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Sikhism Reinterpreted: The Creation of Sikh Identity

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Abstract

The Sikh identity has been misinterpreted and redefined amidst the contemporary political inclinations of elitist Sikh organizations and the British census, which caused the revival and alteration of Sikh history. This thesis serves as a historical timeline of Punjab's religious transitions, first identifying Sikhism's emergence and pluralism among Bhakti Hinduism and Chishti Sufism, then analyzing the effects of Sikhism's conduct codes in favor of militancy following the human Guruship's termination, and finally recognizing the identity-driven politics of colonialism that led to the partition of Punjabi land and identity in 1947. Contemporary practices of ritualism within Hinduism, Chishti Sufism, and Sikhism were also explored through research at the Golden Temple, Gurudwara Tapiana Sahib Bhagat Namdevji, and Haider Shaikh *dargah*, which were found to share identical features of Punjabi religious worship tradition that dated back to their origins. This thesis intends to reinterpret Sikh history, being impartial of political and religious connotations.

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LAKE FOREST COLLEGE

Senior Thesis

Sikhism Reinterpreted: The Creation of Sikh Identity

by

Brittany Fay Puller

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The report of the investigation as a
Senior Thesis, to carry two courses of credit in
the Program of Asian Studies.

Michael T. Orr
Krebs Provost and Dean of the Faculty

Fatima Imam, Chairperson

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Benjamin Zeller

Abstract

The Sikh identity has been misinterpreted and redefined amidst the contemporary political inclinations of elitist Sikh organizations and the British census, which caused the revival and alteration of Sikh history. This thesis serves as a historical timeline of Punjab's religious transitions, first identifying Sikhism's emergence and pluralism among Bhakti Hinduism and Chishti Sufism, then analyzing the effects of Sikhism's conduct codes in favor of militancy following the human Guruship's termination, and finally recognizing the identity-driven politics of colonialism that led to the partition of Punjabi land and identity in 1947. Contemporary practices of ritualism within Hinduism, Chishti Sufism, and Sikhism were also explored through research at the Golden Temple, Gurudwara Tapiana Sahib Bhagat Namdevji, and Haider Shaikh *dargah*, which were found to share identical features of Punjabi religious worship tradition that dated back to their origins. This thesis intends to reinterpret Sikh history, being impartial of political and religious connotations.

This thesis is dedicated to Sajid Hussain for all of his support throughout the years.
Thank you for believing in me.

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Introduction

In the modern political landscape of Indian and Pakistani Punjab, the issue of religious identity presides over the strong regional identity that once joined the two nations together—that of a unified, pluralistic Punjab. This is not the case for medieval Punjab, which provided a landscape for religious pluralism and coexistence between the Bhakti tradition of Hinduism, Chishti Sufism, and Sikhism. The peaceful religious history of Punjab has often been misinterpreted and rewritten in light of 20th century political communalism, which was only enhanced under the partition of the province in 1947. The militant history of Sikhs has especially undergone stereotyping, altering the facts surrounding the need for militarization in the first place—a Punjab independent from Mughal rule. The modern notion of Sikhs pitted against Muslims has often been taken out of political context, the historical reality behind religious coexistence often ignored. The creation of the “other” in terms of religion is a recent phenomenon that I wanted to explore during my research of two influential spiritual sites of medieval Punjab—that of Ghoman and Malerkotla. The histories of both sites were unique and shared a history of religious cooperation, which I hoped to find still intact.

I wanted to begin my research by looking at known sites of religious significance to see if religious pluralism still presides over the boundaries of religious identity that contemporary Punjab has become infatuated with. My first site in my research was the isolated village of Ghoman, the village that once gained popularity in the 14th century as the residency for the Bhakti saint Namdev. After many questions and busses, I found my way to the largely unknown village, which was located 60 kilometers south of Amritsar.

This village was a prominent Bhakti center for the saint Namdev's devotees during his time in Punjab, but today, the incident has chiefly been forgotten. I came across the large *gurudwara* from a distance, realizing after much questioning through the translations of a young boy (Sartaj Singh) that Namdev's shrine was located within the complex. At the *gurudwara*, I met with Baba Bachan Singh, who served as a teacher for the *gurudwara*'s school and as a volunteer reader of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. I also met with a respected Sikh elder named Gurdeep Singh, who advised the teacher. They both concluded that the shrine and town were built by Namdev, a Marathi poet who came to Ghoman in 1270, staying in the forests for eighteen years while gathering a large following. The elders described Namdev's teachings as Guru Nanak's, as Namdev was said to be a devotee of the Guru. The men regarded Namdev as a Sikh, as he had contributed 61 *banis* (hymns) to the *Guru Granth Sahib*. In my questioning, I asked if that could've been possible, as Namdev was regarded elsewhere as a Hindu saint that was born over 100 years before the Guru. Both were offended with my question and restated their answers. Gurdeep Singh later translated the Punjabi writings along the wall: "Baba Namdev was born Sunday, 26th October 1270 and was a Narsi Brahmani from Solarpur, Maharashtra. He was known to spread the truth about God amongst all people. He came from Gwalior to Mathura and Benares; from Delhi he went to Punjab to visit holy places on foot." Gurdeep then proceeded to discuss issues amongst *pandits* (Brahman priests) and an apparent suicide, which was quite unclear in both Hindi and English translations. Despite such writings, I concluded that the history of Namdev had been altered through local tradition, added to the complexity of the Sikh faith. The date of Namdev's birth was still

apparent along the wall, yet two distinguished Sikhs had told me otherwise. The assimilation of the faiths was evident from my prior research on the history of both Namdev and Guru Nanak, but to a local educator, the facts were a different matter, not up for discussion. The Bhakti saint had emerged as a Sikh icon to represent the agenda of the *gurudwara* and Sikh population.

I felt bothered by my discovery of the alteration of facts at the *gurudwara*, but my curiosity was tested once more during a Sikh festival that occurred in the village the night of my interview. Upon my return from the village, I found that the festival most likely commemorated the inauguration of Guru Har Krishan after the death of Guru Har Rai. The lady whose family I was staying with (her name was Raman) was attending the festival and asked me to come along. I asked Raman what the festival was for. Her reply was to “celebrate Krishna.” When we arrived at the tented event, I found a *langar* (open canteen for free food), which served thousands of people who had driven to the remote village on their tractors to hear the *Guru Granth Sahib* being recited. Raman’s husband was a turban-wearing Sikh, so I had assumed that she was Sikh, which she readily admitted to me. Despite my questioning over what was happening during the *kirtan* (call and response chanting of scriptures with music), Raman insisted that the Sikhs were worshipping Krishna. She didn’t know what the exact festival was for, but after continued questioning, she finally used the term God in Krishna’s place. “The celebration is for God.” The term for Krishna as God was interchangeable for her within her Sikh faith, finding no issue in using a Hindu term. The means were the same, as was the God. This was not the first instance of the interchangeable terms for God, as the

Guru Granth Sahib is filled with verses calling out to God in multiple terms—Allah, Rama, and Shiva being the most common “un-Sikh” terms for the divine. This instance of verified my belief that religious pluralism still existed within the Punjab. I wanted to see if such occurrences were possible in another religious setting, that of a *dargah* (Sufi shrine). I chose my next destination to be that of Malerkotla, a city with a rich history of religious tolerance and coexistence.

On my quest to find religious pluralism, I chose to explore the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh in the city of Malerkotla, which is 45 kilometers south of Ludhiana, Punjab. I became familiar with the city through scholar Anna Bigelow’s work at the shrine as well as recent city news reports. Bigelow has written extensive articles regarding her research on British census data from the 19th century until partition, the history of religious pluralism in the city dating back to its origins, and personal interviews at the Haider Shaikh’s shrine in the 1990s. The city had been stereotyped as a Muslim city of violence, though in actuality, any violence that occurred was due to professional and familial disputes. This contradicted the modern stereotype of religious tension within the city. Malerkotla became known for its religious pluralism and tolerance in 1705 from Guru Gobind Singh’s blessings upon the city, but its most recent account of religious pluralism occurred during the partition of Punjab in 1947, as the city became a home to thousands of destitute Muslims. During the partition of 1947, many Muslims fled to the city in fear of violence in their own cities, creating the only Muslim majority city left in Indian

Punjab.¹ Despite the religious violence throughout the Punjab, Malerkotla is not reported to have had any. Anna Bigelow has found that Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims have been widely accredited to working together in support of such political organizations as the Indian National Congress and Akali Dal (for a brief time after the 1984 Operation Blue Star), the religious groups not always aligning with their religiously-backed state and national parties.² As for civic and professional boards within the city, the positions are often shared amongst all the faiths. Furthermore, many religious festivals for all three faiths occur in the cities, which are enjoyed by all city occupants. I wished to view the religious tolerance and pluralism in the city as well as the shrine during my visit, which would aid me in my analysis of Chishti shrines. Little did I know was that this shrine has been reported and claimed as a Chishti center, yet in actuality, it is a Suhrawardi *silsila* (Sufi lineage), a sect rivaling that of the Chishtis. The saint's teacher has been disputed to be one of two rumored Suhrawardi *pirs* (Sufi saints, or shaikhs); therefore insinuating that Haider Shaikh's lineage is in fact Suhrawardi Sufism. This fact was mostly likely altered throughout time, but I find that the shrine found no need to align with a particular Sufi sect. It was simply flourishing as it was.

When I began to create plans for my visit to Malerkotla, I asked for advice and travel companions from many friends in Chandigarh and Delhi, but instead of encouragement or assistance, I was met with hostilities and fierce rejections. I was warned of the Muslim city and violence that could occur in heavily congested areas. It

¹ Anna Bigelow, "Punjab's Muslims: The History and Significance of Malerkotla," *Journal of Punjab Studies* 12, no. 1 (2005): 65.

² *Ibid.*, 74.

was rumored to not be safe for outsiders, or even non-Muslims of Punjabi descent. I had no reason to believe that religious violence and hostilities would occur, but it was a general stereotype I came across from my Punjabi Sikh and Hindu friends. When I arrived in the sleepy town of Malerkotla, I saw no signs of violence or heavily congested areas to fear. Rather, the town was more religiously segregated than I expected from Bigelow's own observations. I stayed with a government official named Umesh Gupta, who warned me of the area around the shrine Haider Shaikh. Having lived in the city for 25 years, he was a bit hesitant of me going to the shrine by myself. His wife, a lifetime resident of Malerkotla, had no issue with my independent travels. She told me in confidence that she loved the city and never wished to leave, finding no issue with her diverse neighbors. To make the scenario more explainable, the Guptas were Hindu and the district of the shrine was predominately Muslim. I sensed that Umesh's fears were along the lines of religious stereotyping, which were similar to that of my friends' opinions. At the shrine, any reservations I had felt were completely abandoned. The *dargah* ritualism I partook and observed was familiar, but what was most encouraging for me was to see the devotees and caretakers of the shrine. Hindu women were coming and worshipping amongst Muslim men; Sikh men were giving offerings to devotees while Muslim men collected flower garlands for the tomb. People were working together and communicating at the shrine, regardless of background. This kind of coexistence was an inspiration for further research into the history of Punjabi religious movements and their strong ties to pluralism.

My observations at Ghoman and Malerkotla told a conflicted tale of religious coexistence in the Punjab. The strong stance of separatism was felt within the Punjab, yet in permitting circumstances, religious cooperation was openly endorsed. My personal observations in Punjab as well as lived knowledge of the current stereotypes surrounding religious relations presented a spectrum of extremes. The conflicting views of separatism and pluralism are not confined to Ghoman and Malerkotla, as I have witnessed such ideas throughout the Punjab, particularly in cities such as Ludhiana, Amritsar, Chandigarh, and Delhi. From my understanding of the origins of the Bhakti/*sant* tradition, Chishti Sufism, and Sikhism, the devotional movements thrived off of one another due to their essence of personal devotion that incorporated the regional ideas and interpretations of the divine. Unfortunately, the lived traditions of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism have become quite rigorous in their structures and traditions through each religion's insistence of unique separation from the other. I became intrigued in finding out when exactly the notion of the "other" was created and for what reason. In doing so, I created a historical timeline to understand the historical, political, socio-economic, as well as religious implications for such drastic changes within the faiths.

My thesis evaluates such themes through the analysis of an array of sources. The primary texts I have referenced come from British memoirs, Persian letters, and interpreted Sikh texts such as the *Guru Granth Sahib*, *Janamsakhis*, and *Rahitnamas*. My secondary sources are from the likes of Sikh as well as European scholars such as W. H. McLeod, Khushwant Singh, Ram Sardha, and Harjot Oberoi, which have provided a variety of historical interpretations concerning eras amounting to the entirety of Sikh

history. I have also obtained personal interviews with officials and knowledgeable teachers that were associated with the Golden Temple, Gurudwara Bangla Sahib of Delhi, and Gurudwara Tapiana Sahib Bhagat Namdevji of Ghoman, personal narratives and statements from villagers and interpreters in Ghoman and Malerkotla, and lectures from an IES Abroad Delhi professor. My accumulative year in India has also attributed to my understanding of contemporary Sikh practice and belief, which I have found to contain conflicting and inaccurate portrayals of Punjabi religious history.

Within my first chapter, I analyze the ritualism behind the origins of the Bhakti, Chishti, and Sikh faiths, which I determined were more based upon Punjabi notions of divine expression and worship technique than that of distinct religious practice. I explore the implications of the faiths in respect to their neighbors, finding that many of the worship techniques in all the religions were shared and influenced by the others. This is especially true with the foundations of Sikhism, which began as a protestant movement against the orthodoxy that reoccurred within Hindu and Islamic religious institutions. These discoveries suggest the shared similarities as the core of the three religions, particularly in regards to belief and practice. The religious pluralism that occurred within medieval Punjab promised a history of coexistence, a time often forgotten amidst modern politics.

The second chapter describes the historical background of Punjab in which the Bhakti, Chishti, and Sikh faiths emerged, noticing the striking similarities between groups which aided in their mutual prosperity. I examine the historical circumstances for which the Bhakti and Chishti sects grew in Punjab through the popular saint poets that

have been accredited for the movement's rapid spread from the 14th century to 1675. Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, began his spiritual quest much like the prominent Bhakti and Chishti saints of Punjab—Guru Nanak was against the increasing orthodoxy and titles that the religions had developed. His rhetoric sounded identical to his influential spiritual predecessors of Punjab as well as other saints in the 15th century. Guru Nanak did not intend to create a new faith, but his message was still conveyed through a line of Gurus that succeeded him, each of them molding the faith in more distinct ways from their spiritual neighbors. I look at the first nine Gurus in the Sikh faith from a historical lens, carefully detailing the political scenarios that developed as later Gurus began to hold substantial landed and spiritual authority in Punjab, seen as a challenge by the Mughal Emperors. Their relationship was influenced by the political concerns of the Mughal Empire, not necessarily on religious terms. During this time, the Sikh identity was neither properly formed nor recognized by the majority of Punjab, only acquiring a distinct religious identity in a later era.

In the third chapter, I focus on the period of Punjabi militancy from 1675 to 1849, which consequently created a surge of Sikh militant identity that was completely altered from any of the earlier teachings of the Gurus. As the last human Guru, Guru Gobind Singh initiated distinct rituals and philosophies that coincided with militancy that was much needed under his small following. Though this has often been seen as the start of Sikh identity for many Sikh scholars, I find that impact of Guru Gobind Singh's tactics was relatively small and without much significance, truly emerging after his death. The circumstances around the brutal guerrilla warfare in the 18th century was caused by

regional rebellions that were stirred by rigorous Mughal rule in Punjab, sparking groups of bandits to confiscate land and money from Mughal supporters, who so happened to be of a Muslim majority. This once political rivalry has been misinterpreted in modern politics, leading to the stereotype centuries-long Muslim-Sikh hatred. In the meantime, the disorganized infrastructure of Sikhism had fallen into decay until the reign of Ranjit Singh in the 19th century. The ruler united the provinces of Punjab together in his tolerant rule, promoting the prosperity of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh institutions under his reign. However, he found legitimacy in using the Sikh title in rallying support from the warring militant landlords beneath him, illuminating religion as a tool for politics. From the 18th to 19th centuries, I have concluded that a new militant identity emerged in the name of Sikhism, representing a simultaneous definition of the faith for later British rulers, though this definition wasn't necessarily endorsed by the majority of Punjabis.

The fourth chapter of my thesis analyzes the creation of the notion of the religious "other" from years 1849 to 1947, which was heavily instigated through the change in the political landscape during British colonialism. As the new rulers of the Punjab and pre-partition India, the British recruited a substantial number of militant-ritualized Sikhs into their army, which gave cause to Sikh stereotyping during the 19th century. The British infatuation with classification inspired Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs alike to align with a common religious identity as the British saw fit. The Sikh religious identity was also altered through the elitist interpretations of Sikh texts, conduct, and ritualism, which was later endorsed by the British. I find that the first revival of Sikhism's kind came in the late 19th century during this period of identification, transpiring in the politicization of

Sikh parties as well as causing such parties to put forth a common identity for Sikhs to follow for the first time in the religion's history. In the early 20th century, communalism became heavily politicized due to the push for independence, sparking violence between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs for the first time in contemporary history. With the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, Punjab was brutally divided, experiencing the dislocation and bloodshed of millions of Punjabis. Such events are more likely to account for the contemporary prioritization of religious over regional identity in Punjab, the faiths finding fault in their longtime religious neighbors. The modern Sikh identity has been caused by a reinterpretation of history that was heavily influenced the political mishaps of the 20th century.

My thesis stands as a historical analysis of the origination of Sikh religious identity, which I find developing throughout my timeline to form its contemporary definition of the faith. Unlike prominent Sikh historians Khushwant Singh and Sardha Ram, I have reevaluated the course of Sikh history amidst the circumstances of Punjab by encompassing the Bhakti movement and Chishti Sufism into my studies. My thesis in total serves as a critical timeline of Sikh history, which has not been attempted previously except for Khushwant Singh's narrative history. W. H. McLeod has also provided short historical narratives around the lives of the Gurus as a survey of the faith rather than an analysis of the Gurus' works. My work will serve as one of the few texts regarding Sikh history that has not been written through a devotional lens. Harjot Oberoi and W. H. McLeod have given excellent historical and political narratives of Sikhism from the 18th century until the 20th century, but I have chosen to take their reports one step further by

pinpointing the waves of change with Sikhism while identifying the emergence of the true Sikh identity in the late 19th century. The scholarships attributed to contrary beliefs are aligned with the beliefs of the majority; my claims disputing the Sikh identity's complete development under Guru Gobind Singh. The period that scholars have often pinpointed as the true creation of Sikh identity is often thought to have existed during the time of Guru Gobind Singh in the beginning of the 18th century. I find that the heightened political antics under the British Raj's census and organized Sikh institutions as the *Singh Sabha* and *Tat Khalsa* chose to create a uniform Sikh identity for the first time to unify the disjointed faith. Though Sikhism has successfully segregated its followers from the "other" since the 19th century through strategic political tactics, the deep rooted ritualism and belief attributed to Punjabi tradition has not been completely eradicated. The methods of Punjabi worship were present in the 14th century and are carried out by many Punjabis today. Through this mutual understanding of the divine and its means of devotion, bonds of pluralism and cooperation exist between some believers of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism today, mirroring the core of Punjabi religious history that cannot be erased.

Chapter One: The Essence of Ritualism: the Culmination of Punjabi Religious Practices

In medieval Punjab, the region experienced a plethora of religious synthesis within the dominant traditions of Sikhism, the Bhakti tradition (or *sant* tradition), and Chishti Sufism. Often thought of as the mixture of Hinduism and Islam, Sikhism emerged between the two faiths, accommodating many of the rituals, beliefs, and texts from both traditions. The essence of the ritualism behind what is now considered Sikhism cannot be merely credited to the dominating religious movements of Islam and Hinduism surrounding its founding, but the indigenous practices and ideas about the divine shared between and beyond faiths (given by common knowledge). A closer examination of the traditions in their origins to contemporary society's links to those movements offer a startling realization—the essence of their ritualism is closely connected to the regional perception of worship, more in line with being considered “Punjabi” practices rather than separate religious rituals.

The formations of Sikhism are linked heavily to its predecessors, not only in their rituals, but texts and beliefs as well. Sikhism, the Bhakti tradition, and Chishti Sufism all endorse the oneness of God in one variety or another, focusing on the loving aspect of the divine entity.³ The founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak, believed that the worship of God is only possible through “love and devotion and not by knowledge or ceremonial observance.”⁴ Each of the movements served as a reaction to the orthodox structures of the religious institutions they were a part of, adopting more devotional practices for self-

³ Mohammad N. Nabi, “The Impact of Sufism on the ‘Bhakti’ Movement in India,” *The Indian Journal of Politics* 11, no. 2 (1977): 126.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

expression in the process. The three religious traditions flourished in their ritual practices, which required individual thought and interpretation rather than mindless action. It is important to note that the rituals at the time connoted particular aspects that were considered common knowledge by devotees alike, making it far easier to associate them into religious practice. These were often acquired from the religious institutions at large and popular practices specific to the region (in this case it was Punjab). As the movements grew over time, rigidity emerged through doctrine and independent ritual classification in attempt to distinguish the faiths and traditions from one another. This was often associated with the eventual canonization of texts (in particular Sikhism). Again, Sikhism is the best example of this, as the Gurus after Nanak enacted the beginnings of new traditions from the other faiths, which were later enacted to create a new religion through such processes.

When analyzing the rituals of Sikh veneration at a preliminary level, it's best to analyze the faith traditions and practices of those surrounding Sikhism. In Punjab, the heartland of the Sikh faith, the religion shares deep ties to Bhakti forms of Hinduism and the Chishti sect of Sufi Islam. Guru Nanak was born into a Hindu family in a Muslim majority district of undivided Punjab, hence it is safe to say that he was heavily influenced by both religious traditions in their entirety.⁵ When Guru Nanak began to preach his teachings, he did not intend to create a new faith. The rituals associated with Sikhism were acquired after Nanak's time, predominantly emerging with concrete structures of worship, such as the *gurdwara* (Sikh worship facility). In establishing the

⁵ W. H. McLeod, "The Life of Guru Nanak," in *Religions of India in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 449.

faith with worship ritual tradition, it would seem natural to institute pre-existing traditions common to devotees at the time to enact previous knowledge about the act of worship. This would entail adopting and adapting rituals from common society; hence the influence of the Bhakti movement and Sufism can be found in Sikhism today.

The heartland of three prominent South Asian religions is within the Punjab, a territory named after the five rivers (the literal translation of “Punjab”) that ran through the fertile plains of the region: Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Sutlej, and Beas.⁶ The medieval Punjab included territory both in the current boundaries of Pakistan and India, its previous borders trickling into the modern Indian states of Himachal Pradesh and Haryana. According to Richard Eaton, the region was home to large agricultural communities, as well as pastoral nomads, many of the nomads settling with time and acquiring land.⁷ A growing number of the pastoral community were nomadic Jats, a peasant group originating from Sindh that eventually settled within the region, acquiring status and multiplying in number throughout the Punjab.⁸ Vedic Hinduism was not well established into Jat territory in Sindh, which might explain the group’s unfamiliarity with the tradition before the large move to Punjab. This Jats constituted a majority in conversion rates to Islam and Sikhism, many tribes remaining under the influence of prominent Chishti and eventually Sikh landowners (much of the group rose to form the landowning community as well). The medieval Punjab was filled with a variety of

⁶ Eleanor Nesbitt, *Sikhism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8.

⁷ Richard M. Eaton, “The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid” in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 342.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 343.

religious movements and traditions that were formed and grew side by side, amounting to become dominant features of society that have assimilated into something that is strictly Punjabi in nature.

The Punjab has a rich heritage of both Hindu and Muslim communities and spiritual leadership, providing a fertile ground for Sikhism to take root in. Some areas of the Punjab experienced the influence of Vedic Hinduism in its origins, the Islamic influence emerging long after Punjab's first encounters with Arab invaders in 711 in the city of Multan, the religion only settling in Punjab permanently with the impact of Baba Farid Chishti's establishment in Pakpattan in 1235. The devotional undertaking of "Bhakti" (which means the loving devotion between the devotee and the divine) offers another form of practice that is quite different from the dominated practices of Brahmin priests, the religious alternative becoming increasingly popular throughout India from the 14th century onwards. The religion of the Brahmin priests was increasingly rejected by many Punjabis who turned to more personalized varieties of worship and interpretations of the divine, finding the Bhakti forms of devotion as tools in worshipping a personal god. Some examples of those Bhakti notions included the focus on mental worship with the divine (placing less emphasis ritual and image worship), the insistence of accessible and personable divine entities.⁹ From the increasing interactions of the Bhakti tradition with that of Chishti Sufism, many of the views developed, some ideas mirroring that of their neighbor. Islam took the most grassroots of forms within the Punjab through its fluid institution of Sufism, the religion expanding with the number of *pirs* (or Sufi shaikhs)

⁹ Nabi, "The Impact of Sufism," 124.

and *dargahs* (shrines) that began to call Punjab their home. The *pirs* taught followers that God was one of love and personal attributes that could be reached through a personal relationship with Him.¹⁰ These teachings opened a new door to seeing the divine and worshipping God, making locality and regionalism acceptable into these new perspectives. In time, both the Bhakti and Sufi movements grew to incorporate other beliefs that were accepted by both Hindus and Muslims. Saints from both religions stressed the abdication of caste and that the primary devotional attribute of God was love. Asceticism was not a required feature of saintly fellowship and devotion, but it was endorsed amidst the custom of being a householder. For example, some saints and their pupils would leave their families to their own devices to concentrate on the divine. Within the region of Punjab, Sufi saints such as Baba Farid (1173/1188-1266/1280) and Haider Shaikh (1434-1515) and the Bhakti saints Namdev (1270-1350) and Ramananda (1400-1470/1476) grew in prominence. These great saints would later play a role in the doctrine of Sikhism, their works incorporated into the *Guru Granth Sahib* under the teachings of the Guru lineage (except for Haider Shaikh, whose teachings were independently accepted by Sikhs from a separate occurrence). When analyzing the larger picture, the interactions between the Bhakti movement and Sufi Islam are not confined to Punjab, but rather are responsible for a larger movement engulfing the sum of South Asia that led to a lineage of religious pluralism. The foundations of Punjabi religious traditions in contemporary society do not completely mimic the ideologies and practices of other provinces, since they encompass a unique interpretation of what constitutes the divine based upon the

¹⁰ Ibid.

interactions of strictly Punjabi saints and schools. These humble beginnings are responsible for the growth of a distinctly Punjabi religious movement, that of Sikhism. Therefore, to understand the inner workings of Sikhism is to understand that of Chishti Sufism and the Bhakti tradition.

At the core of Hinduism, the act of deity veneration is often associated with *darsan*, or seeing/being seen by the divine, hence taking in the deity's blessings. In standardized Hinduism, the idol image itself contains the deity for the duration of the ritual, making the act of *darsan* and veneration of the image core in practice.¹¹ Within temples, images often are conveyed throughout the sacred space, constructed based on cosmological figures given through ancient scriptures. The focuses of the devotees are on the idol, which as a form of God, is used as a meditating device of sorts—a tool for focusing on the entirety of the divine.¹² Between Brahmin-dominated Hindu and Bhakti practices lay similar rituals, but the connotations behind them slightly differ (with the Bhakti traditions focusing more on personal forms of devotion, some sects still reliant on image worship). Music plays a crucial role in worship, containing prayers, folk tales, and mantras that can be used by the devotee to shower the deity with love and praise. *Pujas* (ritual worship of deities) remain an important part of the consecration of the image, circling and prostrating before the deity, adorning the idol with flowers, incense, milk, and oil as well as dressing the icon with clothes, using fire and bell ringing in summoning the deity, waving the fly whisk over the idol, and feeding and receiving blessed food

¹¹ Diana L. Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image of India*, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 45.

from the deity (*prasad*), bathing them, and putting them to sleep at the end of each day. These practices are thought to awaken the senses and play on the role domesticity of that a guest and host.¹³ The devotee plays the role of a host, giving offerings to please the holy guest. In this act of role-play, it demonstrates the personification of the divine and the personalization of the deity—making god within reach. Such acts are intensified in the custom of pilgrimage. The Bhakti movement, or *sant* tradition, tended to focus on the abode of the saints (*sants*) rather than Brahmin priests, as the Brahmins symbolized their rigorous authority that the Bhaktis purposefully tried to stay from. Pilgrimage has been an essential aspect of worship for Hindus for hundreds of centuries, the act compared to Vedic sacrifices in the *Mahabharata* for its ritual benefit, which was accessible for all castes and socio-economic backgrounds compared to the elitist Vedic sacrifices previously offered.¹⁴ This act was largely taken for a variety of reasons related to the deity or holy space in mind, often believed to spaces of auspiciousness, cures for issues of sufferings, assurances of answered prayers, and even aids in transitioning to the next life or the end of the life cycle in general—*moksha*. Popular Hinduism tended to turn to the geographical locations of spiritual importance, whether it was a particular *mandir* (temple) or abode of the gods (for instance, the Ganges River of the Himalayas). Three of the most popular pilgrimage sites in North India today relate to the Ganges River and the temples surrounding it in Allahabad, Haridwar, and Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. The basis for the following rituals incorporated into the *sant* tradition can be directly related

¹³ Ibid., 49.

¹⁴ Ibid., 64.

to those of Sikhism, with many of the same practices followed. Within the *sant* traditions, a deeper parallel can be drawn between the faiths.

The Bhakti tradition is divided between *nirgun* (devotion to God without attributes and image worship) and *sagun* philosophies (devotion to God with personal attributes and incorporate of image worship), both of which were present in medieval Punjab.¹⁵ Guru Nanak (1469-1539) was closer to the *nirgun* tradition himself, advocating a one, formless God without image worship.¹⁶ The *nirgun* perspective of the divine was further endorsed in the following four Gurus, who incorporated a majority of *nirgun* poetic works into the holy text, the *Adi Granth*. It is important to note that the Bhakti saints that the Gurus used in the *Adi Granth* were from both the *nirgun* and *sagun* traditions, yet the poetic works chosen from the text were of *nirgun* nature. The practices notably from the *sant* tradition consist of the use playing music, singing or reciting mantras, and even dance. These items are capitalized on within the *sant* tradition itself, at times attributing to a larger part of the worship rather than the actual image veneration. In breaking with orthodox Brahmanism, alterations in faith practices occurred as well as the rejection of Brahmanical texts and the caste system.¹⁷ Bhakti worship consisted of using folk songs and stories in their vernacular language to reach the common population, making the faith accessible to all.¹⁸ Furthermore, the emphasis on the a direct relationship with God allowed for devotees to worship the divine in a more personable

¹⁵ Rameshwar Prasad Bahuguna, "Beyond Theological Differences: Sant-Vaishnava Interaction in Medieval India," *Indian Historical Review* 36, no. 1 (2009): 57.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Ainslee T. Embree, ed., "The Songs of Medieval Hindu Devotion," in *Sources of Indian Tradition*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 1: 342.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 343.

way, using dance, singing, and instrumental music as a way of reaching God. Each of these practices was further enhanced with the rich cultural surroundings of traditions they evolved in, making them uniquely distinct from province to province. These traditions also expressed the unique displays of affection toward the divine, creating strong ties to the use of music and recitation in the devotional tradition. In the case of Punjabi medieval religious movements, this allowed for Sikhism, the Bhakti movement, and Chishti Sufism to look alike in many of their practices.

Two influential Bhakti saints throughout the Punjab were Namdev and Ramananda, whose works were equally effective in the doctrines of Sikhism (their texts incorporated into the canon of the *Guru Granth Sahib*). Ramananda became a popular figure throughout the South Asian subcontinent for his luring folk tales of love that followed the *nirgun* Vaishnavite tradition.¹⁹ His most popularized religious reforms consisted of the inclusion of women and all castes into worship as well as familial relationship of the soul with the divine. His works spread far from Uttar Pradesh into the Punjab, venturing further throughout the subcontinent to where he received much acclaim. Namdev, a Marathi Bhakti poet saint, visited many Hindu holy places throughout North India before settling in Punjab for eighteen years. During this period, Namdev's poetic works fell into both categories of *nirgun* and *sagun* ideology, but his advocacy of an invisible, singular God from the Vaishnavite tradition was expressed within the *Adi Granth*, aligning with other similar *nirgun* philosophies.²⁰ It is not known

¹⁹ Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Early Sufism and its History in India to AD 1600*, vol 1., *A History of Sufism in India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2003), 357.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 356.

why Namdev decided to leave the Punjab to venture onwards after eighteen years, but his legacy in the Punjab was everlasting, making him a prominent Bhakti saint for Hindus, later incorporated as a Sikh saint due to the canonization of his writings within the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

The village of Ghoman in the Gurdaspur district of Punjab, India remains a unique example of religious pluralism and assimilation. The age of the principality is ultimately unknown, but its' most recent history is stated to date back to 1270 with the arrival of the famous Maharashtran Bhakti saint, Namdev. Namdev had begun his spiritual journey by venturing north from his home, visiting the holy cities of Varanasi and Mathura before reaching Delhi, later venturing into Punjab.²¹ In Ghoman, Namdev stayed and gathered a fairly large following for eighteen years before continuing in his travels.²² It has been stated by a teacher of the *gurudwara*'s attached school that in Ghoman, Namdev composed the *Tapiana Sahib*.²³ His followers remembered his writings and teachings, later building a shrine to the Bhakti saint in the thick of the forests. Since then, the village has held a great remembrance for the saint that remains today, enacting a synthesis of Bhakti and Sikh ideological traditions.

Currently, Ghoman houses a *gurudwara* bearing the name of Namdev. The complex itself is rather large, complete with a massive *gurudwara* and multi-leveled shrine to the Bhakti saint. According to *gurudwara* officials, the shrine is a part of the *gurudwara* complex itself, making it a Sikh icon. To further instill this thought, some of

²¹ Gurdeep Singh, Personal Interview, trans. Sartaj Singh, October 19, 2013.

²² Ibid.

²³ Baba Bachan Singh, Personal Interview, trans. Sartaj Singh, October 19, 2013.

Namdev's poetic works (such as the *Tapiana Sahib*) are included in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, totaling in 61 *banis* (hymns) overall.²⁴ According to *gurudwara* officials and devotees, this makes Namdev a Sikh saint, not a Hindu. One interviewee went as far as dating the Bhakti saint after Guru Nanak, believing that Namdev's teachings were in actuality Nanak's own.²⁵ The history of the shrine and Namdev, himself, is again lost in a cloud of assimilation. Amidst the multitude of changes that have Namdev's time, his *nirgun* Bhakti messages are still intact, and in practice within the Sikh faith.

The essence of Sufism lies in its devotional roots as a way for followers to have a direct relationship with the one God.²⁶ This God is without attributes, though the attributes of worship are often with a personified character. The worship of God took many forms, ultimately under the guidance of a shaikh. Rather than attend prayer at a mosque, Muslims in the medieval era sought the direction of a guru of sorts. These men known as *pirs* held a direct link to the divine, who advocated a personified worship form that was accessible to the masses. In the Punjab, the Chishti *silsila* (the chain lineage of a sect) was held as a common sect, often having an institution for learning and devotion under the *pir*, whose spiritual lineage was carried out through his *dargah* and descendants.²⁷ The shrine acted as the embodiment of the *pir*, the shaikh's moral authority continuing after his death through a hereditary ancestor that continued the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ G. Singh, Personal Interview.

²⁶ Nabi, "The Impact of Sufism," 125.

²⁷ David Gilmartin, "Shrines, Succession, and Sources of Moral Authority," in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 223.

actual authority of the Sufi master through the *dargah* itself.²⁸ Such *dargahs* became major sites of pilgrimage and patronage, attracting followers from all castes and religions in awe of the shaikh's miraculous powers. Overtime, the *dargah* infrastructure incorporated ritualism for devotional practice, the center of such often focused on the tomb of the *pir* himself. The devotee often circles the tomb, the prayers given to the *pir*, who is thought to be an intermediary between God and the devotee. The rituals associated with such pilgrimages are similar to that of the *sant* tradition and Sikhism—the prostration of a devotee in front of the tomb, offerings of incense, oil lamps, money, and food (often sweets and sometimes goats), as well as the tomb's adornment with beautifully gifted cloths and flowers.²⁹ Another tradition that has found roots within Chishti Sufism is the use of a *langar* for the many pilgrims and poor who gathered at the shrine. At Chishti *dargahs* today, the *langar* is primarily used for festival purposes and Friday services, but there is reason to believe that during the sect's prime, the *langars* were far more actively used. A popularized custom of Chishti devotees involves the use of prayer threads. The red strings are often bought and blessed before being tied to the trees and gates surrounding the *dargah*'s circumference while saying a prayer. This particular custom is often a sign of pilgrimage, for such threads indicate the devotees' prayers and devotion to the saint, often planning to return once their prayers are answered to remove a red thread from the same tied spot. Like the auspicious cities of Allahabad, Haridwar, and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, Chishti *dargahs* became popular centers of

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Anna Bigelow, "Saved by the Saint: Refusing and Reversing Partition in Muslim North India," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68, no. 2 (2009): 446.

pilgrimage in the medieval era that were known for miraculous works and answered prayers. In some instances, the Punjabi *dargahs* became equated with the Hajj, in some cases equaling, if not surpassing, the authority of the Hajj pilgrimage with particular shrines (Baba Farid is particularly known for this). These religious traditions have become customary at many Chishti *dargahs*, their practices still evident in Sufi complexes today.

Using my own observational research on Chishti *dargahs* prominent in the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal India, I have particularly seen the previously stated rituals occur at the shrines of Moinuddin Chishti, Haider Shaikh, Nizamuddin Auliya, Shaikh Salim, and Zainuddin Shirazi. My current research on the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh in Malerkotla, Punjab, India suggests that such practices are more significant to cultural ideals of worship than to that of a specific religion. Anne Bigelow, a scholar on the shrine, finds that Punjabi traditions prevail at the shrine, not particular to any specific religion, but to all of them.³⁰ From my visit, I could verify that, as there was a mixed crowd of worshippers and attendants at the *dargah*—Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh, all of who were following in such rituals as circumambulation, prostration, tomb adornment with flowers and cloth, and offerings of food, incense, and money (which needed no religious preference). Music has also become associated with Chishti Sufi practices, the *qawwali* style (Sufi musical performances using an array of instruments and poetic lyrics to worship God) sang with instrumentals being known in particular.³¹ These *qawwalis* contained folk tales and devotional hymns to God for every mood, all sung in the

³⁰ Ibid., 445.

³¹ Harini Narayanan. Class Lecture. IES Abroad New Delhi. October 29, 2013.

vernacular language. These musical performances have become a central aspect to Sufi worship, allowing for worshipers to “get lost in the music” so to speak, singing and dancing in their love for the divine. The style of the musical worship used at the Sufi centers follows the *kirtan* models of the Bhakti traditions (a call and response style on recitation and musical techniques), even many folk tales mirroring those of Hindu saints. Simon Digby writes that “poetic sensibilit[ies], which extended also to the music or sung or chanted verse[, were] the popular appeal of this characteristic during the[Medieval] period [that] usually outweighed deprecations from the point of view of Islamic orthodoxy.”³² For Chishti Sufism, traditional orthodox views of worship were often pushed aside, accumulating the larger practices of the regions the sect inhabited. From such practices, the acts of worship as well as the meanings behind such symbols can be understood as similar to that of Sikhism and Bhakti movements, the religions often identical in forms of devotion.

The network of Chishti *dargahs* was extensive by the time of Guru Nanak’s birth, proving to be an influential force in not only spiritual matters but political and socio-economic means as well. Baba Farid is probably the most famous of Chishti *pirs* within the Punjab, having acquired an extensive spiritual institution that was expanded into charitable associations, landowning castes, agricultural producers, and a political army under the shaikh’s descendants.³³ Baba Farid’s *dargah* became a center of moral influence under the patronage of local and Delhi rulers who sought the *pir*’s blessing. It

³² Simon Digby, “The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Medieval India,” in *India’s Islamic Traditions: 711-1750*, ed. Richard M. Eaton (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 240.

³³ *Ibid.*, 243.

would only seem natural that such strong Sufi institutions gradually held a large sphere of influence on the general population. Such powers were noticed by Guru Nanak, who reportedly struck up conversations with Baba Farid and Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariyya (1170-1268), who was the disputed Suhrawardiyya teacher of Haider Shaikh. Looking at the time period of the *pirs* to that of Guru Nanak's lifespan, it is more likely that the descendants of the *pirs* were exchanging ideas about spirituality with the Guru. For the purpose of ritual analysis, I have decided to closely examine the practices within the shrine of Haider Shaikh, an Afghan *pir* who settled in Malerkotla, Punjab, India in the 1400s. Haider Shaikh was a noticeable power in his Islamic knowledge, but his miraculous works attracted the patronage and respect from Hindus and Sikhs alike, with much of the Sikh pilgrimages coming after the blessing of Guru Gobind Singh. The Guru's two sons were inhumanely killed by the Mughals, the descendant of Haider Shaikh (*Nawab* Sher Muhammad Khan) becoming one of the voices of protest against such acts.³⁴ Guru Gobind Singh placed his blessings upon the *Nawab* and the *dargah* for the *Nawab's* (governor) support, which many contemporary Sikhs use as an explanation of pilgrimage to the *dargah* today.³⁵

The *dargah* of Haider Shaikh consists of ritualistic fusion, one that cannot be distinctly of any particular religion, but merely described as "Punjabi."³⁶ In a recent visit to the shrine, I came across worshippers of Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh backgrounds, each of which were not only there to receive *darsan*, but whom were a part of the trust

³⁴ Bigelow, "Saved by the Saint," 438.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 440.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 446.

associated with the shrine. Some Sikh men were in charge of distributing the *prasad* (a *laddu* in this case) and disposing of the burnt incense sticks surrounding the tomb.

Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh women alike prostrated themselves in front of the tomb, giving monetary offerings to the saint. The descendant in charge of the shrine blessed each devotee with the tap of a flywhisk, which had previously been used to wave over the deceased's tomb (the traditional royal symbol connoting spiritual authority). With the touching of the temple foundation with the hand, the hand then touching the devotee's forehead, showed the respect for the shrine. This ritual is universal for *dargahs*, *gurudwaras*, and *mandirs*, even reaching beyond the Punjab to constitute a South Asian tradition of respect. On the day of my attendance, no *kirtan* practices were occurring, but this ritual takes place on Thursday and Friday afternoons in particular. The recitations of prayers were the worshippers own, each reciting verses or blessings in the religious tradition of their own, or maybe even one specifically personalized for the shrine. Though such examples demonstrate the religious pluralism and assimilation of Punjabi religious sites in contemporary society, it can be assumed that similar occurrences were developed in the past, possibly even more so before rigid religious distinctions were endorsed and enacted. To understand this point, the origins of Sikhism shall be explained starting with Guru Nanak to develop a picture of religious pluralism and ritualism during the Guru's lifespan.

By the time of Guru Nanak's birth, the Bhakti and Sufi movements of Punjab had increased in multitude, taking on a new wave of meaning. Over time, the rigid infrastructure of the religious institutions was felt to only benefit the elite orthodox

practitioners, stirring the consciousness of some devout worshippers. Some Punjabis in the 15th and 16th century became increasingly aware of the intact caste barriers, growing orthodoxy, and infinite rituals given without reason in both Hinduism and Islam, calling for change.³⁷ The *nirgun* philosophy of the Bhakti tradition became an influencing factor in the promotion of ideological and ritual changes within Hinduism, some *pirs* within the Chishti *silsila* advocating a similar type of philosophy for their devotees.³⁸ The same insistence of a nameless, formless, and unified divine was a concept that struck a chord with Guru Nanak, becoming the backbone of his own religious undertaking. His condemnation of Hindu and Muslim distinctions, ritualism, and narrow holy texts made him stand out from his contemporaries, instead supporting the realization of the one true God as the utmost important principle of his unknowingly new movement.³⁹ Nanak expanded on this idea, believing in the Absolute Reality, or Unity of Being, an idea endorsed by some Bhakti and Chishti saints as either *Dvaitadvaita-Vilakshanavada* (or authoritative monism in the sense of an absolute deity) or *Wahdat al-Wujud* (or unity of being, known as the monism of God) within those respective traditions.⁴⁰ When examining Nanak's interpretation of the divine, it may seem contradictory at first. Nanak claimed that God was formless and nameless, yet held true to attributes associated with God. Clearly, the *nirgun* and *sagun* traditions were evident within the Punjab, the two possibly fusing in some aspects (like that of Nanak's dimensions). As a general rule in looking at texts and practices, it cannot be assumed that the actual ideologies will be

³⁷ Rizvi, *Early Sufism*, 372.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 373.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 390.

carried out to their fullest. Alterations can occur, and in all three Punjabi religious traditions, this was exactly the case.

The core ritual of Sikhism lies in the veneration of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which Myrvold claims that a majority of Sikhs view to be “the eternal guru of the Sikhs with authority to provide spiritual guidance and a scripture which enshrines words of an ontologically divine nature and the revelatory experiences and teaching of the historical human [G]urus.”⁴¹ This might seem to contradict the Sikh notion of a formless god, but in actuality, the text is alive, providing divine knowledge and acting as a personal guru. Some Sikh scholars suggest that Guru Nanak reserved the term “guru” for *shabad*, or God’s word manifested within the world through a human intermediary.⁴² When keeping this term in mind, some Sikhs would argue that the *Adi Granth* is the actual word of God, hence the book is God himself, worthy of veneration. Since the *Guru Granth Sahib* did not exist during Guru Nanak’s lifetime, it is slightly controversial to say whether or not he would’ve approved of the text’s veneration. As his succeeding gurus began to write on Nanak and their own ideas of Nanak’s teachings, such works were compiled and canonized, the copy of the *Guru Granth Sahib* today remaining as it was after Guru Gobind Singh.

The treatment of the holy book is not of a mere idol, but as a guru itself. Myrvold relates the sacred scriptures to that of a person with “human-like habits, epithets, and

⁴¹ Kristina Myrvold, “Engaging with the Guru: Sikh Beliefs and Practices of Guru Granth Sahib,” *Postscripts* 6, no. 1-3 (2010): 204.

⁴² *Ibid.*

authorities.”⁴³ When interpreting the *Guru Granth Sahib*, it can be easy to diminish the devotional qualities in worship of the book to that of caring for a human *guru*—attending and adorning the book with expensive cloths (or clothes) and flowers, circling and prostrating in front of the throned text, waving a fly whisk over the holy object (as done in royal rituals), granting the *Guru Granth Sahib* offerings of money and *halwa* (carrot-based sweet) for blessings (*prasad*), playing music with the recitation and singing of the scriptures, and placing the *guru* into a bed each evening. The lines between symbolism and realism are blurred, with many contemporary scholars linking these rituals as part of respective traditions of the Punjab, a mere symbolism towards the *Gurus* and their revelations. To more conservative Sikhs, this ritual veneration is towards to book itself, a full-fledged spiritual being encompassing the divine entity.

Furthermore, the insistence playing music and singing his verses of devotion instituted a tradition of musical worship that has become essential to the faith itself. The recitations, often set to music, are said to have occurred during the time of Guru Nanak, oftentimes his way of conveying his teachings.⁴⁴ These recitations have become essential within the organized faith, the recitation of prayers and the name of God said to have spiritual merit and powers of healing and the intervention of the divine.⁴⁵ The hymns used in worship are not only constricted to the teachings of the *Gurus*, but other Hindu and Muslim saints whose works correlated with such teachings. In sum, such ritualism

⁴³ Ibid., 206.

⁴⁴ McLeod, “The Life of Guru Nanak,” 454.

⁴⁵ Myrvold, “Engaging with the Guru,” 210.

used within Sikhism brings a devotee a particular closeness to the divine as well as appeasement.

A central structure that has come to represent the faith today is the *gurudwara* itself, the term *gurudwara* literally translating to “Guru’s door” or “gateway to the Guru.”⁴⁶ *Gurudwaras* provide a space for congregational worship, which includes recitations or singing of scriptures or prayers accompanied by music often in the form of a *kirtan* (call and response chanting) for many Sikhs. According to Kanwerdeep Singh, an information officer at the *Gurudwara* Bangla Sahib of Delhi, the concept of the *gurudwara* was for meditation purposes other than that of the Western concept of prayer.⁴⁷ The officer further implied that God was not restricted to the hall, but was everywhere, hence prayers and meditation shouldn’t be restricted to just the *gurudwara*.⁴⁸ Singh stated that “temples were primarily made to bring about consensus of thoughts among[st] people so as to make them work effectively as a team in the light of the knowledge of learned people in whose memory these religions places were actually made.”⁴⁹ Congregations were an essential part of worship even during the time of Guru Nanak, who would gather his followers in *sangat*, or a religiously aimed assembly (often consisting of prayers and *kirtan*). According to scholar Gurmukh Singh, the Brahmin-dominated *sangat* tradition only consisted of recitation and meditation, but Nanak himself inserted *kirtan* traditions, making it the primary (and some consider the noblest) means of

⁴⁶ Gurmukh Singh, *Historical Sikh Shrines* (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2005), 43.

⁴⁷ Kanwerdeep Singh, Personal Interview, October 16, 2013.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

worship.⁵⁰ Since the Bhakti and Chishti traditions had previously incorporated *kirtan* as a primary means of worship, it's possible that this practice was drawn from those tradition, it's importance further enhanced under the Guru Nanak. The *sangats* were far and few between during the faith's beginnings, only growing in number years later under Guru Hargobind when some *gurudwaras* began to hold the *Adi Granth*, as well.⁵¹ It can be assumed that due to the heavy political (and eventual religious) persecution of Sikhs during the periods of the later Gurus, *gurudwaras* were not heavily patronized; hence the elaborate centers found today wouldn't have existed (Harimandir Sahib, or the Golden Temple, being an exception). The institutionalization of the *Adi Granth* was a turning point in the *gurudwara* structure, hence the simple *sangats* received a name change in the process—*gurudwara*, named for the building in which the holy text was popularly placed during the time of Guru Gobind Singh.⁵² *Gurudwara* visitations as well as pilgrimages to the Golden Temple became added features to Sikh ritualism, which were not emphasized within the holy texts. In fact, Guru Nanak placed no emphasis on pilgrimage after his countless treks to pilgrimage sites within the Hindu and Muslim traditions. Still, many Sikhs found it necessary to conduct pilgrimages, as it was a Punjabi custom. Rather than visit the Golden Temple, many found refuge in the Hindu holy cities of Haridwar and Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh until the early 20th century. The popularized pilgrimage center of Harimandir Sahib emerged in status within the 20st century due to Sikh propaganda within the late 19th and 20th centuries, evolving the great *gurudwara* as an essential site

⁵⁰ Gurmukh Singh, *Historical Sikh Shrines*, 44.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

for ritual veneration. Another feature that was enacted at *sangats* (and eventually *gurudwaras*) was the *langar* institution, which began under Guru Nanak. When analyzing the ritualism and focus of the *gurudwara* from its basic creation as a *sangat* to the elaborate buildings of the present, the contrast is vast. The transition into distinct Sikh ritualism takes place long after the founding Guru, yet such traditions have been openly incorporated into the folds of the religion.

When attempting to explain the institutionalized ritualism within Sikhism, it must be acknowledged that the rituals themselves are not required in Sikhism. The veneration methods are conducted out of respect for God and the *Guru Granth Sahib*, though their structure has become more developed and ritualized throughout time. The core doctrines of Sikhism advocate against ritualistic discrimination, making worship available for all regardless of caste, religion, or gender without the intercession of any priest (no priests are within the religion as well). The Sikh faith attempts to separate from the rigid Brahmin-dominated Hindu institutions of the Gurus' times, pushing away from idolatry and priest-centered practices in theory. In practice, some Sikhs found that such traditions emerged in the Sikh faith through the influence of the Udasis. Gurmukh Singh claimed that the emergence of idolatry and priest-centered ritualism stemmed from the Udasi priests who were placed in charge of many *gurudwaras* in the absence of a large Sikh population in hiding (due to political persecution under the Mughals).⁵³ Udasis are known to be celibate followers of Guru Nanak's son, Sri Chand, who supported some of his father's teachings but endorsed polytheism. The era of the last Gurus was a strenuous

⁵³ Ibid.

one, as many Gurus were in direct conflict with Mughal governors and local rulers who pushed to suppress the growing Sikh power under the Gurus, leading to the assassination of Gurus and widespread persecution of their followers (who were not only Sikhs, but Hindus and Muslims). Due to such circumstances, Sikhs were often in hiding or in battle far from *gurudwaras*; hence maintenance was need. A groundskeeper was required for the maintenance of the *gurudwara* site, *langar* facilities, the *Guru Granth Sahib* (if there was one), and collector of land and revenue from patrons to maintain the Sikh institutions. Gurmukh Singh links ritualism from this period onwards to the Udasi priests who were placed in charge of the *gurudwaras*, many of whom apparently converted and left a life of hermitage for marriage, which later lead to a hereditary lineage of land and *gurudwara* holders.⁵⁴ The scholar claims that their polytheistic tendencies of worship transitioned into mainstream worship methods, becoming Sikh traditions in the process. This notion would suggest that Udasi priests took on the role of priests within the *gurudwara* itself, initiating worship. Such views may provide some insight for particular *gurudwaras*, but for Sikh practices as a whole it is quite narrow. Unfortunately, this idea of Brahmin-related ritualism within the early Sikh faith has spread amongst contemporary Sikhs, creating tension between Sikh and Udasi/Hindu relations. This theory only accounts for a portion of the Udasi-controlled *gurudwaras*, failing to look at Sikh traditions and Punjabi society as a whole.

When taking the entire Punjabi population into consideration, it is wrong to accuse Udasis as the sole cause of ritualism within the Sikh faith. Udasi priests are only

⁵⁴ Ibid., 45.

responsible for maintenance of select *gurudwaras*, not all of them. In actuality, later rulers with Sikh backgrounds often felt it their duty to oversee and care for *gurudwaras*, though there was no call for doing so in the religious texts themselves. It would be hard to believe that these rulers would institute Udasi practices in this case, but rather the population attending *sangat* would be more likely responsible for bringing in well-known religious practices common throughout the Punjab. Though the number of Sikh landlords and rulers increased after the time of Guru Gobind Singh, it can still be assumed that some Sikhs of influence maintained *gurudwaras* long before the Punjabi kingdom of Ranjit Singh came to power. This was the case of the Harimandir Sahib (Golden Temple), which was maintained by Udasis and Sikhs alike and contained Hindu idols until its removal in 1905.⁵⁵ Rather than blame the Udasis for instituting ritualism in Sikhism, the Sikh population attending *sangats* needs to be examined as a whole. Long after the time of Guru Nanak, some followers still clung to their religious backgrounds, afraid of persecution and loss of prestige. The conversion rate of followers into a “*Khalsa*” Sikh (initiated Sikhs abiding by the 5 K’s suggested by Guru Gobind Singh) was slow, and many ousted Sikhs were actually in hiding or battle. These converted Sikhs originated from Hindu or Muslim families, often unknowingly bringing their assumptions about faith practice with them into the newfound faith. Furthermore, the influence of Chishti Sufi and Bhakti traditions were strong in Punjab, often intertwining in practices. It is highly possible that this fusion of Punjabi religious movements became common knowledge for everyday people, as many religious practices reached across faith

⁵⁵ W. H. McLeod, “Definition by Legislation,” in *Sikhs and Sikhism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 89.

boundaries in its attempt to identify proper worship techniques, such as prostration, food and money offerings, adornment of holy items with practices associated with royalty (fly whisk, incense, and expensive cloth), and *kirtan* practices. It is safe to say that even before the time of Guru Nanak, these practices were commonplace for both religions, not assuming the title of either “Hindu” or “Muslim.” Hence, these techniques could be instead considered “Punjabi.” Despite the Guru’s insistence against ritualism, the traditions were still acquired within his religious movements by the devotees themselves, for Punjabis were only worshiping God in the only way they knew how to (especially since Sikhism didn’t set any specific ground rules for actual religious practices besides that of scriptural and *kirtan* techniques).

The Guru Granth Sahib is an extraordinary example of the religious pluralism of medieval Punjab. The text itself is comprised of hymns (*banis*) from multiple sources, many of which were written by gurus or taken from other sources.⁵⁶ These were recited within the *kirtan* and *raga* style—the *raga* consisting of a sung ballad used to “describe the lacerations of a beloved in the memory of his/her lover.”⁵⁷ The authorship of the hymns are not conveyed within the holy book itself, since the text is meant to be seen as the actual word of God, revealed through the gurus as such.⁵⁸ Still, some sources have kept records of the original authorship of some *banis*. These hymns were not all directly from Guru Nanak. In fact, the *banis* aren’t restricted to gurus within the Sikh faith at all—scholarship suggests that multiple *banis* were derived or borrowed from Hindu and

⁵⁶ Sukhbir Singh Kapoor, *Guru Granth Sahib: An Advanced Study*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Hemkunt Press, 2002), 38.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

Muslim saints, many of whom influenced the teachings of the first five Gurus. The first compilation of the scriptures (the *Adi Granth*) is filled with passages of the first five Gurus as well as an estimated 29 prominent Bhakti and Chishti saints during the 15th and 16th centuries, which heavily influenced the first five *Gurus*.⁵⁹ The actual number of saints (and which saints) whose *banis* and poetry were used in the compilation of the *Guru Granth Sahib* is highly debated by scholars today, as contemporary Sikhs have now begun to dispute the fact of Hindus and Muslims contributing to the texts. Many of the popular saints whose work is found in the Sikh holy texts are Kabir, Shaikh Bhikan, Baba Farid, Ravidas, Namdev, Surdas, and Ramananda.⁶⁰ As some of these authors were quite popular throughout Punjab, some of these authors' *banis* became well known and are often credited as being purely Sikh, allowing for many of the saints to take on Sikh identities after their death. When analyzing this historically, it would seem logical for the Gurus to incorporate texts from the Bhakti and Chishti traditions into the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The poems' praises of a formless and oneness of God aligned with the beliefs of the Gurus as well as some ideals for everyday spiritual living. The saints who composed such literature were widely influential within the Punjab; therefore they were more commonplace amongst the spiritually inclined of the 15th and 16th centuries. Since Guru Nanak and his author predecessors had no intention of creating a separate organized religion, it wouldn't have been a concern to include texts that were not Sikh. At the time, there were not Sikh texts anyway—the Gurus were the only composers. The religious

⁵⁹Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 54.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

background of the authored saints held no significant value to the Gurus, hence their literature was used. This could also show that the Sikh identity was not formed, but rather influenced by a common spiritual theology that could be categorized as Punjabi.

The language used within the *Guru Granth Sahib* is a mix of the common languages used in spiritual literature and everyday conversations in 15th and 16th century Punjab. Much of the *bani* terminology stems from Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Hindavi, and Punjabi, insinuating that the particular terminology used in devotion was not restricted to one language or religious tradition, but rather shared across backgrounds during its incorporation into standard Punjabi religious traditions.⁶¹ For the Bhakti and Chishti sects within Punjab, much of the literature incorporated Hindavi and Punjabi verses alongside their respective faith-based languages (Arabic and Persian for Chishtis and Sanskrit for Bhaktis). Since the region had a strong lineage of Hindavi and Punjabi religious literature since the 13th century, it would make sense to incorporate this type of language in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Hindavi and Punjabi were the languages used by Punjabis by majority; hence the scriptures would theoretically serve the population in which it was meant for. The *banis* of the *Guru Granth Sahib* would've reached its target population through the strong oral tradition in which Punjabis were accustomed to, but not necessarily through the written texts themselves. Like the Bhakti and Chishti sects, the majority of their followings was illiterate and was quite drawn with the *kirtan* and poetic practices of the faiths, which spread the oral stories of the faiths. The *Guru Granth Sahib* was also composed in the Gurmukhi script, which was not widely

⁶¹ Ibid., 127.

circulated nor understood until the late 19th century. With this in mind, the *Adi Granth* in the spoken language was more accessible and acceptable to the general population who would've been acquainted with the languages used and popular texts of other saints to represent Sikh ideology. Due to this, it's accurate to portray many of the early messages of the *Adi Granth* to portray the same messages as that of the Bhakti and Chishti sects, which advocated (but isn't limited to) a one, formless God who was worthy of a *kirtan*-style worship.

In conclusion, the rituals of the Punjabi religious movements share striking similarities to one another due to a common understanding of worship practices toward the divine, which were not necessarily confined to specific religions. When analytically comparing the distinct practices of Sikhism, the Bhakti tradition, and Chishti Sufism, many parallels (if not identical ideas) can be drawn between the beliefs, texts, and rituals of the faiths, all of which grew side-by-side for centuries. The faiths were open to all in their humble beginnings, regardless of religious and socio-economic backgrounds. Due to this fact, religious fusion was commonplace, the passing of ideas, traditions, and even saints an accepted spiritual aspect in Punjab. The ultimate focus on the one divine prevailed throughout the religious movements, the primary means of worship summed to devotional love, a characteristic reaching beyond religious boundaries.

Chapter Two: The Origins of Pluralism: 1300-1675

The contemporary notion of the “other” has often been reflected in the historical interpretations of Punjabi history, particularly concerning the relations between Bhakti, Chishti, and Sikh religious traditions. While examining the origins of these religious movements through a secular lens, it is unfair to assume the traditions are in fact different. Rather, the origins tend to be related to each other, as each of the faiths shared beliefs, rituals, and even texts from one another. Medieval Punjab (1300-1675) should be noted as a time of religious pluralism and cooperation, not different entities assuming the roles of separate constituents on the basis of a modern political agenda.

It is evident that the foundations between each religious movement weren't firm in the medieval era, each fluctuating back and forth with the tide of the people and the spiritual reforms that came from 1300 to 1675. The concrete separations between the Bhaktis, Chishtis, and Sikhs were gradually instigated by the lineage of Sikh Gurus who attempted to distinguish themselves as a separate identity. Despite such gestures, the Sikh identity was far from concrete during the era of the Sikh Guru lineage (1499-1708). From my previous research on contemporary *dargahs*, it is evident that Sikhs and Hindus have been known to still worship at Muslim institutions, and vice versa has been true. These modern examples demonstrate the strong evidence of religious pluralism's existence, the strong ties of the three faiths existing against the constraints and pressures of a modern political society. To truly understand the break within the religions means to examine the relations of *sant* tradition and Chishti Sufism while modern Sikhism was on the rise. The “otherness” in which Sikhism has defined itself is more of a colonial

phenomenon rather than one that stems from religions origins. To examine this point, it's essential to look at the circumstances in which Sikhism emerged to identify a timeline leading to the origins of difference between the Bhakti, Chishti, and Sikh faiths.

In midst of the creation of the force that can now be called Sikhism, the two predecessors of the newfound faith played a similar role in opposing the orthodox religious structures of their religion's roots. In the case of the Punjabi Bhakti movement, the entity as a whole could be considered synonymous with the *sant* tradition during the medieval period. During the 14th to 18th centuries, a number of Bhakti saints gained popularity throughout the South Asian subcontinent, thereby signifying a growing *sant* tradition as part of the Bhakti movement. As I had mentioned within the previous chapter, popular saints poets such as Namdev and Ramananda continued to make an impact in Punjabi religious thought, their literature carried from generation to generation in the form of oral traditions. With the increased fusion of ideas between Sufis (and later Sikhs), some saints of the Punjabi Bhakti movement became more inclusive in theology. At a glance, the gradual increase of Sikh converts can be compared to the slow decline of the Bhakti movement in Punjab, but the rationale between the two actions cannot be completely attributed to each other. To an extent, Sikhism had not emerged as a prominent authority in Punjab until long after the Gurus' deaths (approximately in the late 18th century appears a substantial population identifying with Sikhism). On another note, the identity of the Sikhs from the late 15th century to 1675 was far from concrete; containing many elements of both Sufi and Bhakti faiths. Many Bhakti devotees might not have converted to Sikhism during this time period. Another avenue to explain the

phenomenon of the Bhakti movement in Punjab more clearly would entail carefully examining the remainder of texts and oral traditions, which addressed the stumbling populous around the Bhakti saints. A constant theme of Punjabi Bhaktis lied in the social conventionalism of Hindus, which condemned the caste-based and ritualistic society with some instances of polytheism. From the amount of texts from the period between the 14th and 18th centuries (looking specifically at Kabir, Namdev, Ramdas, and Surdas), there seems to be a shift in saint and Bhakti-inspired literature that closely related *nirgun* and *sagun* traditions to one another, many of which fall under the *sant* tradition.⁶² The poets particular popular in Punjab (Kabir, Namdev, Ramdas, and Surdas) held more *nirgun* tendencies than *sagun*, which advocates an omniscient, formless oneness of God. The *sant* tradition specifically advocates meditation on the divine's name for enlightenment, religious ritualism in aid of *moksha*, and following the *sant* (saint) as a guru.⁶³ Some scholars relate the *sant* tradition's striking similarities of leadership and practice to that of their Sufi counterparts, who were *nirgun* in nature. The influence of both faith traditions upon each other is evident in the Punjab, Guru Nanak identifying their similar ideologies within his own sayings, which were later recorded in the *Adi Granth*.

On another note, the Punjabi Bhakti movement was not a uniform entity; under different *sant* traditions laid different belief systems. Unlike the uniformity that Chishti *dargahs* often received, the Bhakti movement throughout South Asia generally consisted of saint-led sects that were separate in organization from Brahmin-led institutions. These independent saint followings shared some characteristics with the Chishti *pirs* of Sufism,

⁶² Embree, ed., "The Songs of Medieval Hindu Devotion," 371.

⁶³ Ibid, 371-372.

who often acquired large followings based upon a saint's teachings. The lessons varied from saint to saint, but unlike the Chishti *silsila* (which shared a common religious education, leaving a solid ideological foundation that connected each of the *pirs* to one another), the scattered religious education and ideologies between Bhakti saints often differed from one another, which varied in formal training (or lack of) and *nirgun/sagun* ideological preference.⁶⁴ The ideologies under the movements largely varied in their origins; being either *nirgun* (worshipping a formless, attribute-free, and unified god) or *sagun* (view of a personal, incarnate, and characteristic-laid god) as their conceptual bases.⁶⁵ Due to the freelance infrastructure that the movement thrived on, this led to large breaks within the Bhakti movement itself, making it difficult to categorize the diverse strains as a uniform entity. The independence accumulated amongst the sects was long lasting, even past the peak of the movement itself. With the lack of a unifying and uniform system, it was possible for Bhakti sects to evolve over time; some withering away while others fell closer to the Brahmanical tradition it had once strayed from.⁶⁶ In regards to the social setting of medieval Punjab, this relevant assessment of the span of the Bhakti movement is accurate to an extent. What distinguishes the Punjabi Bhakti movement from other regional movements is the saints' unique ability to merge many aspects of *nirgun* and *sagun* Bhakti together within teachings. For instance, the famous saint Namdev (1270-1350) acquired attributes of both *nirgun* and *sagun* schools into his

⁶⁴ Bahuguna, "Beyond Theological Differences," 71.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

texts, though he is predominately classified as a *nirgun* saint.⁶⁷ Ramananda (1400-1470/1476), a popular *nirgun* saint, has been found to include *sagun* elements in his religious hymns as well, though the *nirgun* elements seem to have been more striking with his Punjabi following. Through his verses of equality and universal message of the divine, his teachings transcended his Hindu devotee population, his messages reaching Muslims as well.⁶⁸ Though the saint was originally from Uttar Pradesh, his teachings reached the Punjab, largely influencing the spiritual traditions of Punjab. Ramananda's influence was prominent enough to be included in the Sikh holy text, *the Guru Granth Sahib* as well as with Ramananda's disciple, Kabir (1440-1518), another predominately *nirgun* saint from Uttar Pradesh whose lessons reached the Punjab.⁶⁹ Surdas (1479-1586) was also another popular poet from Haryana whose work was greatly respected by Punjabis. Rather than consider these saints as exceptions, their common strain of combined *nirgun* and *sagun* elements should be taken into consideration next to their counterpart—Chishti Sufism. The Sufis were often known for their *nirgun*-like associations with God, the Sufis' large following in the Punjab often acquiring such connotations with the divine. Their large population besides the Bhakti movement surely influenced one another, sharing such ideas in mainstream religious culture. Namdev, Ramananda, Kabir, and Surdas influenced Guru Nanak and his first four successors primarily through their *nirgun* philosophies, their influence so great that the Gurus included their work in *Guru Granth Sahib*.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 64.

⁶⁸ Nabi, "The Impact of Sufism," 126.

⁶⁹ Bahuguna, "Beyond Theological Differences," 60.

The financial and political support that aided many Chishti (and eventually Sikh) establishments was largely foreign to Bhakti movements, making the entities hard to sustain over time. The Bhakti movement thrived on the unorganized, unorthodox structure the saints encompassed, making it difficult to create a sociopolitical infrastructure remotely like that of the Chishtis. This lack of organization disadvantaged the Bhakti saints from aligning with greater political entities for financial assistance and security. With no political power to draw support from, it can be seen that the Bhaktis fell far from influence in the late medieval era as a rise of new religious and political entities occurred.⁷⁰ The political landscape of the Punjab was drastically changing around the time of Guru Nanak's birth, the land experiencing a plethora of new political power and religious alliances. The scholarly debate continues to dispute the categorization of Punjab's newfound power, with some Sikh scholars claiming that Punjab was under foreign power (Mughals), imposing their political and religious will upon the Punjabi people. In terms of modern boundaries of the Punjab, the newfound political regime of the Mughals implemented centers of control within Punjab through city governorships. The actual boundaries of Punjab are rather tricky, as some maps characterize the Punjab stretching to the city of Delhi, which would make the claims of the Mughals as an outside ruler slightly exaggerated. Rather, such accusations are likely to be stimulated by modern political constituencies and its disputes, as the governorships that developed throughout the Punjab were in Punjabi cities themselves. From 1557-1707, the Chishtis prospered under the patronage of Mughal leaders, which allowed for

⁷⁰ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs: Volume 1: 1469-1839*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 27.

the *dargahs* to maintain influence outside of the spiritual realm.⁷¹ This also is relevant to the later Sikh following of later Gurus and Ranjit Singh, the founder of the first Punjabi empire. In understanding the power play of the Punjab, a closer look at the Chishti Sufi movement lineage is needed.

The Chishti Sufis of Punjab were often exclusive to their *dargah* proximities, their influence more geographically centered and uniform.⁷² Even though each of these districts served populations that sufficiently paid allegiance to their shrines, the entities were not completely isolated from other *dargahs*. The families of their *pirs* made relations with other families, creating religious bonds as well as socio-political ones. Though many Chishti *dargahs* had set up reasonably sized trusts and impressive structures for religious institutions and administration, these were oftentimes done long after the passing of the *pir*, when the groundskeepers (distant descendants of the shaikhs) were considered the ceremonial figurehead of the shrine. Their alliances were largely political in return for patronage, receiving not only spiritual legitimacy, but distributing such notions upon the political powers themselves.⁷³ It is safe to say that long after the *pirs*' deaths, the descendants of the saints expanded their influence outside of spiritual matters into the political sphere, though much of the general population remained largely unaffected by political doings of the spiritual elite (the exception to this is under Baba Farid's *dargah*, though the period of its massive socio-political expansion was well documented throughout the 14th century). It was the ordinary Sufi-influenced Islam of

⁷¹ Eaton, "The Political and Religious Authority," 355.

⁷² Digby, "The Sufi Shaikh," 242.

⁷³ Eaton, "The Political and Religious Authority," 355.

the commoners that Guru Nanak came into contact with, his teachings drawing upon the everyday lore and beliefs that had seeped into Punjabi society.⁷⁴

In a later study by Eaton, he concluded that a large portion of the converted Muslim population were Jats.⁷⁵ A majority of this population was located within the Multan and Pakpattan Districts of Punjab, which now exists in Pakistan. Due to the widespread influence Baba Farid and Shaikh Baha' al-Haqq Zakariya within those districts, high conversion rates were triggered.⁷⁶ The Jats played a major role in the execution of military tasks under various Muslim entities, i.e. Chishti castes. The once disadvantaged castes of *Sudras* also rose in socio-economic status at this time, evolving from agricultural peasants to *zamindars*, or landowners.⁷⁷ Eaton related the Jat growth in status to their association with Chishti shrines (predominately Shaikh Baba Farid), which integrated the group into the spiritual and political castes that served the *dargahs*, often times through marriage alliances and land/agricultural management. These changes largely transpired in the early medieval era—the 13th and 14th centuries, though there's evidence that the Jat Muslim population continued to increase with the steady Mughal and elite patronage of Baba Farid's shrine. By the 19th century, British census records recorded a significant number of Jats falling under both Sikh and Muslim categories. Unsurprisingly, a large number of followers of the Gurus were Jats, like much of the converts to Islam. McLeod rationalized this “conversion” due to the firm belief of a

⁷⁴ W. H. McLeod, *Exploring Sikhism: Aspects of Sikh Identity, Culture, and Thought* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 9.

⁷⁵ Eaton, “The Political and Religious Authority,” 343.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 345.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 344.

casteless equality within early Sikhism, which could have attracted followers.⁷⁸ In the 18th century, the Jat caste was still in the process of socio-economic progress, which McLeod believed allowed for Jats to bear the brunt of peasantry stigmas.⁷⁹ By the 18th and 19th centuries, the force behind the armed movements of various *misl*s (independent rulers of 18th century Punjab) and Ranjit Singh were largely Jats, finding issue with the political oppression of the Mughals and Afghans. The collaboration of Punjabis under these movements could've largely started as a greater political matter, eventually developing into a religious following (which a majority of Jats participated in). Since the actual conversion and identification process for religious identity was not a solidified practice at this time, this allowed for the margins of faith to waver for much of the medieval period.

The groundwork for the religion now known as Sikhism was laid by Guru Nanak (1469-1539), who was born in 1469 in Talwandi Rai Bhoi (Nankana Sahib), Punjab, a city now belonging to Pakistan.⁸⁰ Whilst living in a Muslim majority district of Punjab to a Hindu family, he became familiarized with both faith traditions. The Guru also received his education among the priests of both faiths, which may thoroughly explain his extensive understanding and critique of the religions.⁸¹ At the age of 30, the Guru was said to have received his first divine message by God to teach the world to pray while he was at a river, which led to his first disappearance from his family and his return in the

⁷⁸ McLeod, *Exploring Sikhism*, 52.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ *Sikh Religion* (Detroit: Sikh Missionary Center, 1990), 14.

⁸¹ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 28.

clothes of an ascetic.⁸² This encounter changed his focus from familial obligations to independent wandering throughout the Punjab and beyond for more spiritual teachings and understanding of the religious traditions he was familiar with. He first spent much of his time in Punjab, where he visited multiple *dargahs* and *mandirs* (temples), even meeting revered religious leaders, whom he was said to have debated for their understanding of faith.⁸³ Later, Guru Nanak traveled beyond the Punjab, exploring the religious centers of Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism—from Gaya, Benares, Malabar, Ladakh, and Mumbai, to foreign cities such as Ceylon, Baghdad, Mecca, and Medina.⁸⁴ After his travels, he formally formed the *sangat*, a fellowship consisting of his followers that shared a common prayer space.⁸⁵ To some scholars, this could symbolize the beginning of the Sikh faith, though the Guru who truly developed the modern notions of the faith was only Guru Gobind Singh, who attempted to first organize the sect in hopes of distinguishing the group as a separate identity from its religious neighbors. Guru Nanak did not intend to create a separate religion with his teaching, leaving a cloud of ambiguity after his death that was left to his spiritual descendants. It was the Gurus after Nanak that tried to shape Sikh ideology, using their educated judgment in defining what constituted being a Sikh.

In preparation for the sect's leadership, Guru Nanak chose his successor, soon to be known as Guru Angad (1504-1552), before his death. Nanak's two sons seemed

⁸² Ibid., 29-30.

⁸³ Sardha Ram, *History of the Sikhs: Translation of the "Sikkhann di Raj di Vikhia,"* trans. Henry Court, (Calcutta: Susil Gupta (India) Private Limited, 1959), 7-8.

⁸⁴ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 31.

⁸⁵ *Sikh Religion*, 61.

unsuitable for the task at hand, so Nanak chose a disciple whom he felt had great promise.⁸⁶ Angad continued with Nanak's following in 1539 after Nanak's death, his major contribution to the tradition being the revision of what is now known as the Gurmukhi script, naming it after the Guru (meaning the "mouth of the Guru"). The next in the line of the Gurus was Amar Das (1479-1574) in 1552, who is often credited for his first large attempt in segregating the sect. Guru Amar Das insisted upon institutionalizing traditions like the use of the *langar* (for all castes) and tried to change the marriage, death, and birth rituals by creating poetic verses to be sung at the ceremonies.⁸⁷ The Guru also tried to purge other traditions that previously existed within his small fellowship—polygamy, *sati* (burning of widows upon a funeral pyre), *pardah* (seclusion and veiling of women), and strict caste associations (trying to make Sikh *sangats* of all castes, pushing devotees of all backgrounds to work together).⁸⁸ In reality, such actions were very limited to his immediate congregation. The number of devoted followers fluctuated and was often still attached to the customs of their family. Though the means for change were put in place, little was actually put into practice until much later. Guru Amar Das' emphasis on spiritual authority became clear in his new institution of the *manji* system, which granted particularly dedicated Sikhs to watch over the established *sangats* and proselytize the message of the Guru.⁸⁹ With only 22 *manjis* in total, it is safe to say that the congregation of devote Sikhs were small and scattered. These officials were not in charge of the *gurudwara* or *Adi Granth* since neither had been formally

⁸⁶ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 34.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Sikh Religion*, 89.

established yet. The *sangat* had increased in size since the time of its founder, but from the efforts of the *manjis*, it seemed that maintenance and expansion of the *sangat* was required. The influence of the Guru in name must have spread throughout the Punjab during that period, as the Mughal Emperor Akbar chose to meet the Guru in regards to his spiritual influence. This meeting was the first Guru to meet with Mughal officials of such standing, as the group largely remained a small phenomenon in the interior of the Punjab. It has been said that Akbar was so impressed by the *langar* that Amar Das had founded in Goindwal, Taran Taran District, Punjab that the Emperor granted the Guru land in admiration of his work (the land later used to build the Harimandir Sahib in Amritsar).

More ritualism emerged in the Sikh faith with the next Guru, Ram Das (1534-1581). His short rule lasted only seven years, beginning with the relocation of his congregation to the allocated land given by Mughal Emperor Akbar in 1574, which is now named Amritsar. It had become tradition for the first five Gurus to each reside in a different city after obtaining the title, bringing the congregants with them.⁹⁰ This allowed for the Sikh faith to grow and disperse within the Punjab, but it unfortunately didn't provide a uniform base for the sect to formally develop in. His attempt to add to the purely "Sikh" hymnals (*banis*) and rituals put into place by Guru Amar Das was solidified in his gathering, though their widespread use was virtually nonexistent. In Amritsar, Ram Das was apparently intrigued by the healing powers of a spring, which he decided to dig up, creating a water tank now encompassed by the Golden Temple

⁹⁰ Ibid., 92.

(Harimandir Sahib). In the meantime, the Mughal Emperor Akbar readily accepted the Sikhs' institutions, which were confined to the Punjab, only bringing issue with the Guru upon the complaints of Brahmin and Khattri families of influence. These complaints consisted of the increasingly change in customs amongst the Sikhs, Akbar responding with tolerance, suggesting Ram Das to visit Haridwar on pilgrimage to please the angered parties who advocated for more Brahmin-led ritualism found within the Hindu faith.⁹¹ This suggestion is not thought to have angered the Guru, nor is the act of visiting Haridwar by Ram Das actually known. In analyzing this bit of history, the knowledge of the Sikhs had grown beyond its inhabited territory, the actual base of followers small and scattered without strong institutional ties. Their proselytizing movement was slow to reach beyond central Punjab, but the growing impact of central Punjab was enough to stir the interest of the Mughals. From the complaints of the influential families surrounding the Sikhs, they seemed to be more uncomfortable with the change of traditions of the sect, not necessarily concerned with the Sikhs' ideologies. This could mean that Sikh ideologies weren't radically distinct at that time, as many were still considered Hindus. The fact that Akbar wanted Ram Das to take a Hindu pilgrimage in Haridwar to please the complaining parties validated that fact. The Sikhs were not an established religion at that time, but rather a Hindu sect in the eyes of commoners.

Guru Arjan (1563-1606), Ram Das' successor, decided to stay in Amritsar and construct the Harimandir Sahib 1581, which consisted of a *gurudwara* and the holy water tank. This structure was open for all, but its four-entranced low structure was built with

⁹¹ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 87.

more Punjabi style architecture (a fusion of Mughal and traditional attributes) that lacked the traditional elements of *mandirs*, its foundation laid by the Lahore based *pir*, Mian Mir.⁹² Arjan's legacy laid in more than just his infrastructure of the Golden Temple and tolerance for all castes and religious groups, whom he invited to the *langar* at the Golden Temple. He is also credited to his first wide scale compilation of the *Adi Granth* in 1604, including hymns from local Bhakti and Sufi saints as well as teachings of previous Gurus into the holy book for an organized, everyday manual of worship and living.⁹³ The Guru formed an alliance with much of the Jat peasantry, whom he invited to his base in Amritsar.⁹⁴ Another powerful alliance came from the Udasi sect, a Sikh-influenced Hindu sect started by Guru Nanak's ascetic son, Sri Chand.⁹⁵ The Udasis played an essential role in the maintenance of *gurudwaras* during the eras of later Gurus and frequent military invasions. Guru Arjan was insistent on expanding the Sikh influence throughout the Punjab, purposefully sending *manjis* out of their home districts to act as *masands*, or missionaries, with the intent of spreading the Sikh message as well as collect donations for the construction of Harimandir Sahib.⁹⁶ The Guru maintained a respectful relationship with Akbar, Arjan's alliances stretching to Sufi authorities in neighboring cities, particularly Lahore. However, the Mughal governor of Lahore, Chandu Shah, was in alliance with Guru Arjan's brother, Prithia, who was jealous of Arjan's son becoming the next Guru after many failed assassination attempts on the child. After Akbar's death,

⁹² Ibid., 53.

⁹³ *Sikh Religion*, 95.

⁹⁴ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 54.

⁹⁵ *Sikh Religion*, 95.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 98-99.

Jahangir took the Mughal throne, and Jahangir's son, Khusrau Mirza (whom some believed was Akbar's true successor), claimed Punjab and Afghanistan as his rightful territory in his self-conceived role of heir apparent.⁹⁷ Guru Arjan had previously met Khusrau Mirza, so the Guru had no qualms in receiving the fugitive royal while giving him financial aid in his plight.⁹⁸ This information passed into the hands of Chandu Shah and Prithia, who told Jahangir. Soon after, the prince was captured and brought to his father. This instance made Arjan a traitor to the Emperor, who was left to the devices of Chandu Shah. The death of Guru Arjan in 1606 remains a mystery, with stories of his suicide (considered martyrdom) or torture often represented to formulate the backdrop of his son's anger and insistence on arms use.

With Guru Arjan's successor, Hargobind (1595-1644), a new strain of Sikhism can be witnessed with his reign, raising issues of militancy for the first time, which would later be incorporated by the following Gurus and political powers under Sikh rule. At age eleven, Hargobind was declared Guru after the death of his father. Sources have reported that the young boy held a militant stress in regards to his position during his Guru initiation. In reality, his highly militant regimes might have been egged on by his mother and father's Sikh elders, who would've played a tremendous role in Guru Hargobind's reign as a child. This could also account for the first measures of militancy in Sikh history. Hargobind ordered the construction the *Akal Takht* (literally meaning "throne of the timeless God"), a structure adjacent to the Harimandir Sahib, to house him as a

⁹⁷ Ibid., 115.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

“temporal” authority.⁹⁹ This building was a symbol of newfound ideology carried by the Guru—that of the *Miri Piri* authority. This philosophy combined both worldly (*Miri*) and spiritual (*Piri*) authority within the Guruship, truly issuing the Guru lineage as an authoritative force for the first time. Hargobind became associated with divine qualities, which were symbolized by the dual swords he began to carry on him, his military ambitions evident in his requests for the *masands* to acquire offerings of arms and horses.¹⁰⁰ The Guru’s immediate following were slowly affected by this militant trend when Hargobind began to issue militant chants and hymns at the *sangat*.¹⁰¹ From these conventions of Guru Hargobind, it can be assumed that the death of his father played a large role in his insistence on militarization when the largely peaceful congregation had never considered such an idea. The grace of the Mughals was no longer upon the family; hence it would seem rational for the young boy to take up arms in protection of his family. The Mughal Empire held strained relations with Guru Hargobind from the time of his father (Arjan), which led to his later imprisonment on account of his father’s misdoings. The persecution of the Guru persuaded him to raise an army for his protection (as well as his threatened followers), which largely consisted of Muslim Pathan mercenaries.¹⁰² Since the Guru relied on outsourcing his army, it seemed that the majority of Sikhs were not militant at this time. The ideology was set in place, yet it was not completely followed, as the fine identity of being a Sikh was not rigid and stressed. The doings of the Guru largely affected him and his immediate following (close family

⁹⁹ Ibid., 124.

¹⁰⁰ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 60.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 61.

¹⁰² Ibid.

and friends) rather than the general population around him, the scholarly and political assumptions of religious persecution invalid at this time. The effects of such militancy could be felt at the political (and spiritual) elite level, though the general population must've been largely unaffected. Even with Jahangir's successor's (Shah Jahan) later clash with Guru Hargobind, the Emperor attempted to directly punish the Guru's household, not his Sikh following. A mishap had occurred on account of both group's soldiers—Shah Jahan's soldiers went hunting on the territory of Guru Hargobind; the Guru's troops charging against the unknown soldiers, who were later revealed as part of the Mughal command. In retaliation for the harm placed upon the Mughal soldiers, Hargobind's daughter's wedding was destroyed and the Guru was kept in hiding in 1628. The Guru resisted Mughal capture in 1630 from the help of his armed Pathan mercenaries, whom the Guru's sons fought beside.¹⁰³ When analyzing Hargobind's legacy to the Sikh faith, his militant actions come to mind, but not for religious reasons. For his own protection, militancy was added, which in turn symbolized the protection of the faith. Since a majority of Punjabis surrounding the Guru remained largely unaffected by such actions, their involvement was not warranted (or rather stressed as much) in comparison to later Gurus. The urgency of militant action came much later in the line of Gurus as political lines drew the interior of the Punjab.

The seventh Guru was passed to Hargobind's grandson, Har Rai (1630-1661) when Guru Hargobind found each of his five sons unacceptable for the position (though one of Hargobind's sons eventually became Guru). Har Rai was only fourteen years old

¹⁰³ Ibid., 63.

when he took the role as Guru in 1644. Sikh scholars have suggested that the young Guru was actually guided by his father, Gurdita, who administered much of the early Sikh affairs.¹⁰⁴ Guru Har Rai was originally settled in Kiratpur, Rupnagar District, Punjab, but the *Raja* of his state had difficult relations with the Mughals, pushing the Guru to flee to Sirmur in modern Himachal Pradesh for thirteen years.¹⁰⁵ In his flight to protect his family, his duties as leader of the Sikhs were depleted. He stayed far from the Sikh centers, becoming disengaged with their patronage and *masand* activities. From his writings, Har Rai's character tended to be one of peace, disinterested in the armed activity of his grandfather. His passiveness was still present when he returned to Kiratpur in 1658 after his short tour of surrounding cities, where he befriended prominent *zamindars*, whom eventually converted to Sikhism.¹⁰⁶ One of the contacts Har Rai made was Dara Shikoh, the son of the current Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan. The conflict that ensued between Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb (another son of Shah Jahan, whom eventually imprisoned his father for emperorship) influenced Sikh relations once again, leading to Aurangzeb's mistrust of Guru Har Rai. Aurangzeb summoned the Guru to Delhi in the beginning of his reign, but Har Rai sent his son, Ram Rai, instead. Ram Rai became good acquaintances with the new Mughal Emperor, the alliance troubling his father. Har Rai felt that Ram Rai's interests were those of Aurangzeb's, who expected political submission from the Sikhs. Guru Har Rai's growing suspicions of Mughal hostility led to him placing his five-year-old son, Har Krishan (1656-1664), as the next

¹⁰⁴ Ram, *History of the Sikhs*, 30.

¹⁰⁵ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 64.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

Guru instead of Ram Rai.¹⁰⁷ Har Krishan was only Guru until 1664 when he died of smallpox at age seven.¹⁰⁸ He died in Delhi in the court of Aurangzeb, who had summoned him to meddle more in his affairs.¹⁰⁹ The Guruship was passed to Har Krishan's uncle, Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675), who was an elder member of the family.

Tegh Bahadur (son of Hargobind) was quite taken with the news of his role as Guru in 1665. The title was unexpected for the passive, ascetic Sikh, who had spent twenty years in Bakala, Amritsar District, Punjab for meditation.¹¹⁰ During this time, the Sikh population in its entirety became even more disoriented, the *masands* gaining power through the collection funds for the betterment of themselves. The Guru lineage seemed to be questioned, many of the past Gurus' teachings falling into disarray with the increased number of claimants to the line. From the disorganization that had accumulated over the past two Gurus, it looked as if chaos truly ensued at the time of Tegh Bahadur. The Guru came face to face with some of the claimants in his own village, finding more in Amritsar and Kiratpur, where his own family turned him away.¹¹¹ In his old age, the Guru was passive about his title, which began to attract followers to his new settlement in Anandpur, which was stationed close to Kiratpur. The death threats of his extended family pushed him to leave Punjab with his close family and travel throughout Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, and Assam.¹¹² Guru Tegh Bahadur's identity came to be known in his first stop to Delhi, where his nephew (Ram Rai) had him

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 66.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 67.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ram, *History of the Sikhs*, 37.

¹¹¹ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 68.

¹¹² Ibid.

imprisoned, though he was later freed. During the Guru's stay in Patna, Bihar, the political situation of Punjab began to change under the rule of Aurangzeb. The Mughal Emperor enforced harsher policies on non-Muslims in his orthodox rule, imposing taxes on non-Muslims and their religious establishments. It would seem that due to the political circumstances at that time, the Guru claimants would not have been as active in their push for authority, fearing harsh punishment from the Mughals. The news of the hostilities by the Mughals reached the Guru, who left his family (including his young son) to tour the Punjab, who drew crowds of loyal followers.¹¹³ The new group of devotees should've transpired after the previous surge of chaos had eventually calmed, leaving few Sikhs to claim the title as Guru. Word of his growing power and intolerance of Hindu temple destruction and conversion pressures reached Aurangzeb, who summoned the Guru to Delhi. A small group of known Sikhs as well as Guru Tegh Bahadur were brought to Delhi from Agra after a Mughal search for the "fugitive" was enacted. It was in Delhi that he was tried and executed in 1675.¹¹⁴

At nine years old, Tegh Bahadur's young son, Gobind Singh (1666-1708), took the title as Guru soon after his father's death. Tegh Bahadur's gruesome death surely influenced the young Guru to take up arms in his role, which some later Sikh scholars now look upon as an act of martyrdom for the faith. Regardless of Tegh Bahadur's intentions (whether they were political or not), the ongoing intolerance of the Guru's family by the Mughals was in the back of Gobind Singh's mind, pushing him to take up

¹¹³ Ibid., 69.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 71.

militancy with full force. His reign signified a new era of politics, which quickly became infused with religion amidst the turmoil in Punjab.

From 1300 to 1675, the religiosity felt within the Punjab was that of understanding and coexistence between the Bhaktis, Chishtis, and Sikhs. Though the Sikhs became more individualistic in their teachings with later Gurus, they were by no means separatists from their religious counterparts. Rather, many Gurus accommodated followers of other faiths who often didn't relinquish their caste and faith backgrounds, though the teachings of Guru Nanak were still regarded with respect to those exposed to the Sikhs. For the general population, it seems that the idea of conversion to Sikhism was slow, for the insistence of joining the Sikhs in distinct ritualistic identities wasn't common or necessary. Bhakti and Chishti interactions with the Gurus may have been significant at a level leadership, but the effects of those interactions took long to reach commoners, if at all.

Chapter Three: The Rise of Punjabi Militancy: 1675-1849

The rise of Sikh militancy shares its roots in the tumult political backdrop of Punjab, in which the time through 1675-1849 established multiple reigns of political legitimacy whilst using the Sikh title. In regards to the previous chapter, the slow rise to militancy within the Sikh community was in relation to personal feuds with the Mughals, which was of political value (not a religious feud of sorts, which many scholars have posed the past instances as). Rather, the streak of militancy was abandoned by the time of the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, as the state of the Sikh *sangat* was largely without order, many of the previous teachings of the Gurus largely abandoned. Furthermore, those effected by the militant strain of Sikhism were a part of immediate following of the Gurus, which were the ones largely targeted by the politics of the Mughals. By the time of the tenth Guru, the first real organization of the Sikh *sangat* was established with a militant twist unlike that of his predecessors. Guru Gobind Singh attempted to ensure the legacy of the Gurus through force, which often took a religious spin in attracting followers dedicated to his movement. The means of such an incident was unprecedented, leading up to a new era of Sikh politics.

Guru Gobind Singh can be credited as the true force behind militant Sikh philosophy, as much of his legacy remains intact today. As a young boy, the Guru was heavily influenced by the militancy of Guru Hargobind with his use of arms in the vengeance of his father's death and protection of his family.¹¹⁵ This story was similar to his own—his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, was murdered by Mughal command. In midst

¹¹⁵ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 74.

of the occurring persecution by the Mughals upon Punjabis (regardless of religion), Guru Gobind Singh issued the collection arms for offerings again, enacting the militant chants created under Hargobind in the process. Guru Gobind Singh fortified cities and drafted an army in his quest for justice and riddance of the tyranny of the Mughal governors. Many Sikh scholars have interpreted the Guru's efforts as purely religious, but the Guru's actions tell a different story. Like his father, the Guru kept religious elders in his alliance, particularly Hindu *pandits*. Guru Gobind Singh's and Tegh Bahadur's concerns were for the people of Punjab, regardless of their religious affiliation. Punjabis in total were under a rule many considered unjust, which persuaded some Punjabis to support Guru Gobind Singh's push expel the Mughals. The actual army the Guru recruited consisted not only of Sikhs, but Hindus and Muslims as well.¹¹⁶ The strongest force behind the Guru's army was the Pathan and Rajput mercenaries he had hired, which outnumbered Sikh volunteers.¹¹⁷ This force was often included in primary texts as a source of fear and destruction for Mughal governors. The inclusion of militants from other faiths can suggest that the Guru didn't have an exclusive army in mind that merely focused on the tenets of the *Khalsa*, but one of universal justice and tolerance. When analyzing his conquests, I find that his most conscious effort towards religious militancy was rather symbolic. Under the Guru's guidance, a new lineage was created—that of the *Khalsa*, which didn't truly unfold until after his death.

¹¹⁶ Mandanjit Kaur, "Guru Gobind Singh and His Mission," *Institute of Sikh Studies*. http://sikhinstitute.org/ggs/7-madan_jit.html.

¹¹⁷ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 75.

The beginnings of the *Khalsa*, or the “pure,” consisted of the baptism of five men from varying Hindu castes who volunteered to be sacrificially killed by the Guru.¹¹⁸ This was a staged act which stirred the general population into acquiring unique Sikh rites for the first time, beginning with the first five *Khalsa* members (known as the *Panj Pyare*, or the “five loved ones”). Rather, their act of courage and assurance showed their dedication to the faith and Guru, establishing a fraternity of warriors through a baptism of sorts—drinking sweetened water (*amrit*) stirred by the Guru’s sword from the same cup, a practice still enacted by *Khalsa* Sikhs.¹¹⁹ This symbolism eradicated caste and other faith distinctions, exclusively making the disciples purely “Sikh.” In this process, Sikhs take the initiation vows and endorse the codes of conduct that were later compiled by 19th and 20th century Sikh organizations, engaging in heroic-like behaviors and chants during the process.¹²⁰ The contemporary definition of a *Khalsa* Sikh comes from the previously stated initiation traditions of Guru Gobind Singh, which are often represented with the five articles of faith (5 K’s). At the time of Guru Gobind Singh, the process would’ve not been as elaborate as the ritualistic ceremonies of initiation are today. Within the initiation, the codes of conduct entailed strict rules for everyday life and distinguishing rituals and objects, which explicitly created the image of a separate religion. One example of this lies in the five *Khalsa* articles of faith (known as the “5 K’s”), which consists of the *kara* (steel bangle), *kaccha* (shorts often used by warriors), *kirpan*

¹¹⁸ Khushwant Singh, *The Sikhs* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2006), 37.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹²⁰ W. H. McLeod, “The Order for Khalsa Initiation,” *Religions of India in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 323.

(sword), *kesh* (unshaven hair), and *kangha* (a wooden comb kept in one's hair).¹²¹ This new institution was founded in 1699 in which Guru Gobind Singh issued a newfound nation of devotees (*Panth*) who were willing to take up arms in the name of faith in theory.¹²² The Guru's contributions to Sikhism largely lied in the social framework he developed; the contemporary identity of Sikhism often defined by Gobind Singh's *Khalsa* initiatives, but its institution was more theoretical than practical during his lifetime.

When analyzing the larger image of the *Khalsa* and military, a variety of social factors need to be taken into account. The baptism into the *Khalsa* wasn't mandatory or merely a show of faith. In actuality, the *Khalsa* was a voluntary force that consisted of Hindus, Muslims, and some ordained Sikhs in its origins.¹²³ The composition of self-identifying Sikhs within the *Khalsa* fluctuated during Guru Gobind Singh's lifetime. One established scholar in late Sikh history, Harjot Oberoi, writes that a majority of Guru Gobind Singh's disciples didn't undertake the *Khalsa* baptism and follow such codes of conduct.¹²⁴ In fact, many Sikhs rejected such acts of conversion and teachings, fearing persecution and the loss of familial heritage by undergoing a casteless lineage (the Sikh-identifying names as "Singhs" and "Kauras" were largely unpopular within the masses in the 1700s). Brahmin and Khattri caste Sikhs strongly opposed such *Khalsa* initiations, seeing the large boycott and ridicule of *Bania* (trading/merchant) caste *Khalsa*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 322.

¹²² W. H. McLeod, *The Sikhs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 39.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹²⁴ Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, 62.

brethren.¹²⁵ Joining the *Khalsa* meant adopting a new set of values tied to socio-political factors, which some followers or admirers of the Gurus looked at hesitantly. The first batch of Sikh fighters belonged to *Bania* castes who didn't feel the need to necessarily convert; hence they often didn't follow the doctrines of the *Khalsa* since it was voluntary.¹²⁶ Many of Sikh ordained converts were Jats in central Punjab, a growingly active peasant group that would later alter the makeup of the Sikh population after the death of the Guru.¹²⁷ Despite such wavering, the Guru was sure to speak to those not willing to take the vow, incorporating believers and non-believers alike in his army towards a quest of integrity and empowerment, which was open to all.

In the mobilization and integration of the *Khalsa* into action, Guru Gobind Singh incorporated religious symbolism with militancy, intertwining Sikh philosophies with militant action in the metaphor of a moral battlefield of sorts. The Guru invoked a heroic character as an image of religious ideal while his poetic works expressed his views of necessary violence for the sake of integrity. By using the symbol of the sword in his writings, he related the object to God, which was used to fight injustice and subjugated rule by outsiders.¹²⁸ Through his weaponry infused poetry, the Guru emphasized the necessity of the sword in protection and battle against the immoral and wicked, incorporating such ideologies into the thread of Sikhism itself. In doing so, militancy became an accepted aspect of those who accepted the faith. Such martial emphasis was further endorsed through the Guru's warrior ballads that explicitly told of the heroic tales

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 75.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 86.

¹²⁸ Kaur, "Guru Gobind Singh and His Mission."

of battle, proving to be an effective tool in creating a martial atmosphere.¹²⁹ Such victory cries became synonymous with God-like qualities and mantras. The enactment of such symbolism in the Guru's initiated *Panth* would prove to be a later foundation for other military leaders who found the Sikh philosophy useful for their cause. The promotion of an equalizing force under a monotheistic power gained immense popularity under the last Guru, the Sikh population expanding more than ever before. This use of symbolism dramatically changed and shaped Sikhism in its outward and inward formations, reflecting a new understanding of the faith entirely.

The sociological impact of the *Khalsa* movement had honest intentions in bringing equality and religious power to commoners, but the ideals of Guru Gobind Singh took much time to truly settle with the people. Since the Sikh collective was rather small in number in comparison to the Sikh population, such codes were mostly applicable to the Guru's following, not immediately affecting Punjabis without Sikh associations. According to Sikh scholar Saheb Khandare, the "Guru ingrained through the *Khalsa* that democratic values grow by respecting collective social mind and vote rather than individual personality."¹³⁰ In the creation of a larger social ideal, the Guru attempted to eradicate the caste system by making acceptance into the *Khalsa* available for all, irrespective of background (hence shown in his *Panj Pyare* baptisms from five men of different castes).¹³¹ Guru Gobind Singh was attempting to reach a population with ties to

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Saheb Khandare, "Guru Gobind Singh's Socio-cultural Reestablishment for Nation Building," Institute of Sikh Studies, http://sikhinstitute.org/ggs/15-tp_samual.html.

¹³¹ Ibid.

either Hindu or Muslim faiths on a level of social equality and justice, fighting for a greater good. In doing so, the Guru included non-baptized people into his army, even embracing many Hindus and Muslims that clung to their religious backgrounds. The actions of the *Khalsa* reflected the political agenda of the Guru, who tried to secure Punjabis from Mughal persecution whilst condemning the Mughals' proclaimed rights to the region. Since the Guru's aims were secular in nature, it would seem logical to incorporate all willing parties to reach liberation goals for all Punjabis. As I explained earlier, many people attracted to Gobind Singh's movement didn't feel the need to convert to what is now called Sikhism, an issue which probably persuaded the Guru to extend his offer outside of his immediate community to a wider, political audience. The inclusion of women into this powerful militant force was the first of its kind, setting an example of unity to be followed by believers. Another task the Guru endured was the abdication of the *masand* system, cutting out the "middleman" between devotees and God. In spiritual terms, this allowed everyday people to be in direct access with God, as *masands* had begun to acquire an unauthorized aura of religious authority.¹³² The *masands* system was created as a volunteer position for devoted Sikhs but the position was later used as an illicit means of priesthood and income at a local level. The *masand* system was heavily abused in the times of Har Rai, Har Krishan, and Tegh Bahadur when the lineage of Gurus lost control over the system, largely leaving the *masands* to their own devices. These *masands* would've contained the authority to collect monetary offerings without the Gurus' consents, which were reported to heavily line their pockets

¹³² Ibid.

instead of serving the *sangats*. The height of their authority came with the succession dispute of Tegh Bahadur, who many *masands* didn't follow. Rather, some *masands* began to claim religious authority in their own names or other proposed Guru candidates. The riddance of the *masand* system therefore put the Guru back in power, allowing a single authority and line of revenue to transpire.

One of the most important spiritual infrastructures the Guru left behind was the issuance of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The Guru chose to focus his remaining spiritual authority into the holy text, which he intended to remain as the ultimate religious authority after his death. This act dissolved the traditional line of Guruship, leaving himself as the last human Guru. His actions signified his emphasis on the holy book rather than his own leadership in terms of religious matters, beginning the ritualism now associated with the holy text in contemporary times. To distinguish the spiritual legitimacy of his predecessors, the Guru chose to not include his own teachings in the *Adi Granth*.¹³³ The canonization of the holy text was then complete, ending a history of alterations. The implications of the text are elaborated in the first chapter, its significance seeming to exemplify over time, particularly with its exposure to the masses in the colonial era. At the time of the Guru, the actual numbers of texts were minimal and only available at a few *gurudwaras* to the literate. It took many more generations for the renowned traditions and ideas concerning the *Guru Granth Sahib* to take effect in the colonial era.

¹³³ Kaur, "Guru Gobind Singh and His Missionl.

The mission behind Guru Gobind Singh's *Khalsa* has been argued amongst scholars, as views find the Guru's intentions to be either militant or religious. Khushwant Singh suggests that the Guru Gobind intended to have a soldier-saint army in use of arms to defend the faith only when necessary.¹³⁴ However, the religious mechanisms behind that *Khalsa* were used as an effective tool in mobilizing the masses, the Sikh religion not necessarily shaping the identity of the army. It's quite possible that the original intention of the Guru was to create a religious army, but this was not the case in history. The *Khalsa* served as a largely Punjabi unit that was more secular in nature that aimed to rid the Mughals from the province and protect Punjabis from Mughal persecution. To understand this point more clearly, the political circumstances of the late 17th century need to be examined. Such situations would've provoked Guru Gobind Singh's proclamation of taking up arms. Under previous gurus, the Mughals had disputes and warrants against the families and immediate followers of the Gurus. In the meantime, Mughal governors had taken up the *jizya* tax (taxes upon non-Muslims) and were rumored to have not trusted many of the Sikh and Hindu populations, leading to harassment. These circumstances climaxed by the late 17th century, influencing the Guru to take up the *Khalsa* to serve as an army of liberation and integrity. Another matter at hand probably played a larger role in arms movement of the Guru—the death of his sons. His young sons were said to have been captured by the army of a rival Mughal governor, Wazir Khan.¹³⁵ Under the governor's instruction, the two young boys were bricked alive in 1705, sparking intense criticism by the Wazir Khan's cousin, the *Nawab* of Malerkotla

¹³⁴ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 83.

¹³⁵ Ram, *History of the Sikhs*, 46.

(who later formed an alliance with the Guru). The Guru did not lash out against Wazir Khan, but instead focused his energies on a much larger and threatening power—the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb.¹³⁶ In 1705, a letter was written to the Emperor discussing his grave injustices towards the Sikhs. In the letter (*Zafarnama*), he blamed Aurangzeb for the death of his sons, wives, father, and disciples, which were done without reason or merit.¹³⁷ Furthermore, Guru Gobind Singh criticized Aurangzeb’s lust for power and lip-service religion, stating his intent on seeking revenge and justice for the Emperor’s perils.¹³⁸ The following instances have been transmitted by Sardha Ram in his book, *History of the Sikhs: Translation of the “Sikkhann di Raj di Vikhia.”*

“O King! As God has seated you on the throne, would it not be better if you did not commit injustice towards people? Behold! What injustice you have done me, who lived on the mountain peak, and had never molested any of your villages or towns? You without fault first imprisoned my father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and killed him, and then, joining with other rulers, you sent armies against me; then you killed my young children and thousands of my disciples; you have slain my wives and robbed my treasury; but remember that these injustices, which are committed at your threshold, are not allowed at the threshold of God. There, justice is most truly meted out; there, kings and worms (i.e. poor) are held equal...¹³⁹

“If you have this thought, that, from doing service to God, you will escape from the pains of hell, then listen: reading four verses with your mouth is not called true service, but subduing your appetites is real

¹³⁶ Ibid., 49.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 50.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 51.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 50.

worship; you on the contrary, with the intoxication of royalty, foster your lusts. Behold! You, for the pleasure of your heart, killed your own father and brothers; what service do you call this? ...As you do not show mercy to people but are intent on giving them pain, then why should God show mercy on you? ...Beware! As you have oppressed people much, so also will the *Khalsa* torment you. Now the day of your retribution has come; God is very angry with you. Behold now; I will, with the help of God, take my revenge from you, for the *Khalsa* has only been raised to kill you.”¹⁴⁰

Whether or not the quest for revenge would've occurred is questioned and the urgency of such a quest for more personal than spiritual retributions is debated due to the Emperor's death shortly after the letter. The accumulation of injustices against his families, followers, and Punjabis in total amounting from the previous three *Gurus* to his own reign could have provoked him to act if the circumstances permitted, as the Guru Gobind Singh's intentions were clear as stated in the earlier passages. Aurangzeb died not long after receiving the *Zafarnama* and a power struggle for the throne endured, which allowed the Guru to support Bahadur Shah (who later wins) against his brother for the throne in 1707. Therefore, the proposed fight of vengeance didn't occur against the Mughals. Rather, the Guru formed a partnership with the new Mughal Emperor. Had a religious war upon the Muslim Mughals really taken place, Gobind Singh would never have supported Bahadur Shah in his accession to the throne. Instead, he would've fought Bahadur Shah for a separate province. This constitutes that the Guru had a political agenda, not a religious one. Instead, a political alliance was drawn with the Mughals,

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 51.

which relaxed the restrictions (such as the *jizya* tax) placed upon Punjab during Aurangzeb's reign. Soon after, a cloud of mystery consumes the events leading to the Guru Gobind Singh's death. After a survey of the primary and secondary texts, it can be concluded that at least two Pathan men assassinated the Guru in 1708. The means behind the assassination are uncertain, as two popular rumors that I found claimed that either the Pathans took revenge for the death of their ancestors from Hargobind's time or that they were hired either through the Emperor or Wazir Khan to assassinate him on accounts of his growing power and ill relations with the governor. With the *Guru Granth Sahib* standing in the deceased Guru's place as the new eternal authority, new strains of militancy developed without Guru approval.

In comparison to the *Khalsa*, a fundamentalist band of Sikh warriors grew shortly before Guru Gobind Singh's death, one led by the hermit Banda Singh Bahadur, who took up arms in using the militant authority of the Guru. In fact, Gobind Singh had never instructed Banda to conduct such battles. Much speculation has arisen concerning the intentions of Banda himself. He was still categorized as a Hindu, having recently left his ascetic ways, though there remains no evidence of him ever being initiated into the *Khalsa*. Banda seemed to embrace the Guru's spiritual and militant teachings for political benefit, attracting a large number of followers to his cause against the Mughals, in which he forwardly opposed its oppression against the peasantry.¹⁴¹ Banda's stance on Mughal peasantry oppression attracted a large peasant (mainly Jat) population to his militia, which was used in the looting and capturing of Mughal strongholds. In 1710,

¹⁴¹ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 99.

Banda captured Wazir Khan, the man responsible for the death of Guru Gobind Singh and his sons, and continued in the capturing and killing of Mughal governors and *zamindars*, replacing them with Sikh rulers.¹⁴² Banda called upon the *Khalsa* to fight the Mughals, expanding his conquests into Kashmir and Afghanistan. In the same year, Bahadur Shah heard of his loss of territory in the north; the Mughals were only left with the cities of Lahore and Kasur (modern Afghanistan) in the north.¹⁴³ The Mughal Emperor declared war upon Banda Singh Bahadur's army, which some scholars have interpreted as a war against the Sikhs.¹⁴⁴ In reality, both the Sikhs and the various Muslim governorships were in a political fight for territory, issuing a religious element into the fight as a tool in drawing the masses. Removing the religious connotations from the battles, much of the peasantry (which consisted of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims) were dissatisfied with the tyranny of their rulers (which was of a Muslim majority), hence it is safe to say that due to the large uneasiness of the population, a rebellion would've occurred without the instigation of religion if Banda hadn't initiated it. It's essential to note that such riots was not publically endorsed or instigated by the Guru himself. Rather, widespread use of religious combat was used for the first time, and it was not under Guru Gobind Singh's leadership. Banda even used the Guru's legitimacy in his declaration of sovereignty and warfare, issuing coinage in the Guru's and his name.¹⁴⁵ This period otherwise known as the peasant uprising attracted many Jats to Banda's

¹⁴² K. Singh, *The Sikhs*, 65.

¹⁴³ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 105.

¹⁴⁴ K. Singh, *The Sikhs*, 66.

¹⁴⁵ Nesbitt, *Sikhism*, 61.

army, who received land for the first time from the demolition of Mughal landholders.¹⁴⁶ The agrarian uprising directly affected Jats, who were often disadvantaged under the Mughals. It would seem natural for them to join Banda's forces for political and socio-economic advances in their conquests. The lure of a casteless society surely could've attracted a Jat following to the *Khalsa* movement, but this was only an addition to the militant rewards of the movement. Banda's days came to an end in 1716 with his family's capture and his murder, though a legacy of other Sikh militants rose after his death, intertwining politics and religion in their marketing.

The next period in Sikh history (1716-1801) can be interpreted an era of constant conflict until the unification of warring clans under Ranjit Singh. Without the leadership of a guru, the *Khalsa* began to scatter throughout the Punjab, facing a multitude of political persecution under Mughal governors and the prospects of an Afghan invasion between the years of 1716 and 1801. In Lahore, the new governor became Abdus Samad Khan, who (in joint with Mughal command) attempted to squash the agrarian revolt, demanding the deaths of identifiable Sikhs in the process.¹⁴⁷ From this decree, much of the known *Khalsa* fled their homes, often hiding within the Punjab's thick forests. The lack of a standing authority created a conflict for the maintenance of pilgrimage sites and *gurudwaras*. Though there were few *gurudwaras* and *Guru Granth Sahibs* at that time, its protection was still required, as some Sikhs feared the plunder of their remaining establishments. Due to the longstanding alliance with the Udasi sect, a significant portion of the *gurudwaras* was placed under the maintenance of Udasi priests, who were

¹⁴⁶ Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, 72.

¹⁴⁷ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 115.

not targeted under Mughal reign for their Hindu appearance and ritualism.¹⁴⁸ In the meantime, small bands of Sikhs began to form in opposition to Mughal establishments, their primary concentration on surviving widespread persecution by any means necessary. Many prominent Punjabi guerilla fighting leaders or *jathedars* (many of whom are now known as the *misls*) arose from this period, acquiring a total of 65 rebel-like armies in the process. These separate militias (*jathas*) became known for their looting of Mughal powers and conquests of villages. Many of these parties consisted of Jats, who were attracted to the economic incentives of the looting.¹⁴⁹ The benefits of conquest under each party's regime were based upon status and aid within the army, distributing the looted goods and territory within a hierarchical structure.¹⁵⁰ During the 1720s to 1730s, their political influence was very limited, only amounting with the size of seized territory under the separate *jathedars*. The spiritual authority that some Sikhs endow upon the historical leaders today wasn't present, for these Sikh leaders held no such authority at that time. Under a new governorship in Lahore in 1726, Zakaraya Khan tried to stop the frequent pillages, but the use of Mughal militias against the *jathas* went without much luck. In 1733, the governor tried to bring peace to the tumult Punjab by reaching beyond Mughal forces—issuing the help of the Sikh elders in Amritsar who were responsible for the maintenance of the Golden Temple.¹⁵¹

A few *jathedars* gathered within the Harimandir Sahib (Golden Temple) in Amritsar at a congressional meeting now called the *Sarbat Khalsa*, a communal

¹⁴⁸ Nesbitt, *Sikhism*, 78.

¹⁴⁹ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 116.

¹⁵⁰ Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, 73.

¹⁵¹ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 117.

assembly, to meet with Zakaraya Khan. As a part of token of peace, the Mughal governor offered three cities to a prospective Sikh landholder in return for government revenue and military service (*jagirdar*).¹⁵² Kapur Singh took the title of *jagirdar* and issued the creation of the first purely Sikh army with the emphasis of the protection of *gurdwaras* and proselytizing—the *Dal Khalsa*.¹⁵³ This act in 1733 is the true start of the modern militant Sikhism that is present today. The *Dal Khalsa* was divided between 12 *jathedars*, who were later called *misls*, each ruling separate territories of the Punjab. The power of these *misls* didn't take long to come into effect; they began to openly dispute the Mughal governorship in 1738 whilst withholding much of their owed revenue to Zakaraya Khan. Nadir Shah's invasion of Delhi further weakened the Mughal rule, the Sikhs only targeted with persecution and death threats after Nadir Shah of Persia took his leave in 1738. Countless stories remain of the plunder of Sikh establishments and brutal beheadings of known *Khalsa* members. The twelve *misls* retreated to hiding, working independently in bands of guerilla warfare until 1746 when they joined forces in combating the army of the new governor of Lahore, Yahya Khan. Further fighting between Yahya Khan and his brother the following year placed Mughal attention on the family under governorship, the unstable forces making way for another invasion by Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Abdali. A series of invasions sparked by Ahmad Shah Abdali lasted from 1747 to 1769 that was aimed at targeting the Mughals. The Mughal reign in Punjab became increasingly divided amongst familial interests, the Sikhs stepping in with

¹⁵² Ibid., 118.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

their own claims to authority under attempted *misl* unification guided by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia (he had taken *jagirdar* Kapur Singh's place).

I have titled the *Dal Khalsa*, *misls*, and their respective armies as "Sikhs," but my reasons for doing so are related to the perspective of sources written in the colonial era. In actuality, there is little evidence of the army constituents abiding by the doctrines of the *Khalsa*, but tales have remained of various *misls* and *Dal Khalsa* officials (particularly in Amritsar) using religious symbolism as catalysts for battle. The modern connotations with Sikh identity did not completely prevail during the 18th century; hence the armies fighting under the *misls* might not have comprised the *Khalsa* rites of Sikhs, as it was still not a common feature of the faith at that time. Even so, claiming a Sikh identity seems to be a later feature added to historical reinterpretations of *misls*, not their armies. The *jathedars* that headed their teams of bandits acquired later titles such as *Maharaja* (king) and Sikh warrior in the 1900s, which was an attempt to rewrite Punjabi history in a Sikh light. Any actual religious rhetoric of the *misls* seemed to be lacking for spiritual matters, merely serving as a token of authority. The Sikh *misls* had acquired tremendous political authority; hence those under them attained new financial and socio-economic status. They had also acquired territory, which led to the maintenance of collective *misl* property (including gurudwaras). Punjabis of different religious backgrounds could've easily taken up the cause of the *misls* for these purposes alone as well as in patriotic defense of a unified Punjab.

Within Indian history, the tales of Punjabi fights for independence and justice from Mughal authorities has often been confined to only Sikhs, which is only a partial

representation of the actual history. The Mughals created havoc not only for Hindus and Sikhs, but Muslims as well, who wanted to regain their territories and protective rights. This is the particular case of the Chishti caste of Pakpattan, Punjab in modern Pakistan. This “caste” belongs to the same family of the Chishti *pir*, Baba Farid, whose descendants had previously joined together four clans to protect the territory of the *dargah* in the early 17th century.¹⁵⁴ The growth in service and clan alliances was not a new phenomenon to the shrine, but its active military actions were. With the decline of the Mughals and the continuing raids of Punjab, the shrine’s army was called into service in 1750, to protect the shrine as well as expand the *dargah* keeper’s power through the conquest of Bikaner, Rajasthan.¹⁵⁵ The territory of the shrine came under threat from an attack by *misl* Hana Singh, but the Chishti army (largely composed of Jats and Rajputs) pushed away their forces.¹⁵⁶ From this example, it can be assumed that the Mughal interference in the affairs of Punjab was not wanted by the 18th century and stirred not only the Sikhs, but Muslims as well. Unfortunately, Punjab became severely divided amongst regional loyalties, not able to join forces with others to combat the Mughals. In the meantime, the Mughal state of Punjab grew weary under the frequent shifts in leadership until 1772, the population of the state in chaos amidst the constant battles fought between Chishtis, Sikhs, Mughals, and Afghans.

The *Dal Khalsa* became a reputable force amidst the opposition of the Afghans and Marathas, attempting to take back the strategic city of Lahore in 1760 against the

¹⁵⁴ Eaton, “The Political and Religious Authority,” 349.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 350.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

backdrop of battles.¹⁵⁷ The purpose of the *Dal Khalsa* became very specific in 1761—keeping the Afghans off Punjabi soil. The *misls* had taken back much of Punjab as Abdali left, only to face the Afghan leader again upon his return in 1762. The surprise attack by Abdali at Kup Kalan, Sangrur District, Punjab took the lives of 30,000 people in the period of one day, many of them were unarmed older adults, women, and children.¹⁵⁸ The event known as Vada Ghallughara (The Great Holocaust) continued with Abdali's gunpowder attack on the Golden Temple in Amritsar. The *misls* were forced to service to form two large groups to invade the Afghan-ruled cities of Punjab, slowly taking back city after city whilst Ahmed Shah Abdali returned to Afghanistan. It would seem that the growing strength of the Sikhs rallied fellow Punjabis in the spirit of conquest with stories remaining regarding the aid of Hindus to the regime. There have been reports of the *Dal Khalsa* rallying their army with religious chants, often pertaining to the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh. Since the battles by the Sikhs were of a political agenda, their underlying intentions were to reclaim and protect the Punjab for Punjabis, meaning the riddance of Mughal and Afghan authority. In rallying the public to their cause, it wouldn't have proven too difficult. The message the *Dal Khalsa* gave was for a unified and free Punjab, though their strategic religious rhetoric caught on amongst their supporters. The increase of Jats to the cause was particularly striking, many of them reported to have enthusiastically endorsed the teaching of the *Khalsa*.

The period after the absence of Ahmad Shah Abdali left the Punjab as vulnerable as ever to attack from Afghans, Marathas, and the approaching British soldiers. The

¹⁵⁷ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 144.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.

Sikhs became known as a force to be reckoned with, their tactics of guerilla warfare proven valuable as *Nawabs* of Oudh, Rohilla, and the Mughal Empire sought after *misl* forces to act as mercenaries for their estates.¹⁵⁹ In the meantime, the *misl*s took precautions in protecting their region from outsiders, some even partaking in the continuation of neighboring communities' looting (such as Delhi and its surrounding villages). The *misl*s continued to grow in power, endowing themselves with titles and costumes of royalty as well as minted coins in their names.¹⁶⁰ The *jathedars* of bandit groups grew into leaders in their own right, acquiring administrative officials for their growing territory, musicians and artists to patron, and *gurudwaras* to build and maintain in their vicinity.¹⁶¹ It wasn't long until some *misl*s came into conflict with one another, leading fellow *misl*s to attack another's army in 1776.¹⁶² The pompous attitudes of entitlement attributed to the downfall of the *misl*s, their internal quarrels proving detrimental with the coming of the Afghan ruler, Zaman Shah, the grandson of Ahmad Shah Abdali. He traveled into the South Asian subcontinent for a total of three times with the intent of taking Delhi in 1796, the state of Punjab in a panic. For the next year, many Hindus and Sikhs fled in fear of the plunder of Punjab, though the sixteen-year-old Ranjit Singh of the Sukerchakia *misl* felt it necessary for the *misl*s to join forces to combat the Afghans. It would seem from the evidence gathered that only some *misl*s decided to join his bold front where others retreated and disowned his authority. By 1797, the cities of Gujarat and Gujranwala were claimed by the Afghans alongside the

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 167.

¹⁶⁰ Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, 74.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 75.

¹⁶² Ibid., 167.

slaughter of the remaining inhabitants of the cities, who were reportedly of a Muslim majority.¹⁶³ When Zaman Shah came to Lahore in 1798, Ranjit Singh and his forces met the Afghan Shah in combat for the first time, the young Sikh leader taking back Lahore and other conquered cities a year later while he forced Zaman Shah to retreat to Afghanistan.¹⁶⁴ From a newfound alliance with the exiled Afghan leader, Ranjit Singh gained unpopularity with the other *misl*s, who also questioned his authority at Lahore. He acquired the city through a battle at Bhasin against the powerful Bhangri *misl*, who submitted to his authority soon after. By 1801, Ranjit Singh became the undisputed ruler of Lahore, hence beginning the Punjabi Empire.

The *Maharaja* of Punjab was said to have produced the first purely Sikh Empire of its kind according to a majority of Indian Punjabi scholars, but this statement doesn't reflect the secular administration of Ranjit Singh. An interesting feature of the regime lied in the *Maharaja's* tolerance for other religions. His administration consisted of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, not requiring non-Sikhs to convert in their acts of service.¹⁶⁵ He preferred the administrative system enacted under the Mughals and felt no need to change it, leaving many of the same local officials in charge. Furthermore, Ranjit Singh endorsed the religious shrines and ceremonies of non-Sikh religions, providing adequate patronage to such institutions to allow them to flourish.¹⁶⁶ One such example of this is the *Maharaja's* conquest of the *dargah* of Baba Farid in Pakpattan in 1810, which led to the ruler's takeover of the shrine's religious duties, territory, and revenues, stripping the

¹⁶³ Ibid., 185.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 186.

¹⁶⁵ Nesbitt, *Sikhism*, 67.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

shrine of its political authority.¹⁶⁷ Despite his tolerance for other religions, the *Maharaja* still identified with being Sikh, endowing plenty of funds on the construction and maintenance of *gurudwaras*, particularly that of the Golden Temple. The Harimandir Sahib was renovated with marble floors, intricate floral designs, gold leaf interiors, and copper panel exteriors.¹⁶⁸ The temple became a site of grandeur, attracting fair numbers of Sikh pilgrims to the renovated *gurudwara*. The *Maharaja* also drew upon his Sikh character by issuing coins in the name of Guru Nanak, the *Maharaja* addressed as merely Singh Sahib.¹⁶⁹ There is no doubt that Ranjit Singh coordinated himself amongst Sikh ideals, but as there were no proper institutions besides the *gurudwara* that could be classified Sikh, his empire can't be rightly described as such. Ranjit Singh ruled his kingdom by the customary laws by which were ordered under *panchayats* (village governments), which was not codified.¹⁷⁰ The only written law available was the Shari'a for Muslims, though this became secondary since customary law tended to prevail within Punjab. Therefore, the nature of the *Maharaja's* Empire was Punjabi rather than Sikh, drawing upon the pre-existing institutions of the state whilst allowing the persecuted parties under the Mughals (mainly Sikhs) to flourish.

Ranjit Singh is remembered for his countless military antics that lead to the expansion of his kingdom to reach 100,000 square miles in territory. During his reign, the Punjab expanded into what are now Haryana, Gilgit-Baltistan, Kashmir, North-West Frontier Province, Rajasthan, Sindh, and Tibet. Part of his military success is due to his

¹⁶⁷ Eaton, "The Political and Religious Authority," 350.

¹⁶⁸ Nesbitt, *Sikhism*, 68.

¹⁶⁹ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 192.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 261.

reorganization of the army into one focused on infantry and artillery, admiring the inclusion of gunpowder by the British.¹⁷¹ He began to train his army using the deserters of the British East India Company as well as French and Italian officers, who mimicked much of the tactics of the British.¹⁷² With the imposing forces of the Marathas, Rohillas, and British in close proximity, Ranjit Singh found himself in an alliance with the British East India Company in 1806, which prevented the British from entering Ranjit's territory as well as pitted the alliance against the Marathas and Rohillas.¹⁷³ This alliance lasted until after the *Maharaja's* death, but hostilities between the Sikh Empire and the British began shortly after their treaty with the British's annexation of Malwa in 1809. The next decade consisted of battles between the *Maharaja's* troops and Afghan, Baloch, Kashmiri, and Pathans, his capture of Multan, Peshawar, and Kashmir territory the highlight of the decade. In the 1830s, the British East India Company's territory was surrounding that of Punjab, land-blocking the kingdom in the south and east. The two were briefly together once more in the British conquest of Afghanistan, which the ill *Maharaja* endorsed in 1838. A year later, Ranjit Singh died, his reign falling into the hands of his son, Kharak Singh, who was assassinated and replaced by Kharak Singh's own son, Nau Nihal Singh, the following year in 1840.¹⁷⁴ He was shortly killed after his father's funeral, leaving his own mother in charge until Kharak Singh's brother, Sher Singh, took charge in 1841.¹⁷⁵ The five-year-old son of Ranjit Singh (Dalip Singh) was

¹⁷¹ Lepel Henry Griffin, *Ranjit Singh* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 133.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁷³ K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 204.

¹⁷⁴ Griffin, *Ranjit Singh*, 218.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

then made the final *Maharaja* of the Sikh Empire after Sher Singh's assassination in 1843.¹⁷⁶

The tremendous circumstances of the royal family led to the decay of the political infrastructure of Punjab. The chaotic assassinations pitted against family members separated the once unified state again, the turmoil becoming a factor in the British's demise of the Empire. The collapsing Empire gave way to the coming of the British, who took the opportunity to conquer the province. The first Anglo-Sikh War occurred between 1845 and 1846 when the British East Indian Company marched to the city of Ferozpur, the broken Sikh army under various landlords rushing to meet them. A treaty between the Company and Dalip Singh gave the Company control over various hill stations as well as Afghan and Kashmiri territories after the Punjabi armies were crushed. It wasn't long before the second Anglo-Sikh War broke out from 1848 to 1849 by small insurgencies of soldiers attacking British convoys in Multan. The brutal war that followed ended with the young *Maharaja* signing over all of his rights, giving the remaining state of Punjab to the Company before his imposed exile to England. With the loss of territory and a uniform leadership, an age of Sikhism ended. The annexation of Punjab issued a different strain of Sikhism under colonialism that focused on religious identity rather than Punjabi unity, changing the face of the religion forever.

In conclusion, the enactment of militancy within Sikhism was one of necessary value, creating an atmosphere of defense amidst political domination, aimed towards social equality and justice for all. Guru Gobind Singh was the primary force behind such

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

developments through his incorporation of militant and heroic values within Sikh faith and practice, forming an ideal persona of the moral and pure as a fighting force (the *Khalsa*). He laid the groundwork for the militant regimes started after his death. Only then were those powerful philosophies readily endorsed, the militancy coming with a historical necessity for the defense against the imposing Persians, Afghans, and Mughals, creating a wave of insurgency by commoners (and people of other faiths) to join the fight for tolerance and justice. The foundations of the modern *Khalsa* Sikh identity were enacted by the last Guru—Gobind Singh, whose protective militancy tactics were adjusted for the benefit of later political regimes.

Chapter Four: The Creation of the “Other”: 1849-1947

The “other”—this word is often described as something separate, distinct, and unique. This is what the Punjabi religious movements have been categorized as—each one different from the other. Bhakti, Chishti, and Sikh activities have fallen into the classification of diverse religions, constituting individual entities, each with their own histories, traditions, and beliefs. In contemporary society, the rich pluralism that the three movements once shared has been long forgotten in the modern creation of the “other,” the history of such strong similarities dismayed in light of modern politics. This in part has come from the creation of boundaries, particularly with that of what are now India and Pakistan. In midst of some scholarship, these boundaries may have been created but not fully enacted prior to partition, in lieu of the politics surrounding the fall of the British Empire. The unintentional categorization of the British led to the creation of concrete religious identities that had fluctuated since the Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism first emerged within the subcontinent. In turn, colonialism can be credited to developing the identities of separate Punjabi religions, these titles taking prominence over the regional identity the groups all shared.

One of the first British encounters with the Sikh population of Punjab was through the militant and political circumstances surrounding the fallen lineage of Ranjit Singh. After the annexation of the Punjab under the British East India Company in 1849, the growing force sought to incorporate the revered militias of Punjab endorsed by Ranjit Singh’s lineage, many of whom were identified as Sikh due to their Sikh leaders. Many of these militias were quickly incorporated into the British forces, which were often

considered as one of the “militant races” of South Asia under colonial sources. Interestingly enough, the issuance of Sikhs into the British army during the Rebellion of 1857 took a striking character, the British finding support by the once rebels in crushing the uprising of the regime’s disloyal troops. From 1857 to 1858, ranks of the British East India Company and ousted *Maharajas* and *Nawabs* fought for India’s sovereignty, the bloody rebellion waged against the company and its’ troops. In 1858, the rebellions were squashed by the Company thanks to the loyal support of the “Sikh” army fighting for the operation. Soon after, the British Raj took control of South Asia, placing the Company’s affairs into that of the British Crown rule, South Asia then incorporated into a colony. From this time period onwards, many Punjabis rose within the ranks of the army and attended to the image of the British army, which later transcended into the stereotype of the Punjabi-characterized Indian army of today. This image of the British army was correlated with Sikh identity, which the British associated with *Khalsa* identifiers.¹⁷⁷ The British Raj instituted a policy forcing Sikhs to adhere to Sikh form (mainly the 5 K’s) from 1875 to 1925, which largely contributed to the mass appeal of what a *Khalsa* Sikh should be.¹⁷⁸ In identifying their troops and subject population, the British Raj attempted to categorize populations by physical characteristics and textual representations of what consisted within a particular religious identity. The *Khalsa* rites and beliefs became a source of identity for Sikhs under the British Raj, using such characteristics as a method

¹⁷⁷ W. H. McLeod, “The Singh Sabha Reformation,” in *Sikhs and Sikhism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 70.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

classification. Outside of the army, textual means were later instated to specify the modern Sikh identity as well.

The Sikh community at large was theoretically supposed to abide by the spiritual doctrines within the *Guru Granth Sahib*, but every day ethics and guidelines were not completely illustrated in the sacred texts. The Sikh organizations that I will later explain in this chapter created a set of codes to organize, characterize, and guide Sikhs, many of the groups in this process turning outside of the holy scriptures to another text—The *Rahitnamas*. The *Rahitnamas*, or codes of conduct, has often been accredited to Guru Gobind Singh, who laid the first concrete rules for the *Khalsa*. In actuality, the text consists of far more governing doctrines for Sikhs than that of the 5 K's, which were later compiled by various authors. There is little evidence pinning the canonization of the *Rahitnamas* to an exact period, but rather the codes were more likely to have been recorded throughout time. For instance, one of the first works of the *Rahitnamas* that largely covered the *Khalsa* rites was called the *Suraj Prakash*, which was documented by Santokh Singh in 1844.¹⁷⁹ The gradual assembly of the codes allowed for alterations and rules that related to the historical occurrences of the codification. For instance, the contents of the popular doctrines of Guru Gobind Singh's contributions to the *Rahitnamas* ask for *Khalsa* Sikhs to abstain from halal meat, fornication with Muslim women, and tobacco products. In contemporary Sikh practice, the refrain of Sikhs to fornicate with Muslim women has been extended to the creation of the rule of no adultery. The specific nature of the original code was more likely related to the political

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 67.

context in which these rules were followed. For example, many *Khalsa* Sikhs were initiated in the looting conquests under landowners and *misl*s in the 1700s as well as under Ranjit Singh in the 1800s, many of which called for the destruction of Mughal and Afghan endorsed villages (many of whom had Muslim majorities). It was typical for the militia bands to divvy up their treasures, which could've included women. Therefore the code would've made sense at the time, calling for men to not claim women as military conquests. On another note, McLeod, a prominent Sikh scholar, has assumed that a previous ban on Muslim hookah products was widely extended in many traditions to that of a complete tobacco prohibition.¹⁸⁰

The uncut hair vow under the 5 K's of the *Khalsa* has often been cited as a source of Sikh identity, which is emphasized within the *Rahitnamas*. This visual description of *Khalsa* Sikhs has drawn many Sikh scholars back to the rule's origination, believing that the code was truly used in separating Sikhs from their Hindu and Muslim counterparts. When looking at the historical circumstances in which this code grew out of, there is evidence that the custom of long hair was long inhabited by the Jats, who increasingly continued to occupy the ranks of the *Khalsa* as well as Sikh-influenced militias.¹⁸¹ There have been myths regarding the use of long hair for the army in relation to its fierce character as well. Some scholars such as Sardha Ram have likened the habit of long hair to that of the Pathans, though little information is available to back the claim. The use of the turban is an attribute of Punjabi culture in actuality, though the uniform folds of the

¹⁸⁰W. H. McLeod, "The Khalsa and its Rahit," in *Sikhs and Sikhism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 33.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

“Sikh” turban are more associated with the military traditions under the British, which were largely made up of Jat Sikhs.¹⁸²

The noticeable characteristics distinguishing contemporary Sikhs today began to emerge in prominence in 1838, though the popularity of uncut hair, turbans, *kirpan* carrying, *karas*, blue clothing, *Khalsa* rites, smoking bans, and the “Singh” name grew more popular by the end of the 19th century.¹⁸³ The reason for the lag in distinguishable Sikh identity for the masses isn’t due to the gradual process of codification for the *Rahitnamas*, but more likely related to the lack of widespread knowledge concerning the doctrines. This issue became a core advocacy point of the late 19th century Sikh movement known as the *Singh Sabha* Reformation. The rationale behind the *Singh Sabha* reform was related to revising the incoherent nature of the texts and allowing Sikh doctrine to be accessible to the masses. For everyday people, it was common for Punjabi religious norms to transpire regardless of religious background. Therefore, it would be rather difficult to distinguish between Hindus and Sikhs in most cases, as the appearances of both would be similar. Furthermore, Sikh customs in accordance with rites and *gurudwaras* were often abandoned, as caste and regional traditions trumped all. There is evidence that this even played out in Sikh institutions, with many low castes rejected from the *gurudwaras* themselves, not even being allowed *prasad*.¹⁸⁴ *Gurudwara* numbers were beginning to grow in number with the available *Guru Granth Sahibs*, but the reformers felt that the words of the Gurus were falling upon deaf ears. The condition

¹⁸² Narayanan, Class Lecture.

¹⁸³ McLeod, “The Singh Sabha Reformation,” 66.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

of the masses triggered an assembly that enacted the reform, which attempted to organize the Sikh faith in a true manner of religion, accompanied by texts, traditions, and codes of conduct.

From the beginning, the *sangat* was not a united entity, but the prominence of “correct” doctrine was not strongly emphasized in the religious communities. This dramatically changed with the creations of the Namdharis and Nirankaris sects, who used political leverage in their interpretation of the *Guru Granth Sahib* and definition of Sikhism. These groups began to form before the commencement of the *Singh Sabha*, which the council elders disapproved of. The Namdhari sect originated in Hazro District, Punjab, Pakistan under Balak Singh, but the sect truly grew under his successor, leader Ram Singh, whose followers pushed for political separation from the British, calling for the ousting of British rule and goods in 1857, long before Mohandas Gandhi’s Quit India Movement.¹⁸⁵ The Namdharis became known for their stress on *ahimsa*, or nonviolence. This was evident in the rejection of meat eating (the sect promoted strict vegetarianism) and their participation in the cow protection movement in the early 1870s.¹⁸⁶ The communities attracted to the Namdharis primarily came from the Jat agrarian and artisan backgrounds, which were already influenced to *Khalsa*-ridden Sikhism.¹⁸⁷ Some of these same families had been susceptible to the *misl* campaigns in the 18th century and governmental armies in the 19th century. It would then make sense for the sect to grow in light of the ideology of majority, evolving into an entity fully endorsing *Khalsa* identity.

¹⁸⁵ Nesbitt, *Sikhism*, 72.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ McLeod, “The Singh Sabha Reformation,” 65.

The growing political association with the sect caused the British government to swiftly oust the leader in 1872, leading to the execution of many of his devout followers. This moment in history has often been portrayed as one of Sikh intolerance though in actuality it tends to be one of the British Raj attempts to squash a rival challenging the government's political authority. Another sect known as the Nirankaris emerged in the city of Rawalpindi through its founder, Dayal Singh, who accommodated followers of Hindu-leaning ideology and backgrounds (often called *Sahajdharis*, or slow adopters, in the Sikh tradition) as well as initiated Sikhs, the group's dedication to the remembrance of the formless oneness of God the foremost attribute of the sect (with God referred to with such attributes as *Akal Purakh*).¹⁸⁸ This group was ostracized by the later *Singh Sabha* due to their insistence on a living guru, for the Nirankaris followed their own lineage of gurus after Dayal Singh. The group focused much of their teachings of Guru Nanak rather than the later *Khalsa* ideology of Guru Gobind Singh. Still, the militant ideology was slowly adopted into the sect as a secondary feature. Their later consolidation of rituals worked in the sect's favor since their separate institutions of life rites were promoted as purely Sikh, later adopted into British law. The unification of Sikh ideology was a bit hard to come by in the 19th century, but what unified the groups of the Namdharis, Nirankaris, and the *Singh Sabha* was their issuance of Sikh identity in accordance to the *Khalsa* teachings of Guru Gobind Singh.

The majority of Sikhs in the 19th century had little to do with either Namdhari or Nirankari sects, but was rather more absorbed into the religious practices of their caste

¹⁸⁸ Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, 193.

and regional locations. With the increase of British education systems and missionary groups in the late nineteenth century, a few prominent Sikh members became alarmed with the influence of the Christians and new Hindu ideologies and found Sikhs vulnerable to conversion. This prompted a few influential Sikhs to return to their ideological religious roots. Christian missionaries played an important role in the development of Western-style educational facilities, which aided proselytizing efforts. Some prominent Sikh families as well as Dalip Singh, the last leader of Ranjit Singh's Empire, were known converts to Christianity. Similar religious and social reforms were met with Hindu (such as the Brahma Samaj) and Muslim reformist groups during that time as well. The Brahma Samaj was originally erected in Punjab in 1862 to target the migrant Bengali community working under the British Raj, but a growing number of Punjabis became attracted to the "Unitarian Christianity soaked with iconoclastic Hinduism and rational ethics" that the Samaj offered.¹⁸⁹ The Arya Samaj also became extremely popular around the time of its origination in Punjab (1877).¹⁹⁰ These Christian and Hindu factions drew in urbanized Sikhs due to their government networking for administrative jobs, high-ranking educational facilities, and well-off communities. The Sikh masses had no such organization in comparison at that time, as the paths of socio-economic empowerment only lied within agrarian landownership and the military of the British Raj. In midst of the changing circumstances in Punjabi urban areas, some elite Sikhs felt that devotees should return to the essence of Sikhism, in turn revising its history in a more militant and exclusivist nature. One of the first advocates of such

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 223.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 279.

thinking was through the Singh Sabha Reformation. In 1873, the first Singh Sabha group was convened, consisting of prominent Amritsari scholars, *zamindars*, and elites who sought to solidify the Sikh religion.¹⁹¹ This group was known to be more partial towards non-initiated Sikhs, whereas a rival *Singh Sabha* convened in 1879 to counter their interpretation of the *Khalsa*. The *Singh Sabha* reform in Lahore later came to be known as the *Tat Khalsa*, which was in favor of the militancy issued under Guru Gobind Singh, the complete initiation and adoption of the *Khalsa* by Sikhs, and instituting the message and followers of Guru Nanak under a separate religion.¹⁹² The *Tat Khalsa* was also known for its promotion of Sikh literacy in the faith as well as academics in 1882, as the group was concerned with the lack of Sikhs in government employment and educational facilities in comparison to Punjabi Hindus and Muslims.¹⁹³ To combat this problem, the *Tat Khalsa* created faith-based schools filled with a rigorous *Khalsa*-like curriculum, even instituting the requirement of turbans for all students (girls included). By 1879, a notion of a complete separateness within Sikhism became an issue of contention, causing extreme segregation between the involving parties of the *Sabhas*. A particular area of tension lied in the interpretation of Sikhism, i.e. what it means to be a Sikh. Each *Sabha* assembly went back to the textual sources (especially the *Rahitnamas*) to interpret this point. With the newfound circumstances eluding the Sikhs, it was necessary to redefine the Sikh identity, which was constantly drafted in versions of the *Rahitnamas* throughout the 19th century. Another revision of the *Rahitnamas* was republished in 1880 until the

¹⁹¹ McLeod, "The Singh Sabha Reformation," 70.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁹³ Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, 364.

final issuance of *Rahitnama* codes appeared in 1919 under the title *Tavarikh Guru Khalsa*.¹⁹⁴ All of these newly instituted Sikh institutions tried to assimilate the Sikhs into common identities that didn't previously exist, issuing the term "Sikh" in its modern context.

Many elitist Sikhs began to feel that their community was lagging behind in religious as well as secular education as the numbers of Christian, Arya Samaj, and Brahma Samaj institutions increased in the Punjab, which advocated Western as well as their respective religious education curriculums. Furthermore, Sikh scholarship was slow in its development, as many of the *Khalsa* Sikhs had little access to education under their own language, being illiterate in the script of the holy texts. By the 1880s, Sikhs were lagging in administration jobs in comparison to their Hindu and Muslim counterparts, finding much of this due to the rural educations inadequacies (much of the Sikh population was confined to rural areas, which lacked adequate education facilities).¹⁹⁵ On another note, the elitist language under the administration of Ranjit Singh was Persian, the same language of the Mughal court language. Under the governing leadership, Sikh doctrines were often written in the Arabic script in the Punjabi language or in Persian itself, straying away from the Gurmukhi script of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. From a historical perspective, it seems that Gurmukhi wasn't necessarily the most common script for written and read communication between Punjabis. The Sikh tradition was largely an oral one, as many Punjabis were illiterate in Gurmukhi and had little access to the holy texts. The Gurmukhi script was never an elitist script nor Punjabi an

¹⁹⁴ McLeod, "The Singh Sabha Reformation," 67.

¹⁹⁵ Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, 368.

elitist language. In fact, some scholars questioned if Punjabi and the Gurmukhi script were even unique languages at all. The debate of Punjabi and the Gurmukhi script as either a Hindavi dialect or separate language only emerged in the 1870s when Sikh elites tried to introduce Punjabi and the Gurmukhi script for a literary curriculum in the Oriental College of Lahore.¹⁹⁶ After much debate, the subjects were added to the college in 1877, the event interpreted as an official recognition of Gurmukhi Punjabi as a distinct language. In reality, there is little evidence of Gurmukhi texts in print or widespread circulation since the printing press wasn't in the hands of scholars and Sikhs until the 1880s. Rather, the printing press was limited to Ludhiana Mission Press before the 1880s, the press being part of a Christian initiative that printed few texts in the Gurmukhi script for the benefit of the Christian proselytizing mission.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, the mission of spreading the Sikh doctrine and education using the Punjabi language (in the Gurmukhi script) was off to a shaky start, the process slow to take root in much of the population.

The growing number of factions within the Sikh faith began to worry some prominent Sikh figures, which decided to try to merge the *Singh Sabha* and *Tat Khalsa* groups under one council in 1902—the Chief *Khalsa Diwan*. The meticulous regulations and control of *gurdwaras* and its movement monitoring served as an important issue of needed address, bringing many of the fraction members together. This group later became known as the *Akalis* by which a movement of anti-British reign emerged. The *Akali* movement was the next phase sparked under the leadership of the Chief *Khalsa Diwan*, which pushed for Sikh council control of *gurdwaras* and property as well as

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 282.

¹⁹⁷ Nesbitt, *Sikhism*, 72.

government approved census and marriage rites strictly for Sikhs, often using *ahimsa* strung boycotts and protests as a way to advocate their messages.¹⁹⁸ Within the eyes of the British Raj, Sikhs were not a formal religion of their own, still falling under many census and administrative classifications as Hindus (though some were identified as Muslims). This was not necessarily the government's fault, as many Sikhs classified themselves under such titles for socio-economic, political, historical, and familial reasons. In many cases, rural devotees later classified as Sikhs didn't necessarily disclose their religious identities since they were unaware of the differences of Hindus and Sikhs at the time, often seeing such classification as unimportant. The identity formed around self-classified Sikhs was newly constructed in more solidified political terms. McLeod writes that "those who labeled themselves 'Sikh' in the nineteenth century embraced no single cultural meaning, religious identity, or social practice; rather, an amalgam of what later reformers made into separate Hindu and Sikh cultural principles prevailed...In fact, no such tradition existed."¹⁹⁹ In forming this newfound identity, Sikhs later turned to collective groups from within while the British began to categorize populations, their associations with Sikhs largely based upon their relations with their militias (who fell under the *Khalsa* rite group).

The lines of religious identity for Sikhs continued to be blurred for much of the duration of the faith's existence. Contemporary Sikh scholar Harjot Oberoi finds this especially true in his investigation of the Punjab census of 1881, which is largely inaccurate due to Sikhs being classified as Hindus with some Hindus falling under the

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 76.

¹⁹⁹ McLeod, "The Singh Sabha Reformation," 78.

Sikh religion category.²⁰⁰ The figures for the year 1891 declared 1,344,862 Sikhs as Hindus in the Punjab, for instance.²⁰¹ Rather, at least 24 sects that were later categorized as Sikhs were identified as Hindus. The errors of religious classification continued far into 20th century, the Hindu population of the Punjab not even recorded in Punjab's census of 1941.²⁰² This case of identity confusion is not foreign to Hindus and Muslims; the blurred boundaries of distinct religions have been found throughout the South Asian subcontinent in census reports as well. Even after India's independence, census reports have continued to wrongly categorize inhabitants by proposed religious sects. This cannot be entirely blamed on government reports—the informants for such wide scale projects couldn't have possibly understood the intricate categorization of regional religious groups. Religious rituals, traditions, and beliefs have been found to vary amongst regional groups, even within close proximity to factions within the same region. Spiritual synthesis occurred throughout the subcontinent, though the end products weren't all the same. On another note, the individuals and groups that reported their religious standing weren't always sure of their classification. With all of the religious fusion ensuing throughout South Asia, categorization wasn't necessary. The first massive documentation of such intimate details was through the census of the British East India Company. For the purposes of most indigenous rulers, documents of such kind weren't needed except for issues regarding the *jizya* tax. The implications of the British censuses were not completely intentional in my opinion, but their consequences

²⁰⁰ Nesbitt, *Sikhism*, 9-10.

²⁰¹ Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, 210.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

effected the communities in the long term. For the first time, religious classification truly mattered, which I find partially responsible for the urgency of groups of religious rhetoric emerging within the late 19th century.

In the late 19th century, Muslims began to form concrete identities through Arabic naming as well, the actions intending to characterize groups as outwardly Muslim for the first time. Other classifying factors occurred previously, but by ridding of Punjabi names, Muslims tried to claim a personality linking them to a universal brotherhood of fellow Muslims, disbanding the ethnic fraternity it had once been a part of. Using the data of the recorded names of the Siyal clan, a family in the Jhang District of Punjab, Pakistan, the prevalence of male Muslim names was examined by scholar Richard Eaton over the span of 800 years. Shaikh Baba Farid supposedly converted the Siyal clan in 1217, lived some districts away. Richard Eaton found that Punjabi secular names were still recorded on the majority, Muslim (predominately Arabic) names appearing for the first time in 1415 (only 10% of the names recorded were Muslim).²⁰³ The number of Muslim names in the clan only reached over 50% in the year 1646 (at 55%).²⁰⁴ A solid 75% of names recorded were Muslim in the year 1750, reaching 100% in 1862.²⁰⁵ Eaton eludes that such numbers were possible for other districts throughout the Punjab, particularly with ones of a Muslim majority. With the Pakpattan and surrounding districts claiming a strong allegiance under Baba Farid, this would seem to indicate some of peak numbers of converts and name changes in the Punjab. In summarizing the data,

²⁰³ Eaton, "The Political and Religious Authority," 353.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

the gradual identity changes of the Punjabi Muslims of the Siyal clan seemed to heighten at the time of political turmoil in the region—the period of the Afghan, Mughal, and Singh (Sikh) empires. In comparison with the new custom of Sikh name changes, both time periods yield the same results.

Many Sikhs continued to identify with the regional and caste-based names, as was tradition for all Punjabis. The custom of attaining the last name Singh (lion) for males and Kaur (princess) for females under Guru Gobind Singh wasn't widespread until long after his death with the *Tat Khalsa* movement.²⁰⁶ Though many Sikhs continued to use their regional and caste names, Singh and Kaur was often added, becoming an outward form of religious identification in the process. For some conservative *Khalsa* initiated Sikhs, first names were chosen based upon the *Guru Granth Sahib* rather than astrology and family names.²⁰⁷ By majority, many Sikhs did not necessarily feel that changing their name to a Sikh term was necessary, as they were no such pre-existing traditions. Most Sikhs continued using regional and even Hindu names. Even such Gurus as Ram Das, Har Gobind, Har Rai, and Har Krishan were named after Hindu titles—Har, Ram, and Krishan standing for names for the incarnations of Vishnu (Rama and Krishna in particular). As for Bhakti Hindus, there were no specific methods of faith-specific identification that hadn't already been present within the faith tradition. Alongside the Brahmanical Hindus, the names they bore were relative to their caste and village within Punjab. The classification as a “Hindu” was still becoming a term, the first

²⁰⁶ Nesbitt, *Sikhism*, 77.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

categorization of such people only commonly emerging in the 16th century.²⁰⁸ This was a vague religious term, once used to describe those living beyond the Indus River. With the British East India Company and British governmental censuses, Hindus were forced to identify with this term of religion, one some Bhakti followers had chosen to sustain from (within some sects, religious sect and caste were advised to be abolished, leaving their primary focus on their relationship with the divine). The Hindu identity received its now concrete identity with the colonial-pitted nationalist spirit in the late 19th century with the census.²⁰⁹

The British government, through its census operations and legislative categorization, recognized the invented formal Sikh identity. The insistence of Sikh life rites became a focus of the *Akali* movement, the issue of marriage rituals first taken into the political sphere. The Nirankaris had long instated the Sikh marriage hymns proposed under Gurus Ram Das and Amar Das, but its' failed to become popular within a larger audience. From these hymns, the Nirankaris had concocted their own rites that were later identified as Sikh (which were only native to the sect). The *Anand Karaj*, as Sikhs now call the marriage rites, stood as a symbol of a grander Sikh identity, the elders of the Chief *Khalsa Diwan* striving to separate themselves from their Hindu neighbors through enacted rituals rather than ideology alone. This required rigorous promotion of such rules, which took longer to come into effect by the masses. By 1909, the Chief *Khalsa Diwan* succeeded in attaining the first Sikh law in its history, which allowed for the

²⁰⁸ Cynthia Ann Humes, "Hindutva, Mythistory, and Psuedoarchaeology," *Numen* 59 (2002): 188.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.

Anand Karaj to be recognized by British government as a Sikh marriage rite.²¹⁰ With the first purely Sikh law enacted, the *Akali* movement had established Sikh identity in terms of ritualism, using their political power to push for other Sikh ritual recognition under the government.

Prior to the creation of the of the *Anand* Marriage Act, the population classifying themselves as Sikhs had no specific life rituals by majority (except for the Nirankaris), such as rites for birth, marriage, and death.²¹¹ The initiation rites endorsed under Guru Gobind Singh began what can now be considered “Sikh” ritualism, including everything from *gurudwara* and *Adi Granth* practices to personalized traditions that were expected of devotees. These standards were written in paper, but the practice of such was gradual, the aftereffects not felt until the *Tat Khalsa* convention. In reality, no such traditions had truly existed, as there were no evidence of any of the Gurus and prominent Sikhs leaders of the past writing down (and performing) particular Sikh rites, especially for marriage. For the *Tat Khalsa*, a few marriage hymns by previous Gurus was evidence enough to create distinct rituals, in turn inventing the tradition behind them. This contradicts the new history that has been rewritten for Sikhs, as large claims of the creation of original Sikh rites have emerged in the Indian Punjab post-partition. Despite these rumors, I stand firm in my belief that there is no substantial evidence for marriage rites during the time of the *gurus*. Previously, Sikh marriages were often focused around the holy fire, complete with rotational rites, sunset ceremonies, and the company of Brahman priests.²¹² These

²¹⁰ Nesbitt, *Sikhism*, 76.

²¹¹ Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, 63.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 65.

rites mirrored those of Hindus, the weddings lacking a distinct Sikh identity. In other words, the Punjabi customs were still ingrained in ceremonies, each appropriated by caste codes and regional traditions. For instance, Sikh marriages were by largely considered Hindu in nature until the late 1870s. Inspired by the Nirankari sect and the *Tat Khalsa*, the groups called for uniquely Sikh marriage customs.²¹³ This association attempted to recognize itself as truly Sikh and pitted themselves against the opposing group, Amritsar *Singh Sabha*, which readily accepted *Sanatan* Sikhs (the name used to describe sects heavily identifying with Bhakti ideology and Hindu ritualism as well as the Udasis, Nirankaris, and Namdharis).²¹⁴ In 1909, the *Anand* Marriage Act was put into place, the British government recognizing the Sikh customs of early morning scripture recitation, marriage and Sikh duties informed, and the rotational measures of the cloth-linked couple around the *Guru Granth Sahib* in the presence of an initiated Sikh.²¹⁵ Some of the Hindu-influenced rites remained as well as such pre and post wedding traditions of the *sangeet*, *mehndi*, and *vidaai*. This final measure of legislation truly chose to distinguish Sikhs from Hindus, though it took until the 20th century for Sikh marriages to become a universal custom. Furthermore, the Indian post-independence government continued to place Sikhs under Hindu legal codes. This applied to marriages as well, which only received separate registration for Sikh marriages in 2012.

Under British census and legal reports, *Khalsa* definitions were synonymous with Sikh categorization from 1868 to 1891, as no Sikh terminology was included in previous

²¹³ Nesbitt, *Sikhism*, 74.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

census records (it is to be assumed that Sikhs were classified as Hindus during that time).²¹⁶ The government realized by 1911 that many Sikhs were not adequately classified as such within the census, only then allowing for their subjects to classify themselves based upon non-*Khalsa* criteria, adding the category of Hindu-Sikh to the census in 1911 and 1921.²¹⁷ For British records, a uniform Sikh identity was needed for administrative reports and electoral validity. Government officials were eagerly in search of a concrete definition of what it meant to be a Sikh, gladly incorporating inferred ritualism endorsed by the *Sabhas* under the Chief *Khalsa Diwan*. Such ritualism became definitions for Sikh identity, claiming legal status in the process, such as the *Gurudwara Act of 1925*.

The *Tat Khalsa* as well as the greater Chief *Khalsa Diwan* was dissatisfied with the British control of the Golden Temple and the committees' lack of control in other *gurudwaras*. These Sikh authorities held little power in the practices of most of the *gurudwaras* throughout Punjab, as they were often held under the care of Udasi priests (*mahants*) since the 18th century. These *mahants* were in charge of the monetary gains and maintenance of the *gurudwaras*, often restricting the responsibilities of such to hereditary successors. Over time, many of the Udasi priests married, incorporated Hindu ritualism and idols within the sanctuaries, and lived lavish lifestyles with their acquired earnings, which angered orthodox Sikhs.²¹⁸ The *Tat Khalsa* openly blamed the *mahants* for the declining morality of the Sikhs, requesting the British government to return the

²¹⁶ McLeod, "Definition by Legislation," 86.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

gurudwara rights to the Sikh committees. The Udasis had become a powerful force within Sikhism, as they had acquired excessive patronage from various governing powers, elites, and peasantry within their lineage of maintenance. This was said to have accrued a massive income which was enhanced by their revenue-free land-grants rewarded by the state. Their high socio-economic status angered prominent Sikhs within the *Tat Khalsa*, finding a large injustice in the Udasis' hoarded wealth. This led to an array of protests in the 1910s and 1920s in regards to *gurudwara* rights and separate Sikh electorates. In order for Sikhs to maintain political sovereignty and representation, political action was needed. The demands of the powerful Sikhs found supporters amongst Mohandas Gandhi and the Indian National Congress party through its newly instituted polities of the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and the Shiromani Akali Dal (for political representation) by 1920.²¹⁹ This era is often narrated as a part of the *Akali* movement due to the establishment of a Sikh political authority. The *Akalis'* protests led to the constant drafting of a *Gurudwara Act*, which was finally enacted in 1925. This act placed historic *gurudwaras* under the control of the SGPC and allowed the committee to act as supervisors over other *gurudwaras*, ousting many *mahants* in the process. The unintentional consequence of the law defined Sikh identity once and for all, with Sikhs to declare the following: "I solemnly affirm that I am a Sikh, that I believe in the Ten Gurus, and that I have no other religion."²²⁰ By this definition alone, non-*Khalsa* Sikhs were excluded under the religious title, particularly *Sahajdharis*. By government endorsement, the SGPC became the official Sikh religious authority in

²¹⁹ Ibid., 91.

²²⁰ Ibid., 93.

1925 through their *gurudwara* activities, the group eventually drafting a suited version of the *Rahitnamas* for their use (the publication of the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* in 1950 remains the most recent version of the codes of conduct).

Whilst the Chief *Khalsa Diwan* was concerned with forming a unified political identity, the remainder of the rural population was uninterested in such matters. In other terms, the Chief *Khalsa Diwan* lacked a true influence in the promotion of their values upon the general population. Their means seem to be limited to a select few, who presided over the Singh Sabha and the *Tat Khalsa*. As for their subordinate groups, they tended to reach further into the urban public domain, though this was not necessarily the case for rural areas. The enterprises of the attempted *Khalsa* initiations upon the rural Sikhs did not catch on well with much of the population by the early 1900s. The *Tat Khalsa* took frantic efforts in spreading their literature that was heavily influenced with their own views regarding the faith, printing hundreds of thousands of packets in the Gurmukhi script for the public starting in 1898.²²¹ Despite such efforts, it seems that the rural population was largely unaffected by their conformist schemes. This could be for a variety of reasons. Firstly, many of the rural Sikhs were illiterate, therefore were not able to understand the literature distributed to them. The education regimes were slow to take root in rural areas and are still a main concern for the states of Punjab in both India and Pakistan today. Secondly, the strict views of the *Tat Khalsa* were not a view of the majority of Sikhs. If the *Tat Khalsa* would've had its way, the group would've pushed for a complete eradication of ritualism (including Hindu holidays and Punjabi worship

²²¹ Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, 363.

mechanisms), a strict following of the 5 K's, and education in the Punjabi language using the Gurmukhi script.²²² In actuality, this did not take place in rural Punjab. To this day, some rural Sikhs have tended to cling to their Punjabi customs in worship and everyday tradition, which includes not following the 5 K's in their strictest sense, worshipping at Hindu and Muslim shrines, and celebrating Hindu holidays. It would seem that the *Tat Khalsa* views wouldn't have settled with much of the population, which was quite comfortable in the traditional ways of society. The isolation of rural Sikhs from urban areas is also a contributing factor for the slow change in Sikh identity in such areas.

Between the years of 1925 and 1947, Punjab became a forerunner in the devastating partition of 1947. The circumstances of the Sikhs were shadowed by the tumult changes within the state, foreshadowing the events to come. After many *Akali* Sikhs pushed to support the World War I efforts of the British, hundreds of thousands of them were enlisted in military service overseas and in British colonies, many of whom stayed in African countries after their time in the service.²²³ In the meantime, the province of Punjab became heavily politicized in terms of communalism. As communalism arose, the urgency of separate electorates became an issue, which was backed by census records in the categorization of the religious groups. The religious identities of Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims all took political formations during this era that later instigated a notion of the "other." The city of Lahore was made a stronghold for the Indian National Congress, Shiromani Akali Dal, and the Muslim League during this period, causing some waves between the three groups. Though their methods differed,

²²² Ibid., 400, 403.

²²³ Nesbitt, *Sikhism*, 79.

their cause remained the same—independent rule from the British Raj. The Indian National Congress was the first group to declare its independence from India in Lahore in 1930.²²⁴ In 1940 and 1944, Shiromani Akali Dal had toyed with the idea of a separate province for Sikhs, but the idea was largely ignored by outside politicians and officials.²²⁵ The Muslim League passed the Lahore Resolution in 1940 as well, which was a leading proclamation for independence as well as a separate majority province for Muslims. Muslim politicians began to fear that Muslims would be largely underrepresented in a Hindu majority state; therefore a separate representation was required. In this proposal, Hindus and Sikhs were once again grouped together by the government as an entity, the separate religious identities developed by Hindus and Sikhs trumped by a needed political one. It wasn't long until communal tensions reached their peak, ending in violence between Muslim and Hindu-Sikh groups in 1946.²²⁶ The demands of the involved parties couldn't be ignored any longer—the British government began to take action starting with new pressing requirements of the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress—partition along religious lines was necessary for the Punjab. By 1947, the British had fled while leaving the countries of Pakistan and India behind. The Punjab was divided between the two countries, forcing many Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims to leave their ancestral property for generations out of fear of communal violence. The Punjab was faced with brutal bloodshed against neighbors, honor killings, rape, and kidnapping that displaced over 12 million people, killing more than 500,000 civilians in a

²²⁴ Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 20.

²²⁵ Nesbitt, *Sikhism*, 80.

²²⁶ Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 27.

matter of months.²²⁷ The demographics of Punjab completely changed since 1947, leading to the loss of religious institutions, relocation of populations into fled property and villages, and the loss of a rich history of pluralism. The Punjabi traditions that had dominated society for hundreds of years were erased in the minds of politicians, in turn developing a new identity with a segregated history to match.

When analyzing the partition history in a nutshell, the Sikh efforts for a separate religious and political identity seem to be largely ignored in comparison to the efforts of the Muslim League. As I noted earlier, the majority of defining terms of Sikhism and separatism came from elitist organizations that were patronized by the upper-middle class urban-educated Sikh communities. Their area of influence was mostly constricted to the urban areas they thrived in. The political patronage in which Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims drew their support was also confined to urban areas. It would be easy to say that the rural areas were largely left out of the religious and political turmoil of the cities, but it's likely that the political and religious entities attempted to reach out to the rural masses to draw support. The rumors of partition began to develop fear in the masses as in 1946 and 1947 amidst the news of previous communal riots. Literature and campaigning propaganda may have graced the villages of Punjab (which held the majority of the province's population, not cities), but the severe infractions that the cities began to demonstrate doesn't seem to have largely existed between 1925 and 1947. The monstrosities of partition seemed to be the largest act that affected the conditions of the masses, including the rural folk. The first-hand accounts of such events would've likely caused the effected

²²⁷ Nesbitt, *Sikhism*, 80.

parties turn towards their identities in terms of religious politics, as many regional identities were abandoned in the creation of two Punjabi identities—one Indian and one Pakistani. Still, the stereotypical hatred for Punjabis on either side of the border began to form in its acceptability during the Indo-Pakistani Wars of 1965 and 1971, which I find was fed off the unclear borders and political development of the two countries. These periods led to further breaks within the Punjabi identity. Firstly, the Shiromani Akali Dal protested the Indian government for a separate state along the lines of linguistics—Punjabi.²²⁸ A similar instance in regards to the partition of the Punjab was played out—Hindus were persuaded to vote for their primary language as Hindi in order to gain adequate representation amidst their Sikh counterpoints, who voted for Punjabi; in 1966, Haryana and Punjab were created—Haryana for Hindi-speakers (Hindus) and Punjab for Punjabi-speakers (Sikhs). The issue of language has further divided the religious groups into stereotypes: Punjabi in the Arabic script was for Muslims, Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script was for Sikhs, and Hindi in the Devanagari script was for Hindus. The educated and well documented forms of Punjabi and Urdu within Indian Punjab has largely been discarded or ignored, the same ringing true for the literary and scholarly remains of Hindi and Gurmukhi Punjabi within Pakistani Punjab. In Pakistan, the government faced a coup in 1977 that placed its “democratic” government out power in turn of an Islamic military dictatorship, which led to the eventual relinquishment of regional identities in favor of a common Muslim national identity. With the means and newfound historical

²²⁸ Ibid., 81.

hostilities created after 1947, Punjabis turned to a communalist spirit, formally classifying their neighbors as the “other.”

The social infrastructure of the Sikh population within Punjab had changed dramatically between the 19th and 20th centuries to a larger extent experienced in any previous era. The power of the peasant (primarily Jats) had increased from their mere tenant position to landowning status in the 18th century, but their wealth acquired from landownership had flourished under the fertile crop cycles and tenancies developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The largely illiterate population began to have access to educational facilities in Urdu, Persian, and Sanskrit as well as Punjabi and English through government and Christian missionary institutions. Likewise, religious groups in Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim faiths began to open religious institutes with centers in academic and religious education in response to the success of outside efforts. A complete reorganization (or organization for that matter) of Sikh institutions and faith guidelines also occurred, structuring the faith as we know it today. Furthermore, religions took on political identities through governmental committees, census and administrative efforts, and electorates, leading to communalism. These political institutions found religious ideology to back the movements, which is largely responsible for the partition of Punjab and the communal violence and hatred that broke out around the time of independence. The notion of the “other” was not only enforced upon Sikhs, but Hindus and Muslims as well, forever placing the emphasis on religious politicisim over the once unifying Punjabi identity. This identity was heavily exacerbated by the British Raj, which had an infatuation with categorization during the colonial era. The

increased notions of communalism were a consequence of these actions, altering the history and alliances that have prevailed in the broken province.

Conclusion

The modern definition of religious identity has consumed Punjabi politics and historical reinterpretations of the past. Such efforts have simplified that complex circumstances of Punjab, often forgetting the essence behind which Punjabis were once united—from a common, pluralistic identity in which Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism emerged and flourished. To understand the conflicting religious identities of the present, we must return to the past to rationalize the circumstances in which they developed. My thesis critically examines the tumult changes within the Punjab, creating a timeline of historical events. I divided Punjabi history into three eras to track the emergence of Sikhism amid its Bhakti and Chishti counterparts to the partition of Punjab in 1947. Each historical period was divided in regards to one another based upon drastic transitions in spiritual belief and practice. To understand and witness the historical transformation of Sikhism throughout its existence, I included a preliminary chapter to decipher the religious traditions of the Bhakti movement, Chishti Sufism, and Sikhism to establish the ritualism and beliefs of the lived tradition, which are the essences of the faiths.

Within my first chapter, I concurred that the origins of Bhakti Hinduism, Chishti Sufism, and Sikhism were intertwined in a sharing of religious practices, beliefs, and texts that stemmed from common understandings of Punjabi ritualistic worship rather than particular religious traditions. The second chapter mapped the rise and decline of the Bhakti and *sant* tradition and Chishti Sufism from 1300 to 1675, which led to a similar aspiring movement against the orthodox ritualism of religious institutions—that of Sikhism under Guru Nanak. I traced the religious policies of the first nine Gurus,

which received minimal impact in terms of distinct Sikh identity. Each Guru developed additions to the faith's beliefs to accommodate the circumstances surrounding the families and immediate followings of the Gurus. The political uncertainties of the Gurus later led to militant policies, which have incorrectly been credited as Sikh identity.

The third chapter of my thesis concluded that the *Khalsa*-driven military stereotype associated with modern Sikh identity was acquired amidst the persecuting policies of Mughal governors and Emperors from 1675 to 1849. Such stereotypes of Sikh identity were often abandoned or misused in connection with such open acts of persecution, leaving the Sikh faith as a whole in shambles with the end of a human Guru lineage as well as exploited Sikh institutions. Through the careful reinterpretation of Punjabi bandit looting, the socio-economic implications of landownership under peasants, and feudal powers that emerged in the 18th century, I have concurred that the Sikh identity of the past has been forged and used for non-religious motives. This was explained more thoroughly during the reign of Ranjit Singh. I have issued my findings of the creation of the Sikh identity with the notion of “others” in the fourth chapter. My timeline included the era of colonial Punjab—1849-1947. The British Raj instituted a census that inconsequently classified Punjabis according to religion, abandoning the pluralistic regional identity that had once been prioritized by Punjabis. In the meantime elitist Sikh committees such as the *Singh Sabha* and *Tat Khalsa* tried to define the Sikh faith for the first time, creating a uniform concept of identity in the process. The politicization of 20th century Punjab led to approved ritualism and codes by the British Raj, their roots tracing to contemporary Sikhism. The communalism that emerged during

this period was further amplified through the partition of Punjab in 1947, which I believe has consequently lead to the rigorous definitions of religious identity and stereotyping due to the trauma of the region.

The origins of religious indifference of Punjab has often been forgotten amidst the haze of modern politics, but the rich history of pluralism remains within the Punjabi traditions itself, which have stood throughout time and trauma. It is my greatest hope for roots of religious identity to be remembered for as they were, not as they have become. For any impartial understanding of such matters, I hope that scholars will place the once unified Punjabi identity before religious boundaries, the religious identities becoming secondary matters to the true history of Punjabi independence and religious coexistence.

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