning a language of the Musalmans'. And, added I, '*Is your mother's name Bibi Jamalo or Begam Bano?*' 'No, my mother's name is Bishen Devi' was the angry reply... [italics mine].¹⁶⁹

Albeit barely discernible, opposition to the ambiguous nature of Sikh female nomenclature was beginning to make an impression on the Sikh literary horizon. Bhai Vir Singh's novel

honour for her educational work was Mata Raj Devi. Other important women mentioned by him include Sardarni Bishen Dai, the wife of Sirdar Kirpal Singh Chadha and Bibi Bhan Devi, the sister of Sardar Lal Singh, a powerful member of the Sikh aristocracy in Rawalpindi during Sikh rule. Lakshman Singh's grandmother was known as Gulab Devi. The Sikh heritage is however distinguishable by his grandfather's name of Sirdar Karam Singh. Their names attest to the fluidity of the relationship between Sikhs and Hindus in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Ganda Singh, ed., *Bhagat Lakshman Singh*, pp. 9-12, 239.

Of the Udasi order, a highly influential personage was Panditta Jeewan Mukta; the first woman to present a paper at the Sikh Educational Conference was Bibi Savitri Devi. Further, Mai Amar Devi was a highly acclaimed teacher in the Singh Sabha educational establishment. See *Khalsa Advocate*, Mar. 17, 1911, August 15, 1904, Jan. 3, 1914, Jan. 4, 1908.

¹⁶⁹ See Ganda Singh, ed., *Bhagat Lakshman Singh*, pp. 110-111.

Sundri published just before the dawn of the twentieth century brings what would appear to be an inconsequential censure to the fore. For Surastri's (Sundri's earlier name) initiation into the Khalsa fold by the *Amrit* ceremony was accompanied by a change of name; henceforth she was to be known as Sunder *Kaur* and popularly as Sundri.¹⁷⁰

Another seemingly innocuous though important indicator of this shift can be traced to Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha's celebrated tract, *Ham Hindu Nahin* [We Are Not Hindus]. According to Kahn Singh, Guru Gobind Singh pronounced himself as the father, and Sahib *Kaur* not *Devan* as the mother of the Khalsa.¹⁷¹ The context of this change in nomenclature, from Sahib Devan to Sahib Kaur is highly significant. For according to the worldview of Kahn Singh of Nabha, Sikhs were not Hindus; 'Hindu' names, particularly those associated with the inauguration of the Khalsa necessitated transformation into a form acceptable to the increasingly defined ideology of the Tat Khalsa. This purging of 'hinduized' names can best be understood within the context of the *larger* issue of Singh Sabha reformers' attempts to distance themselves from the ever menacing Hindu aspects from *within* their own history. Indubitably, early Sikh accounts consistently maintained that Guru Gobind Singh not only paid homage to the Goddess Devi, but that she also

¹⁷⁰ Bhai Vir Singh, *Sundri*, p. 26

¹⁷¹ See Kahn Singh Nabha, *Ham Hindu Nahin* [We Are Not Hindus] Amritsar, 1914, pp. 4-9, first published by Khalsa Press, 1899, reproduced in part in McLeod, *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990, pp. 134-136.

According to Macauliffe and other Sikh historiographers, Sahib Devan was offered to the Guru in marriage but was rejected by Gobind Singh on the grounds of his having relinquished family life. She did however agree to a life of service to the Guru without conjugal privileges and thus a marriage took place between them. One day however as she was shampooing her husband, she conceded to the Guru that as his two previous wives had borne sons, she too desired a son to call her own. The Guru replied, "I will give thee a son who will abide for ever. I will put the whole Khalsa into thy lap." See Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion* Volume V, pp. 4, 143-144.

played a central role in the actual creation of the Khalsa.¹⁷² According to an eighteenth century narrative, Kalika or Devi was the 'mother' of the new order.¹⁷³ By the mid-eighteenth century there was a definitive shift in the 'parenthood' of the Khalsa; Ratan Singh Bhangu's *Panth Prakash* came to sanction to Mata Sahib Devan and Guru Gobind Singh as the mother and father of the Khalsa.¹⁷⁴ The development of Mata Sahib Devan as the mother of the Khalsa as opposed to the Goddess Devi was likely to have been influenced by Bhangu's attempt to establish for his British audience the distinct nature of the Sikhs from the wider Hindu community.¹⁷⁵ Devi as *Mata* of the Khalsa would have

¹⁷² According to McLeod, the *gur-bilas* genre of literature is similar to the *janam-sakhi* tradition in that more than being an accurate statement of historical events it offers testimony to the beliefs and worldviews of its writers. The Goddess Devi is elemental to the *gur-bilas* literature of both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See McLeod, *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*, pp. 11-12, and *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, pp. 90-91.

¹⁷³ The *Gurbilas Daswin Patshahi* was written by Sukha Singh in 1797, the height of Sikh rule in Punjab. See Sukha Singh, *Gurbilas Daswin Patshahi* Lahore: Lala Ram Chand Manak Tahla, 1912, pp. 596, 203, cited in Surjit Singh Hans, "Historical Analysis of Sikh Literature, 1500-1850," Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Amritsar: Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, 1980, p. 427, 419. Another important account is Sainapat's *Sri Gur Sobha*, the earliest example of the *gur-bilas* literature stemming either from 1711 or 1745. Sahib Devan receives no mention by Sainapati in conjunction with the creation of the Khalsa order. The author does present the earliest perspective on the parentage of the Khalsa. For Sainapat, Guru Gobind Singh is *both* the father and the mother of the Khalsa. See J.S. Grewal, *From Guru Nanak to Maharajah Ranjit Singh* Amritsar: Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, 1982, pp. 79-80.

¹⁷⁴ Ratan Singh Bhangu was invited by Captain Murray of the British army to relate the story of the Sikhs to him. In 1841 the *Panth Prakash* was published and answered the various queries Murray had with regard to the development Sikh history. With regard to the creation of the Khalsa, Bhangu notes: "What can I do with these Sikhs?" The Guru asked himself. 'They refuse to accept the sovereignty which I want to confer of them.' The omniscient Guru who knows all things discerned the reason. 'The form of baptism which they receive is to blame,' he reflected. '*Charan-amrit* encourages a docile nature. It does not inspire the spirited fervour which alone can meet the need... They must therefore be transformed. They must be infused with a spirit which will strike fear in the hearts of others. They must assume martial names and they must receive a baptism which will impart this spirit.' ... Thus the Guru reasoned and from thought he proceeded to action... Thus the Khalsa would itself be God, possessor of all divine attributes and subject only to the Guru. All superstition would be cast aside. Sikhs would no longer worship spirits, tombs or cremation grounds, nor would they pay homage to popular deities. [They would set themselves apart from Hindu society], renouncing the frontal mark and refusing to wear either sacred thread or dhoti. Together they would constitute a single caste, all eating from the same vessel and all united in the same resolve." See Ratan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Prakash* 16:1-36. Vir Singh edition, Amritsar, 1962, pp. 40-42, reproduced in McLeod, *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*, pp. 71-73.

¹⁷⁵ The *Gurbilas Patshahi* 10 attributed to Koer Singh of the mid-eighteenth century however continued to maintain that Devi played a central role in the development of the Khalsa. Moreover, the Goddess is

made this distinction highly untenable. For similar reasons Devi had also disappeared at the time of *amrit* preparation in the *Prem Sumarg*.¹⁷⁶ This development culminated with the Singh Sabha reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the Devi could have no place within the worldview the Tat Khalsa was valiantly attempting to contour, particularly in light of Singh Sabha objectives to *conclusively* establish Sikh distinctiveness from the wider Hindu community. Earlier claims regarding Guru Gobind Singh's homage to the Goddess were met by calls for pragmatism. According to one writer: "[W]ho out of the bedlam would ever believe that the Great Guru approached a goddess for help in founding a religion inculcating the worship of none else but God, and condemning that of even Durga whom the Guru is alleged to have addressed, adored and worshipped?"¹⁷⁷

Albeit inconsistently, attempts to establish distinct 'Sikh' patterns of nomenclature for women continued.¹⁷⁸ By 1909, enthusiastic attempts to rewrite history, Sikh women's history in particular, accompanied this seemingly innocuous transformation of Sahib Devan's name and the eradication of Durga among Tat Khalsa writings. In fact, Singh Sabha claims of females' unobstructed inclusivity in terms of ritual signification and distinctiveness within the order of the Khalsa necessitated novel versions of historiography. Max Arthur Macauliffe, the celebrated British historian was particularly

presented as responsible for its very creation. See *Gurbilas Patshahi 10*, Shamsheer Singh Ashok, ed., Patiala: Punjabi University Press, 1967, p. 103, cited in Surjit Hans, *A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature* Jalandhar, ABS Publishers, 1988, p. 267.

¹⁷⁶ Gurpreet Kaur, "Historical Analysis of Sikh Rahitnamas," p. 349.

¹⁷⁷ *Khalsa Advocate*, August 19, 1916.

Here the writers invoke the opinions of Macauliffe in rejecting Guru Gobind Singh's worship of Durga.

¹⁷⁸ While Vir Singh clearly connected the appellation 'Kaur' with his heroine's baptismal rite, he nonetheless maintained Sahib Devan's original name as the mother of the Khalsa. See Bhai Vir Singh, *Sundri*, p. 26.

obliging in this regard.¹⁷⁹ By-passing all early historical sources, the third wife of Guru Gobind Singh, Sahib Devan is said by Macauliffe to have been baptised by Guru Gobind Singh and as subsequently being renamed 'Sahib Kaur'.¹⁸⁰ The influence of Singh Sabha reform initiatives are palpable here, given an earlier assertion by Macauliffe that Guru Gobind Singh omitted women in his directives regarding the rite of initiation into the newly founded order of the Khalsa.¹⁸¹

Needless to say, the shift from Sahib Devan to Sahib Kaur was by the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century in its rudimentary stage and thus inconsistently endorsed.

¹⁷⁹ Macauliffe devoted fifteen years to his magnum opus, *The Sikh Religion*. His predecessor, Earnest Trumpp had come under a great deal of fire from within the Sikh community in light of his interpretations of Sikh sacred scripture and religion. Macauliffe was determined to by-pass the opprobrium of the Sikhs. Relying heavily upon interpretations from prominent individuals within the Singh Sabha movement such as Bhai Khan Singh of Nabha, Macauliffe ensured that his writings were by and large approved of by the new leaders of the Sikh community. Further, Macauliffe submitted drafts of his work to a special committee established by the Khalsa Diwan of Amritsar. According to Barrier, the "final drafts therefore resulted from a lengthy series of reviews and alterations, in a sense the product of compromises and a composite of documents rather than the work of a single person." See N.G. Barrier, "Trumpp and Macauliffe: Western Students of Sikh History and Religion," Fauja Singh, ed., *Historians and Historiography of the Sikhs* New Delhi: Oriental Publishers & Distributors, 1978, pp. 176-177.

¹⁸⁰ See Max Arthur Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. V, pp. 143-144.

The earliest accounts referring to the third wife of Guru Gobind Singh stem from the early eighteenth century. Both Mata Sahib Devan and Mata Sundri are clearly noted as writing *Hukamnamas* to assemblies of Sikhs regarding community life in the early eighteenth century. They pertained specifically to offerings to be made for the community kitchen and the fostering of fraternal causes. See Ganda Singh, ed., *Hukamname* Patiala: Punjabi University, 1967, pp. 197, 221, 211, cited in Gurpreet Kaur, "Historical Analysis of Sikh Rahitnamas," p. 109.

Kesar Singh Chhibber is responsible for the earliest major writing of the eighteenth century after Sainapat's *Gur Sobha*. Chhibber adds a fascinating dimension to the extant information available on the third wife of Guru Gobind Singh; Mata Sahib Devan, according to his *Bansavlinama* was the Guru of the Sikhs for twenty-five years after the death of Guru Gobind Singh. See Kesar Singh Chhibber, *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka*, R.S. Jaggi, ed., Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1972, p. 198, cited in Surjit Hans, *A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature*, p. 285.

As already noted, a pivotal work of the mid-nineteenth century was Ratan Singh Bhangu's *Prachin Panth Prakash* written between the time of Maharajah Ranjit Singh's death and British conquest of Punjab. Again, Gobind Singh's wife is referred to as Sahib Devan. See Ratan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Parkash* Bhai Vir Singh, ed., Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar, 1939, pp. 1789-1790.

According to Macauliffe however, a number of the Guru Mahals besides 'Sahib Kaur' were also named 'Kaur', although it is difficult to ascertain whether these name changed are indicative of the Singh Sabha influenced penchant to rewrite history. Ramo, the mother of Guru Angad was apparently renamed Daya Kaur; Guru Ram Das' mother's name is given as Anup Devi though Macauliffe stipulates that she was known as Daya Kaur after her marriage. Another Guru Mahal associated with the appellation 'Kaur' was Krishan Kaur, wife of Har Krishen. See *The Sikh Religion* Vol. II, pp. 1, 87-88, Vol. IV, p. 315.

¹⁸¹ Proponents of the Singh Sabha reform movement who insisted that women were initiated as early as 1750, objected to Macauliffe's earlier observations. See Max Arthur Macauliffe, *Calcutta Review*, 1881,

Re-defining the Sikh Code of Conduct in the Twentieth Century:

Given the variety of claims, doctrines and attitudes in the development of the Sikh tradition, a prominent group of Singh Sabha reformers also took issue with the existing Sikh codes of conduct stemming from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁸² The discrepant injunctions found within these codes were deemed as having been tainted by the ever-pervasive Hindu tradition. The objectives of this small group of notables were primarily focused on eliminating the diversity of practices among the Sikhs by formulating an undefiled Sikh code that concurred with the reformed worldview of the early twentieth century.¹⁸³ They also addressed the performance of life-cycle rituals, an aspect that earlier codes had neglected.¹⁸⁴ In 1915 a prescriptive manual known as the *Gurmat*

p. 162, and Khazan Singh, *Philosophic History of the Sikh Religion*, Lahore, 1914, p. 166, cited in H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes*, p. 696.

Macauliffe was sufficiently persuaded by the Singh Sabha reform endeavour that he also endeavoured to refute historical sources claiming that Guru Gobind Singh had three wives; Sundari was claimed to be an alternate epithet of Jito and not the name of a third wife. This adjustment in the number of the wives of Guru Gobind Singh is indicative of the systematic attempts made by the Singh Sabha reformers to purge spurious aspects of Sikh history not conducive to the highly refined Tat Khalsa mindset. It was thus important that the *beau ideal* of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh be represented as having only one wife. See Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion* Volume V, pp. 4, 143-144.

Nonetheless, reformers could not deny that polygamy existed within their history. Out-workings of this concession can be found within the contemporary and authoritative 'Sikh Code of Conduct', which stipulates that Sikhs *generally* are not to have more than wife [italics mine]. See Dharam Parchar Committee, *The Sikh Reht Maryada* [The Code of Sikh Conduct and Conventions] Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, 1994, p. 29.

¹⁸² The members of the original committee seeking amendments to the existing *rahit* included such notables as Gurbakhsh Singh, Bhai Vir Singh, Jodh Singh, Bhai Thakat Singh, Teja Singh of Bhasaur, and Sardar Trilochan Singh. See "Sikh Sanskar Vidya," *Punjabi Bhain*, (July 1912), p. 41.

¹⁸³ As noted earlier, Baba Khem Singh Bedi in the late nineteenth century had already produced a code of conduct, the *Sansakr Bagh* that was highly influential among his large following; this compilation was however held suspect by the 'true' Tat Khalsa.

¹⁸⁴ Harjot Oberoi purports that the earliest *rahit-namas* omitted reference to the rules of passage rites; these included birth, marriage and death rituals. The *Prem Sumarg* and *Sau Sakhian* both heavily relied upon by the earlier Namdhari reformers briefly mention rites of passage, but did little to elucidate these rituals. According to Oberoi it is probable that the specific attention to these rites indicate their later date of composition. Harjot S. Oberoi, "From Ritual to Counter-Ritual: Rethinking the Hindu-Sikh Question, 1884-1915," Joseph T. O'Connell, et al., eds., *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century*. P. 155.

Prakas was produced which delineated an amended and 'correct' order of *rahit* for Sikhs.¹⁸⁵ Not surprisingly, the new code determined that both men and women were to be initiated into the Khalsa order by *khande di pahul*.¹⁸⁶ Perhaps more significantly, the document did *not* attend to the increasingly persistent voices that were advocating a unified and distinctive form of nomenclature for Sikh females; the *Gurmat Prakas* was silent about 'Kaur' as an epithet for Sikh females. Moreover, it evidently rejected the name 'Devi' for Sikh women who were being baptised into the Khalsa order as sanctioned by the *Prem Sumarg*.¹⁸⁷ Further, the 'mother' of the Khalsa was designated as Sahib Devan not Sahib Kaur, in spite of the latter usage becoming increasingly widespread among Singh Sabha narratives and reports.¹⁸⁸ Evidently a consensus was not possible in this regard even among the tightly knit fraternity that constituted the leadership of the Singh Sabha movement. Ultimately, despite the high hopes and hard wrought efforts of

¹⁸⁵ The committee seeking amendments to the existing *rahit* initially met in 1910. It was not until 1915, after years of intense deliberation that a book of order known as *Gurmat Parkas* was completed. See Chief Khalsa Diwan, *Gurmat Parkas* Amritsar: C.K.D., 1952, p. 11, (first published in 1915).

I am indebted to Harjot Oberoi for his translation efforts and insights into this document.

For background information of the *Gurmat Prakas* see W.H. McLeod, *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*, p. 79.

¹⁸⁶ *Gurmat Parkas*, p. 11.

Nonetheless, when a committee was formed in 1920 to address the controversial issue of gurdwara management, the issue of women's baptism once again came to the fore. Sadhu Singh Nihang who was elected as one of the official *panj piare*, when examined with regard to doctrinal considerations continued to maintain that women being the 'weaker' sex were to receive baptism by a one-edged sword as opposed to a double-edged sword. At this point however, Sikh women themselves rose up and insisted that the hard wrought reforms were to stay in place. *The Akali*, Nov. 25, 1920, cited in Amarjit Kaur, "The Nascent Sikh Politics," pp. 789-796.

¹⁸⁷ Randhir Singh, ed., *Prem Sumarg Granth*, p. 25.

¹⁸⁸ *Gurmat Parkas*, pp. 28, 26.

An early twentieth century account by Khazan Singh regarding Guru Gobind Singh's third wife, while maintaining historical sources that designated her as Sahib Devan noted that she was also known as Sahib Kaur. Khazan Singh however was silent with regard to Sahib Devan's baptism into the Khalsa. See Khazan Singh, *History and Philosophy of the Sikh Religion* Part I, Lahore: Newal Kishore Press, 1914, pp. 165-166.

these notables, the *Gurmat Prakas* never gained widespread acceptance among the Sikh community.¹⁸⁹

This impasse necessitated another attempt in 1931 to conclusively delineate Sikh *rahit*, this time under the auspices of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. The final result however only appeared in 1950 as the *Sikh Reht Maryada*; by this time it was finally recognized as the definitive statement of conduct for Sikhs.¹⁹⁰ What had during the early years of the twentieth century remained an ill-defined, disjunctive and even cryptic endorsement of Sikh nomenclature for females had by this time been transformed to the level of prescription for Sikh females and fundamental to their very identity. Upon a child's birth, boys were required to be given the suffix 'Singh' and girls the suffix 'Kaur'.¹⁹¹ As has already been noted this naming practice among the Sikhs in a *culturally* significant manner had long been adopted, at least among a portion of the populace. Here however the appellation 'Kaur' as a specific Sikh *symbol* was for the first time officially sanctioned.¹⁹² Mata Sahib *Kaur* too was by this time firmly entrenched

¹⁸⁹ McLeod, *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*, p. 79.

The Chief Khalsa Diwan issued a letter in October, 1910 advising the readership of the journal *Punjabi Bhain* that a draft of the document had been completed. It also outlined the plan of action to be taken with regard to the dissemination of the new *rahit*. Two thousand copies were to be printed and distributed to all the Singh Sabha headquarters, to the major Thakats, Diwans and Gurdwaras, and to the various sects including the Akalis, Nirankaris, Namdharis, Nirmalas. Further, the draft was to be printed in the Sikh organ, the *Khalsa Samachar* seeking suggestions so that a consensus on the newly formulated *rahit* could be reached. See "Sikh Sanskar Vidya," *Punjabi Bhain* (July 1912), pp. 41-42. Needless to say, consensus on the *rahit* was difficult to attain. Although drafted in 1910, the *Gurmat Prakas* only came to be issued in its final form in 1915. Even after five years of deliberation, the code was largely disregarded.

¹⁹⁰ This version has remained authoritative to the present time. See McLeod, *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*, p. 79.

¹⁹¹ Dharam Parchar Committee, *The Sikh Reht Maryada*, p. 25.

¹⁹² The *Gurmat Parkas* while highly specific about the ways and means of naming children is silent regarding the application of Kaur or Singh to newborns. Naming procedures were to be carried out ten days after the birth of the child with the assistance of Sikh sacred scriptures. The signifier 'Singh' was exclusively associated with Sikh baptismal rites. As already noted, the appellation 'Kaur' was entirely omitted in this 'Code of Conduct'. See *Gurmat Parkas*, pp. 16-17, 28.

in the historiography of the Sikhs as the spiritual mother of the Khalsa Panth.¹⁹³ This later delineation of specified Sikh appellations to be given *at the time of birth* is indeed remarkable given its originality, at least at the level of explicit *rahit*. In the thirty-five year time period between the *Gurmat Parkas* and the *Sikh Reht Maryada*, Bhai Khan Singh of Nabha had published his monumental and highly influential *Gurusabad Ratanakar Mahan Kosh* also known simply as *Mahan Kosh*.¹⁹⁴ It definitively coincided the appellation 'Kaur' with female initiation into the Khalsa Panth. Kahn Singh's interpretation of the significance and application of the name 'Kaur' at the time of initiation was clearly rejected by 1950; the epithets 'Kaur' and 'Singh' henceforth came to be given at the time of birth instead.

The various applications of the signifier 'Kaur' are indicative of the heterogeneous nature of Sikhism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They also point to the varied and fluctuating needs of a rapidly developing Sikh community during pivotal stages of its growth. The hard wrought distinctions between Sikhs and Hindus put in place through the process of reform spearheaded by the Singh Sabha movement were widely accepted by the 1950's. By the mid-twentieth century the appellation 'Kaur' had become *the* signifier of Sikh female collective identity. As such the application thereof came to be transferred to an even more fundamental platform than that of baptism, namely, the naming ritual occurring just days after a child's birth. Public exhibition of Sikh distinctiveness through overt signifiers applied at the time of baptism was no longer necessary; infants were

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁹⁴ Kahn Singh Nabha's *Gurushabad Tatanakar Mahan Kosh* was first published in four volumes in 1931. A revised edition in a single volume was issued from Patiala in 1960 with subsequent reprints. It was known simply as *Mahan Kosh* and it is this volume that is cited here. See Kahn Singh Nabha, *Mahan Kosh* Patiala: Language Department, 1993, p. 352, first published in 1930.

quietly furnished with by now widely accepted Sikh forms of nomenclature in the confines of their homes.¹⁹⁵ Needless to say, Singh Sabha initiatives intent on injecting new definitions and new applications to previously indistinct cultural practices, particularly as they pertained to Sikh women folk were immensely successful.¹⁹⁶ Nonetheless, and perhaps surprisingly, it was only by the 1950's that they came to be officially ratified. With the gradual authorisation of specific Sikh naming practices for *both* males and females in the form of *rahit*, Sikh communal consciousness was inevitably heightened. By the mid-twentieth century the "performance of each of these ritual acts continually communicated, reaffirmed, and rehearsed" had become securely established within the Sikh ritual drama.¹⁹⁷

Contemporary Scholars and the Rewriting of History:

As has been shown, extant historical sources are unanimously varied with regard to both women's baptism into the order of the Khalsa as well as the application and

¹⁹⁵ The conversion of a Muslim woman to Sikhism who had for years been married to a Sikh man was highly publicized by the press. Under the auspices of the radical Bhasaur Singh Sabha, her conversion necessarily included a name change. According to the *Khalsa Akhbar* "the Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Bhasaur, has administered the Gurmantra and holy *amrita* to a Muslim woman and ushered her into Sodhbans [the family of Guru Gobind Singh]. Her Sikh name is Kishan Kaur. A Sikh who had fallen by living with a Muslim woman has been baptized and renamed Ude Singh." The *Khalsa Akhbar*, September 18, 1896, cited in Harbans Singh, "The Bakapur Diwan and Babu Teja Singh of Bhasaur," *The Panjab Past and Present* Vol. IX, Part II, (October 1975), p. 323.

¹⁹⁶ Carrol Smith Rosenberg offers an apt summary of the final stage of hegemonic ritual identity construction in the context of the evangelical revival of the late 1800's in America: "Finally, however, the new order will establish its hegemony. The new wielders of power will move to suppress symbolic as well as literal disorder. The language of diversity will be muffled. We will be left with the sounds of silence." Carrol Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct. Visions of Gender in Victorian America* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985, p. 164.

¹⁹⁷ Harjot Oberoi, "From Ritual to Counter-Ritual," Joseph T. O'Connell, Milton Israel, Willard G. Oxtaby, with visiting editors, W.H. McLeod and J.S. Grewal, eds., *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* Toronto: University of Toronto, Centre for South Asian Studies, 1988, p. 156.

implications of the term 'Kaur' among the Sikhs. Nonetheless, contemporary assumptions allow for scant contention in this regard. Khushwant Singh for example, in his ever popular *A History of the Sikhs* unequivocally coincides the appellation 'Kaur' with that of 'Singh', adding that the surname Kaur is to be granted Sikh women at the time of baptism.¹⁹⁸ W.H. McLeod who has almost single-handedly transformed the academic study of Sikhism through his near exhaustive scope of inquiry has also failed to move beyond early twentieth century assumptions in this regard. This is indeed remarkable, given McLeod's meticulous research methodology and his resounding insistence on the need for a systematic reorganization and rigorous analysis of virtually all aspects of the Sikh tradition.¹⁹⁹ With regard to the critique at hand McLeod, in addressing the Chaupa Singh injunction against the utilization of half-names for those of the Khalsa brotherhood, inadvertently furthers the belief that the requisition encompassed women's naming practices as well; in essence he accords equal status to both 'Kaur' and 'Singh'.²⁰⁰ Yet the *Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama* gives no indication of distinct nomenclature for Sikh females. Here McLeod is fortuitously furthering a redaction of Sikh history that is tinged by the Singh Sabha tendency to reinterpret historical sources in order to fit the Tat Khalsa agenda.

Nikki Singh takes this contemporary re-visioning of Sikh history one step further inasmuch as she contemplates both the rite of baptism for women and the signifier Kaur from an uncritical though professedly feminist perspective. Basing her insights wholly

¹⁹⁸ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs* Volume I, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 83. Although Singh cannot be specified as an academic scholar of Sikhism, his highly readable two volume *History* continues to be widely utilized and cited by academics and non-academics alike.

¹⁹⁹ W.H. McLeod, "A Sikh Theology for Modern Times," Joseph O'Connell et al, eds., *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century*, p. 33

upon late Singh Sabha redactions of history Nikki Singh maintains that the signifier 'Kaur', female initiation into the Khalsa and the military symbolism are in and of themselves explicit and viable indicators of the inherent egalitarianism of the Sikh tradition. In her own words:

This baptism through steel was open to both men and women. Women were to wear the five emblems of the Khalsa, too. As men received the surname Singh, women received the surname Kaur, modified. Men and women no longer traced their lineage or occupation to the "father." As "Singh" and "Kaur," both were equal partners in the new family.²⁰¹

Needless to say, in light of the indisputable contradictions and the immense variability within the tradition itself, Nikki Singh's attitude of certitude with regard to the historicity of her interpretation denotes the potency and longevity of Singh Sabha interpretations of Sikh history. Grewal and Bal's critique regarding the methods and means of traditional historical analysis among Sikh scholars, particularly with regard to the scant sources addressing the creation of the Khalsa is highly applicable both to the issue of female baptism and the application of the appellation 'Kaur' among the Sikhs.

Most of the modern historians of Guru Gobind Singh have adopted the very simple method of selecting one and rejecting another detail from one of more of the chronicles. But once that selection is made the isolated point or passage is treated as literally true... Now, it should be unwise on anyone's part to reject later tradition merely because it is much later to the events; and there is no doubt that traditions, as a valid form of evidence, can provide useful clues to past probabilities but later tradition cannot be accepted literally and it seldom leads to any certainties about the past.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ See McLeod, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama*, p. 237, note # 349.

²⁰¹ Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh, *The feminine principle in the Sikh vision of the Transcendent*, p. 120. She continues: "When he [Guru Gobind Singh] created the Khalsahood, all men received the last name "Singh" and women the name "Kaur." In this egalitarian structure, which the tenth Sikh prophet established, women were liberated from tracing their lineage to their father or adopting a husband's name after marriage." See *ibid.*, p. 245.

If we turn to positions taken by scholars addressing the inauguration of the Khalsa, baptism, and injunctions regarding nomenclature *as they pertain to women* it becomes abundantly clear that the above noted critique is remarkably pertinent. The concurrence of even the most meticulous of scholars in the furtherance of untenable, inaccurate and variegated claims in this regard is indicative of the indifference surrounding Sikh scholarship with regard to a systematic study of women's history. In this regard, modern scholarship has inadvertently failed to move beyond Singh Sabha renditions of history, particularly the highly modified version offered by Max Arthur Macauliffe, Kahn Singh of Nabha and the ever prolific writer Bhai Vir Singh. This tendency has long been recognized in a generalized sense in the academic study of Sikhism. The editors of *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* note with considerable astuteness that "Singh Sabha scholars and writers were so successful in their attempt to reformulate the Sikh tradition that their general interpretation of the tradition acquired the status of implicit truth. That status it continues to hold to the present day." They continue with a warning: "It is essential that we recognize the actual nature and extent of this influence and conditioning, if we are to comprehend the historical development of the Sikh tradition."²⁰³ Indeed, while for the most part scholars have taken this counsel to heart, close scrutiny and rigorous analysis of sources with regard to historiography as it pertains to women has been virtually non-existent. In short, in this regard scholars have done little to append to the contributions of the Singh Sabha reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Historical questions regarding women within the Khalsa order

²⁰² Grewal and Bal, "Appendix C," *Guru Gobind Singh*, pp. 182-183.

²⁰³ Joseph T. O'Connell, et al, eds., "Editor's Introduction," *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century*, p. 12.

have either been ignored, or, historians have simply furthered the highly biased outlook of the Singh Sabha reformers.²⁰⁴

The range of discrepant assumptions is indicative of the insignificance accorded not only women's history, but also points to a pervasive unwillingness to engage in a careful analysis of the wider process of gender construction. For gender understood as a construct has significant consequences far beyond an awareness of the relationships between women and men. How and why the categories of male and female, subjective and collective have actively been constructed is crucial in coming to a more comprehensive understanding of the historical process. Analysis of the discursive structures in the formation of ritual identities from a gendered perspective allows for a more complex understanding of the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion central to group identity formulation. Perhaps most importantly, the perspective of gender warrants an endorsement of historiography *beyond* the reiteration of rhetorical formulations, however imprecise, that served the purposes of a community in flux admirably well. More precisely, it allows for an understanding of how and why specific gender construction was fundamental to the very evolution of the Sikh community; this includes early configurations of identity, the process of Sikh adaptation to the colonial milieu and the even more complex task of communal identity formation led by the Singh Sabha reformers.

²⁰⁴ W. Owen Cole, in the popular 'Teach Yourself World Faiths' Series takes the feminized 'myth' of the Khalsa inauguration one step further. He notes the after the *panj piare* were initiated, they in turn initiated both Guru Gobind Singh and his wife Mata Sahib Kaur. She was thus one of the initial participants at this central Sikh event. See W. Owen Cole, *Teach Yourself Sikhism* London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994, p. 31.

J.S. Grewal's recent book, arguably the most highly respected of contemporary volumes on Sikh history does not even address the pivotal questions of female baptism and nomenclature in history. See J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*.

Chapter Seven:

Conclusions

Overview:

The preceding chapters have largely been conceptualized upon the notion that gender is a fluid construct, one that is open to the vicissitudes of circumstance and change. In essence then, gender constructs are evolutionary; they emerge and develop with the shifting needs of the community within which they unfold. They are also susceptible to the forces surrounding them, be they political, economic, social and cultural. The Guru period of the Sikh community came to be transformed by its own needs and constituency. It progressed from a tradition in the fifteenth century that stressed above all, the interiority of devotion to the Ultimate to a community in the seventeenth century under Guru Gobind Singh whose very identity was dependent on exterior manifestations of distinction from the wider community. This evolution led to considerable changes to the understanding of what it meant to be a Sikh woman, a Sikh man. For while a patriarchal value system was firmly established throughout the Guru period, by the end of the seventeenth century this system had been transformed into an order that gave religious, symbolic and ritual signification and sanctioning to a very specific gender hierarchy. With a primary focus on male Sikh identity, female Sikhs were relegated to a secondary position within the religious community; a 'theology of difference' based on gender was now firmly in place.

The forces of imperialism after the conquest of Punjab also brought with them highly defined conceptualizations of 'true' masculinity and 'true' femininity. Victorian assumptions about race, religion and gender as well as the economic and political designs of the British played an important role in the ever-continuing process of Sikh gender construction. Colonial rule and Victorian assumptions did not take hold among the

Sikhs without opposition. Reformatory groups among the Sikhs that were inaugurated during this time period such as the Namdharis not only attempted to regenerate what they considered to be a corrupted Sikh tradition, but also put ingenious means in place to resist the authority and presumptions of the colonizers. Alternate visions of gender, particularly for Namdhari women in the form of leadership positions, as well as the augmentation of ritual space to include females, were significant features of Namdhari reformatory efforts and their overt defiance of the increasingly pervasive British ethos.

By and large however, the hyper-masculine ethos pervading Sikh identity was singularly congruent with highly polarized British constructions of masculinity; this led to what has been characterized as a 'politics of similarity' between the English rulers and the Sikhs. The 'manly' Jatni of rural Punjab on the other hand collided with the colonizers' notions of true femininity. The education program initiated by the British to uplift Punjabi females from their degenerate condition was also an attempt to amend their 'manly' character. Further, the winds of reform sweeping over Punjab in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were conducive to the securing of gender constructs. Alighting upon the new 'keepers of tradition' in the form of the Singh Sabha movement, Sikh reformers consolidated Victorian assumptions of gender with traditional Sikh values.

Needless to say, reformist gender ideology did not originate with the Sikhs. The Brahmo Samaj, originally of Bengal arrived in Lahore in 1863 to fulfill the need for educated Indians to staff government offices and institutions. However, the overarching Bengali character of the Brahmo Samaj limited its ideological expansion in Punjab. Swami Dayanand's Arya Samaj on the other hand became the most powerful agent of reform in the province. Preaching a message of egalitarianism and an iconoclastic monotheism in

the name of Vedic revival, Dayanand's vision of gender ideology became a pivotal yardstick by which Punjab reform came to be measured, particularly with regard to the province's womenfolk. Initially, Swami Dayanand's message was widely lauded by the educated elite of Punjab; he subsequently began to alienate Sikh reformers who took great offence to the Swami's attacks on their Gurus and the Sikh religion. The need to distance Sikhs from the overarching vision, message and threat of the Arya Samaj became the central reactionary force in the determined effort to delineate a 'true' Sikh identity. This was particularly the case with regard to Dayanand's highly developed gender ideals. Largely reacting to Dayanand's vision of a purified, Vedic gender ideology, a contrasting and 'true Sikh' gender identity came to be fostered. Singh Sabha reformers consistently blamed the 'fallen' state of Sikhism as responsible for the degenerate position of Sikh womanhood; they also claimed that the 'true' tenets of Sikhism were foundational in their interpretation and development of Sikh gender ideology. However, for the most part the combined force of their reactionary response towards gender constructs stemming from the Arya Samaj *and* the influence of Victorian British assumptions of gender formed the basis of Singh Sabha gender construction. The result had far-reaching consequences; gender ideology was integral to the very essence of the Tat Khalsa reform endeavour. This translated into a comprehensive overhaul of Singh Sabha educational initiatives and ritual observances, particularly for Sikh women.

To return to Joan Wallach Scott's analysis of gender in the context of identity construction in the Sikh tradition, that which is dominant needs the secondary for its very identity. The inauguration of the Khalsa polarized understandings of gender among the Sikhs; the primary concentration on 'true' male Sikh identity demanded that women

subsidize that equation by being the opposite, secondary aspect of that identity. Similarly, the 'civilized', dominant male construct of the Singh Sabha reform movement necessitated a 'civilized' and educated female construct. The fulfillment of the new, *authentic* Sikh female construct also demanded the removal of traditional ritual barriers that had led to women's subordinate position. However, these 'civilizing' attempts also included an *extension* of male control in the form of regulations of dress and outward appearances. Male control also invaded and attempted to dismantle the arenas of popular religious and cultural traditions within which women had normatively played pivotal roles. The dominant position of the Sikh male heretofore largely sanctioned by essential gender-specific ritual activity thus continued to stay firmly in place; ultimately, males were at the forefront of the reform movement. Assisted and in some cases regulated by the assumptions and concerns of their colonial masters *and* reacting strongly against the reform initiatives of their co-religionists in Punjab, it was the Sikh male that delineated the foundation and defined the structures that circumscribed and upheld the Tat Khalsa reform endeavour.

Women in the Singh Sabha – Agents of Change or Casualties of Reform?:

While for the most part it was male reformers that instigated and asserted their reformatory claims over the lives and practices of female family members, this selective process of feminine identity construction was also sanctioned and even furthered by a select, somewhat anomalous, but nonetheless devoted group of female reformers. Harnam Kaur, the first school mistress of the Ferozepur school was one of a number of women who adeptly

furthered the Singh Sabha reform endeavour. Although highly influential in contributing to the cause of female education, her biography also attempts to inculcate to its readers proper 'Sikh' values as they pertain to women. Not surprisingly, her biographer is highly attentive to questions prized by the reform agenda.

Further, a number of other women became active in the reform endeavour of the Singh Sabha under the auspices of female education beyond honorary teaching duties. The collection of ornaments and money was often taken over by females who were involved in raising funds for educational initiatives. Bibi Livlin Kaur, the Secretary of the Bhujangan Diwan, Kairon was especially influential in this regard, gathering women together to travel as far as China and Burma to "beg...for funds" for a Girl's Boarding House in Kairon.¹ By 1914, a woman named Bibi Savitri Devi spoke at the Sikh Education Conference; loyalty to the Crown, the benefits of 'Sikh education' and its continued reform formed the bulk of her presentation.²

A number of female preachers (*Updeshaks*) also took on highly public roles in the dissemination of Sikh reform. However some of the women most active in preaching were adherents of the various 'sects' loudly maligned by the Singh Sabha reformers. A number of highly influential women were associated with the Udasis in particular, the very bastion of the Sikh orthodoxy, who according to the Tat Khalsa mind set were most responsible for the degraded status of Sikh womanhood.³ One such preacher, Pandita

¹ See *Khalsa Advocate*, May 15, 1909, February 13, 1911.

² See Bibi Savitri Devi, *Sikh Education. A Paper Written for the Sikh Educational Conference, Jallundhar* Amritsar: The Educational Committee of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, n.d.

³ The powerful Udasi sect advocated celibacy, asceticism and refused to acknowledge the symbolism and primacy of the Khalsa. In essence, they were an ascetic order of Sahajdhari Sikhs. By 1849, the end of Sikh rule, there were more than a dozen orders associated with them. W.H. McLeod notes that during the eighteenth century, there was less antagonism between the Udasis and the early Khalsa which resulted in many Sikh shrines and gurdwaras passing into their care. Many mahants of the late nineteenth and early

Jiwan Mukti who was a follower of Swami Chitgan Dev and Headmistress of the Gurmat Kanya Pathshala Jammu toured and preached in and around Jammu as well as collected funds for the Pathshala and the widow's home attached to it. Given her efforts to promote female education, the Singh Sabha mouthpiece the *Khalsa Advocate* warmly embraced this "Sikh lady" despite her continued affiliation with the sect.⁴ Pandita Jiwan Mukta also gained distinction and was highly lauded as the invited Sikh speaker at the *All India Conference of Religions* in Allahabad, 1911.⁵ Udasis at large however were

twentieth centuries claimed to descend from Udasis. See W.H. McLeod, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism* Jon Woronoff, Series Ed., Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements. Series No. 5, London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1995, pp. 214-215.

A number of highly influential women were associated with the Udasis. Lachhmi Devi was a prolific poet-saint who published a monumental 'Granth' "About Udasis, Bedhis, Sodhis, About Guru Nanak, About Jai Ram (Brother-in-law of Guru Nanak), About Lachhmi Das (Son of Guru Nanak) and many other tales and stories." See Lachhmi Devi Vidya Sagar, *Lachhmi Hulas Sagar* Amritsar: Akhtar Hind Press, 1916, 1255 pp.

Another poet named Pero, 1833-1873 was associated with the Gulab Dasi sect, a group largely based on Vedantist ideals and influenced by the Nirmalas, another Sikh ascetic group of highly educated Sanskrit scholars and teachers. (Ditt Singh, the celebrated 'untouchable' and prolific writer of the Singh Sabha movement was originally a Gulab Dasi follower before moving to the Arya Samaj and finally becoming an active member of the Singh Sabha reform movement). Pero was a Muslim dancer and prostitute who was left destitute after the death of the Qadi whom she followed. She then turned to Sadhu Gulab Das, thus coming under his patronage and devoted herself to him and eventually becoming his spouse. Although already skilled as a musician and poet she continued her education with Gulab Das, already a well-known literary figure. She began anonymously writing poetry that was heavily influenced by Gurbani, Sikh sacred scriptures. Her writings focused primarily on social reform, particularly the uplifting of scheduled castes. She died and was buried according to Muslim rites; Gulab Das died soon thereafter and instructed that he too be buried with Pero. See Dr. Shaiharyar, "Punjabi di Pahili Shaira: Pero Preman," *Ajoke Shilalekh*, January, 1997, pp. 5-8. I am grateful to Mr. P.K. Sharma, Patiala, Punjab for his assistance in translating this article.

The touching story of Pero, the destitute prostitute, successful poet and lover became immortalized in the popular imagination of the peasantry. Largely overshadowing her patron and lover Gulab Das, Pero came to be known as 'Mai Pero' in the rural tracts, taking on legendary proportions in the imagination of the peasantry. Private interview April, 1997 with Surjit Lee Singh, Punjabi University, Patiala. The Gulab Dasis although enjoying some prominence in the late nineteenth century waned and disappeared as a sect soon after the death of Gulab Das in 1873. See W.H. McLeod, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, p. 90.

⁴ Swami Chitgan Dev was lauded by the Tat Khalsa as a "fine example" to be upheld for "taking an abiding interest in the education of Sikh girls and boys." See *Khalsa Advocate*, August 4, 1911. Another Udasi, Shrimati Bibi Har Kour of Sitapur was highly praised for her teaching abilities and her work for the cause of education. See *Khalsa Advocate*, December 23, 1910.

⁵ *Khalsa Advocate*, January 27, 1911.

maligned as "loafers" who accepted the obeisance of their followers, did not follow true Sikh *rehat*, and were impure in their conduct and morals.⁶

Mai Ram Kaur, Another *updeshak* of the Singh Sabha movement, though supported by the Tat Khalsa for the most part, also had her critics. She was soundly critiqued by one observer as being

utterly destitute at the tact of lecturing... She cannot couch her bitter but sound advice in sugared language. She exposed to them their faults too bluntly. At first she elicited the applause of her audience, but her tedious lecture taxed their brains to such an extent that they grew weary and impatient... Were she to learn a little more tolerance and knew how to quietly pocket insults when it is expedient to do so... she will prove a boon to the Panth.⁷

By 1920, apparently wearied by the 'bitter' tongue of female preachers, the newly appointed Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee or S.G.P.C. passed a motion that women *updeshaks* were no longer to continue their duties.⁸ This injunction was however ignored by individual women and they continued to tour the countryside and preach.⁹

In looking to the women most active during the time period of Singh Sabha reform movement one is faced with a number of perplexing contradictions. Certainly a number of highly influential women were already active agents within the larger Sikh milieu, particularly

While members of the Tat Khalsa supported the efforts of Pandita Jiwan Mukta, her presentation was denoted as 'makeshift', given Mukta's spur of the moment invitation as a conference presenter. Calls were made to tighten control over the activities of *Updeshaks*. See *Khalsa Advocate*, March 24, 1911.

⁶ *Khalsa Advocate*, October 9, 1915, February 14, 1914.

Criticism of Udasis was further extended to those of the Guru lineage who also allowed their followers to pay homage to them and were addressed as 'Gurus'. See *Khalsa Advocate*, January 20, 1911.

For a good overview of the various sects in the early twentieth century, see also *Khalsa Advocate*, February 14, 1914.

⁷ See *Khalsa Advocate*, September 14, 1907.

⁸ Amarjit Kaur, "The Nascent Sikh Politics: 1919-1921," Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Amritsar, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, 1992, p., 25.

See also Ruchi Ram Sahni, *The Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Sikh Awakening* Lahore, 1922.

⁹ *The Ranjit*, January 15, 1919, cited in Amarjit Kaur, "The Nascent Sikh Politics, pp. 25-26.

within the Udasi establishment and thus in little need of the 'uplifting' that the male reformers were loudly asserting. Further, for those *within* the parameters of the Singh Sabha movement it is important to come to an understanding of why they so vigorously promoted the male ideology that in actual fact constrained them and diminished many choices they would otherwise have viewed as normative. Without doubt, they wished to be accepted within a system that professed as one of its foremost objectives 'women's reform'. Adopting permissible ways and means of acting within that system can on the one hand be understood as part of an ingenious coping strategy, a mode of conforming to the new standard of Sikh womanhood propounded by the Tat Khalsa. It also presented women with an opportunity to take part, however minimally, in the ongoing debate regarding the process of ameliorating the status of women. Further, male criticism regarding the degenerate position of Sikhism and their corresponding degradation were indeed making an impact on women. The education of females in terms of a proper 'Sikh' education increasing came to be understood by both male and female agents of reform as the key to alleviating this 'fallen' status of Sikh women. It is tempting to view the promotion of female education as a mere contrivance adopted by women as the most effective means to enhance their position; in Gail Minault's terms, it allowed for an active pursuance of "the art of the possible" within the structures circumscribed by the male leadership.¹⁰ However the active promotion and by implication, ongoing dialogue with this very discourse *beyond* that of education moves women into a more intricate position within the hegemonic discourse and its underlying stance of religious authority. For the rhetoric posited by reform ideology of the inherent superiority of an unadulterated Sikhism was

¹⁰ Gail Minault, "Introduction: The Extended Family as Metaphor and the Expansion of Women's Realm," Gail Minault, ed., *The Extended Family. Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan* Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1981, p. 9.

enticing, particularly with regard to claims and promises of an elevated position for women. This in turn prompted an active engagement and promotion of 'true' Sikh ideology, albeit by a small group of educated women on the sidelines of the reform endeavour. Moreover, the stress on women's conceptual equality with men propounded by Tat Khalsa reformers provided women with the leverage needed to insist that the space within which they normatively acted be augmented and their roles be substantiated, particularly within the realm of education. In essence then, to be agents in the process of redefining tradition was an exciting and groundbreaking opportunity for women within the Sikh tradition. On the other hand, to blame and remonstrate against 'un-Sikh' and thus 'degenerate' customs was a convincing effort on the part of these women to come to terms with the degraded position within which Sikh women at large could be found.

Nonetheless, the reforms initiated by their male counterparts did indeed bring about significant changes in the lives of a number of women. With education came opportunities to further the larger reform endeavour through honorary teaching services. This offered women beyond those of the orthodox religious establishment novel occupational choices. Further, Sikh Education Conferences provided women with an opportunity to play a part in the unfolding drama of the Sikh social and political arena. These gatherings allowed women to be spectators and even minor contributors to the significant decisions made by the principal players of the social and political elite. Perhaps most importantly, the ritual traditions that had barred women from becoming full-fledged members within the Panth were slowly being eroded. The pivotal rite of baptism by *khande ki pahul* heretofore closed to women allowed for a novel inclusion for females within the Khalsa order. The opportunity to take on new status and roles within the religious establishment was ultimately liberating for Sikh women.

For attempts to displace 'un-Sikh' elements during ritual or other ceremonial occasions came novel and highly significant roles for Sikh women; in replacing professional musicians at ritual events spaces that had heretofore been closed to women were opened. While these modifications were largely based on an augmented understanding of women's gratuitous *duty* to the cause of reform, they opened doors for women to become far more active in the religious establishment than ever before.

Circumventing Hegemony - Alignment and Resistance:

Nita Kumar has outlined four persistent modes utilized for conceptualizing women in history. The first addressed by her makes women "the object of our gaze, by enlarging the scope of each particular discipline and including them in topics." According to Kumar, this approach leads only to a further objectification of women. Another lens through which to view women in history, presents them as actors and as subjects, "with the will, rationality and meaning to re-make the world." In short she contends, this gives women the prerogative of males. Needless to say, the actuality of women's history simply cannot sustain this view. A third approach focuses on the structures within which women exist, "which seemingly control them without a chance for them to exercise agency, especially patriarchal, ideological, discursive structures." The fourth mode outlined by Kumar looks at the "hidden, subversive ways in which women exercise their agency even while outwardly part of a repressive normative order."¹¹ In coming to an understanding of Sikh women during the time of Singh Sabha reform, it is impossible to

speaking only of the fourth approach, one focusing on women's resistance without also taking account of and giving credence to the force of male hegemonic ideology circumventing these women's lives. According to Kumar,

We have subjects, in short, who act, as action is commonly understood, but it is more likely that we have subjects who at best 'merely' speak. In both cases, there is a larger structure that binds them – and is unquestionably dominant, powerful and controlling... The jump we have to make is to envision how in both these, and other cases as well, there is an attempt to assert themselves within this structure of power, through the posing of alternative models, sometimes deceptive in their mutedness. But in all cases there is partial alignment with these very dominant structures, so that autonomy is never complete, it is often ambiguous, and is probably not always desired.¹²

Indeed, to identify and explicate the very places within which women act necessitates a thorough examination of the larger social and discursive structures. Further, while acknowledging that this select group of women indeed made specific choices within certain circumscribed confines albeit with a wide variety of incentives, objectives and obligations, the hegemonic voice itself given its explicit biases and compulsions gives evidence for an understanding and interpretation of the subject.¹³ In the case of the female Singh Sabha reformers, agency and subjectivity were so closely intertwined at times as to blur the boundaries between the seemingly opposite modes of being. A thorough understanding of the structures within which Tat Khalsa ideology developed thus allows for a discovery of women's acts of negotiation and to uncover even slight hints of resistance as opposed to less likely rebellion.

¹¹ Nita Kumar, "introduction," Nita Kumar, ed., *Women as Subjects. South Asian Histories* Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1994, p. 4

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

According to James Scott, overt insubordination almost universally provokes an immediate and acrimonious response; the alternative, namely tactically chosen and circuitous forms of resistance without contesting the formal definitions of hierarchy and power, may have more far reaching results.¹⁴ In the case of Harnam Kaur, while maintaining that the ultimate duty of Sikh women was to provide happiness to their husbands, her belief in the inherent equality of both girls and boys led to an active campaign for female education despite persistent opposition from the education-wary populace. This included the establishment of a Girl's Boarding House at Ferozepur in the face of obdurate protest stemming from deeply held notions of family honour. The *Updeshak* Ram Kaur seizing fast the message of equality furthered by male reformers continued to preach in spite of the faultfinding of her audience. Bibi Livlin Kaur travelled as far as China, Malaya, and Hong Kong to collect funds in the hallowed name of education.¹⁵ Women thus enlarged the framework offered by male reformers in the acquisition of individual and collective freedom. Women of the radical Bhasaur group too were stark embodiments of this new ethos; they continued to don turbans despite the censure of orthodox Sikh groups. By the 1920's women defiantly insisted that the reforms allowing for equal access through pivotal initiation rituals be upheld, in particular, the rite of *khande di pahul*, in spite of the overt efforts of powerful groups to place restrictions on women's full membership into the 'brotherhood'.

¹⁴ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 33.

See also Susan Carol Rogers, "Female Forms of Power and the Myth of Male Dominance," *American Ethnologist* 2, no. 4 (November 1975), pp. 727-756.

¹⁵ *Khalsa Advocate*, May 24, 1913.

James Scott's delineation of insubordination from the perspective of peasant culture, that which he calls the 'everyday forms of resistance', at times seemingly quiescent, often nuanced, though overtly persistent 'weapons of the weak' is helpful in this regard.

By reference to the culture that peasants fashion from their experience – their 'offstage' comments and conversation, their proverbs, folksongs, and history, legends, jokes, language, ritual, and religion – it should be possible to determine to what degree, and in what ways, peasants actually accept the social order propagated by elites... Rejection of elite values, however, is seldom an across-the-board proposition, and only a close study of peasant values can define the major points of friction and correspondence.¹⁶

To the reform initiatives pertaining to restrictions placed on marriage celebrations by the increasingly hegemonic Singh Sabha elite, the populace retorted: 'To hell with Singh Sabha people, who prohibit singing and dancing'.¹⁷ As noted earlier, Singh Sabha ideology was also characterised by the wider population as 'Singh *Safa*', thus likening the reform initiatives to the destruction caused by plague epidemics.¹⁸

Needless to say, these maxims are indicative of the estimation held of the Tat Khalsa reformers by the wider populace. To understand their full significance however, they necessitate contextualizing: For the Sikh Jat who formed the bulk of the Sikh peasantry, what Robert Redfield calls the "good life" of the peasant included above all a strenuous work ethic, appeasement of the gods, and as a reward for their toils, hard drinking and spirited

¹⁶ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, p. 41.

Proverbs and popular maxims have alternately been delineated by Scott as 'hidden transcripts' that are implicit in women's song; though "often veiled, but sometimes overt and public, words and actions through which women communicated their resistance to dominant North Indian characterizations of 'women's nature... and of kinship relationships.'" See Gloria Goodwin Raheja and Ann Grodzins Gold, *Listen to the Heron's Words. Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, pp. 1-2, and James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

¹⁷ 'Mar jan Singh Sabhia, jinah nachna gauna bund keeta'. Maxim translated by Dr. Surjit 'Lee' Singh, Punjabi University, Patiala.

¹⁸ See Chapter Five.

celebrations.¹⁹ Needless to say, reformers' attempts to solemnise festive occasions such as wedding festivities did not go unchallenged by their rural counterparts;²⁰ these times of revelry were an essential outlet for the frustrations and struggles of everyday existence. Moreover, the proclivity for excessive drinking, drawn-out festivities and sexual exploits were part and parcel of the deeply ingrained notions of manliness upheld by the Jat; the 'sturdy' Jatni also found a respite from the often solitary, mainly servile, everyday drudgery of her life during times of festivity. The 'effeminate' city dweller attempting to restrict and circumscribe these moments of celebratory diversion from the monotony of everyday life could only be derided and ultimately ignored.

Women's Reform - Laying the Foundation for a New Era:

Perhaps most importantly from the perspective of female agency, Tat Khalsa women became well versed in the art of mobilization. An insinuating tract, depicted by members of the Tat Khalsa as insidious to the honour of Mata Ganga the wife of Guru Arjan, united Sikh women in protest meetings; vehement objection to the booklet came to be expressed not only in women's meetings but also through letter writing campaigns.²¹

¹⁹ Redfield notes that the 'good life' refers to the "integrated pattern of dominant attitudes" that represent the value-orientation of the peasantry. See Robert Redfield, "The Peasant View of the Good Life," *The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture* Chicago and Toronto: The University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1960, pp. 61-69.

²⁰ Neither did the peasantry give up on the calendrical festivities that served as signposts for the agricultural year. See *Khalsa Advocate*, March 21, 1914.

²¹ The booklet by Raunaq Ram and Bishumbar Dutt, "Khalsa Panth ki Hakikat" depicted Mata Ganga as asking Bhai Buddha for her husband's permission for Niyoga. See *Khalsa Advocate*, June 6, June 20, July 4, 1914.

Niyoga was a form of conjugal relations prescribed by Swami Dayanand for those who were without "control of their senses" and wished to have legitimate progeny. According to Dayanand, if "the wife is pregnant or diseased, or if the husband has a chronic and incurable malady, what should the husband or

Earlier too, women's groups had joined the massive letter writing crusade in support of the Anand Marriage Bill. Further, in support of the British involvement in the First World War, purdah meetings were called by women who contributing their sewing skills to the effort.²² According to Gail Pearson, the participation of women from those within what she characterizes as "extended space" was essential to the process of universalisation of the nationalist movement. Closely tied to traditional male dominated structures, these women were familiar with the values of social reform and nationalism, but could also move "from the traditional household to the rough and tumble of street politics in times of national crisis."²³ For the Sikhs, who had hitherto remained outside of nationalist politics and had concentrated their efforts on Sikh nationalism instead, the ability to mobilize forces served both men and women well in the overtly politicized milieu of the Sikhs in the

the wife do if they are youthful and find themselves incapable to control their sexual appetites?" The guidelines for niyoga were minutely outlined by Dayanand. It was permissible for those who were widowed, or in instances when one partner within a marriage was infertile. It was also admissible when one partner was absent for over eight years if he was tied up with preaching duties, six years if he left in search of fame or learning, and three years if he is absent for trade. "Similarly, if the husband is intolerably cruel, it is proper for the wife to desert him, have a *niyoga* and bear children as heirs to the married husband's property." It was not however not permissible for virgins and bachelors to practice niyoga. According to Dayanand: "Just as a marriage is performed by proclamation, so is niyoga. As marriage requires the sanction of the society and consent of the couple, so does niyoga. When man and woman want to perform niyoga, they ought to declare before the men and women of their families that they want to enter into niyoga relation for the sake of issues, that they will sever their connection when the purpose of niyoga is fulfilled, that they should be counted as sinners and be penalised by the society or the state if they do otherwise, that they will meet for intercourse only once a month and will abstain from intercourse for a year after the conception." See Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya, tr., *The Light of Truth. English Translation of Swami Dayananda's Satyarth Prakasha* Allahabad: The Kala Press, 1960, pp. 165-176.

Not surprisingly, British sensibilities had little use for the practice. Farquhar protested that niyoga "is simply sexual relationships without marriage. The details are too horrible to transcribe." J.N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* The Hartford-Lamson Lectures on the Religions of the World, London: The MacMillan Co., 1924, p. 122.

While niyoga as delineated by Dayanand was similar in most respects to the custom of *karewa* practiced by the Sikhs, the latter's connection to landed property, and the protection thereof from the whims of widows as opposed to the desire for progeny made *karewa* far more acceptable to the rulers.

²² See *Khalsa Advocate*, May 6, 1916.

²³ Gail Pearson, "Nationalism, Universalization and the Extended Female Space," Gail Minault, ed., *The Extended Family*, p. 177.

1920's. The formation of the Central Sikh League, a political party formed in 1919 and the inauguration of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee by the leaders of the League also signaled the end of the Singh Sabha movement. What had for years been depicted as a *religious* reform endeavour unabashedly loyal to the Crown came to be replaced by an intense level of overt disaffection manifesting itself in the political designs of the Central Sikh League. A new era was thus ushered in; the participation of the Sikhs in India's nationalist struggle against the Raj had formally begun.

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