RELIGION AND MODERNITY IN PUNJAB

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SIKH AND DERA CULTURE

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University

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for the award of the degree of

Master of Philosophy

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled **"RELIGION AND MODERNITY IN PUNJAB: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SIKH AND DERA CULTURE"** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of **Master of Philosophy** has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.
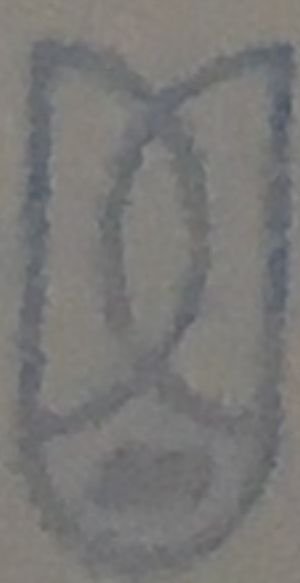
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We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Dedicated to Parents

Na main momin vich maseeta
Na mai vich kufr diyaan reetaan
Na mai paakaan vich paleetaan
Na mai Musa na Firaun
Bulleh ki jana mai kaun

Neither am I a believer in the mosque
Neither am I an infidel
Neither amongst the virtuous nor amongst the sinners
Neither am I Moses nor the Pharaoh
Bulleh, who knows who I am

Bulleh aashiq hoyo rabb da huyi malaamat lakh
Tenu kaafir kaafir aakhde tu aaho aaho akh!

Bulleh you became god's lover and for this were disgraced
They call you, "Infidel, infidel", you reply to them, Yes, Yes!

By Bulleh Shah

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION:

Modernity is a multifaceted phenomenon that means it has many dimensions or aspects; on the one hand it is emblematic of the process of secularization or the triumph of ideals of liberty, equality and on the other hand it forms the undercurrent of the process of homogenization. In this process of homogenization or the drive to homogenize the population, modern state plays a crucial role. In other words it's the modern state and its drive of homogenization and uniformity that constitutes the essential feature of modernity especially in diverse space like India. Modern state as an essential feature of modernity in India has transformed and affected every sphere of life in India, the sphere of religion or spiritual also got completely transformed under the impact of colonial modernity and colonial state.

The logic of modern state has tried constructing a monolithic universal community. In Indian context and in Punjab's context the question of 'what is your religion?' was first asked by the colonial authorities or colonial state. This question might have been a trivial or benign question with clear-cut answer, but if analyzed it represented the insidious process of homogenization of religious beliefs and the concomitant construction of a monolithic universal community. Pre-modern communities were unable to define or conceptualize their beliefs and rites in terms of a monolithic universal religious community[1].

Religious or spiritual imagination in pre-modern times were conceptualized in terms of 'faith' which was inherently plural and accommodative than in terms of 'ideology'[2], religion as faith dominated the cognitive process of the masses and it

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[1] Harjot Oberoi, *The construction of religious boundaries, culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (India: Oxford University Press, 1994), 10.

[2] Ashis, Nandy *"An Anti Secularist Manifesto"* India International Centre Quarterly 22(1). India International Centre: 35-64. http//www. Jstor.org/stable/23003710.

manifested in the form in which group of Mehrat Rajputs and Meos of Rajasthan identified themselves as Mohammedan Hindus and half of the people whom we considers as Sikh now identified themselves as the followers of a Sufi Pir named Sakhi Sarwar in the first census that happened in 1881 in Punjab and followed a syncretic culture where identities did not correspond with state given categories[3]. Religion as 'ideology' got manifested in Punjab, when during the first census after independence some Punjabi Hindus guided by the communal ideology of Arya Samaj and Sangh Parivar declared 'Hindi' as their mother tongue instead of Punjabi to subvert the demands of Punjabi Suba[4].

The process of enumeration brought in by colonial modernity and colonial state has transformed the cognitive process of people regarding religious imagination and the corresponding idea of 'self' and the construct of the 'other'. Despite efforts by the Modern state whether in colonial form or post colonial form, many people and many spiritual traditions remained unresponsive to the insidious change brought in by modernity and modern state. These traditions remained syncretic or plural and those people who followed such syncretic tradition remained under the religious or spiritual imagination in which the enchanted universe of spirituality or 'faith' dominated the cognitive process, not the ideological or modern aspect of religion to use the words of Ashis Nandy. The case of Punjab could be used to do a comparative study of these two traditions and the cognitive process that governed these traditions. The two traditions that I am trying to explore in this work are the fuzzy and syncretic Dera tradition and the organized or institutionalized Khalsa Sikh tradition.

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[3] Harjot Oberoi, *The construction of religious boundaries, culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (India: Oxford University Press, 1994), 11.

[4] Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*(London: iUniverse, 1974), 293-294.

Modernity and Spiritual Traditions of Punjab

The advent of Modernity in Punjab like other parts of India has affected each and every sphere of life in Punjab. The domain or sphere of spiritual has also not remained isolated from the condition of modernity. The modern state which forms the crucial element of modernity, has transformed the domain of spiritual in Punjab. Many spiritual traditions of Punjab didn't remain the same and got completely transformed with the unfolding of modernity and the insidious change that the modern state has brought in the domain of spiritual in Punjab. Punjabi spiritual tradition can be broadly divided into two major types, one is the informal domain of spirituality also known as the domain of popular religiosity, and the other one is the domain of formal spirituality which is the domain of organized and institutionalized religion.

Modernity in Punjab has strengthened the domain of institutionalized religion or in other words it can be said that modernity has facilitated the process of institutionalization of spirituality. Sikhism which is one of the main religious traditions of Punjab has also been shaped by modernity; in this process of getting shaped or transformed by modernity, Sikhism in a way imbibed the logic of modernity and the modern state. The main endeavor of my research is to fathom and elucidate the impact of modernity on spiritual traditions of Punjab and also simultaneously to compare the modern statist spiritual tradition with the tradition that remained aloof from the logic of modernity and modern state. The two traditions that I am trying to Juxtapose are the Dera tradition, which can be called as the informal or non- institutionalized spiritual tradition and the Sikh tradition which is the tradition of institutionalized and organized religion.

To explain the tradition of Dera we need to first go into the definition of Dera. In Punjab the abode of any prominent spiritual figure is called as Dera. It has its origin in the medieval era. In the medieval times Deras were mainly a place where a prominent Sufi or Jogi used to reside. Conceptually Dera is inextricably linked with the tradition of

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Nath jogis and Sufis of Punjab. The sort of informal spirituality that Nath Jogis and certain sects of Sufis like Chisti and Qadri silsilas used to promote which was a domain of informal relation between the disciple and the master is quite visible in the deras of Punjab even today.

Deras of Punjab in my view is part of the collective consciousness of society in Punjab. The main idea that is integral to the deras of Punjab that makes it ubiquitous is Guru- Bhakti, which makes deras extremely popular and also the main or integral part of popular religiosity. Sikh tradition in a way also got started as the same informal and non-institutionalized tradition much similar to the dera, in fact it can be argued that Sikh tradition started as a dera tradition and in initial phase it was also known as Nanak Panth. Later with the advent of colonial modernity and under the impact of colonial and modern state it got completely transformed into a proper organized religion.

The difference between the two tradition are sometimes difficult to discern because despite Sikhism's development as an organized and institutionalized religion in 19th century, the diversity, plurality and openness which is the hallmark of informal spirituality remained integral in the life of the common Sikhs . The lived religion has always remained different from the textual and organized form. This is this reason why sharp categories of religion in Punjab are difficult to sustain and any attempt on the part of state to categorize Punjabi religious traditions into sharp and mutually exclusive religious boundaries has failed.

Modernity though has changed Sikhism and other spiritual and religious traditions of Punjab up to a large extent, but the space and domain for informal spirituality has remained extremely fertile. This is because the informal domain of spirituality which was promoted by Jogis, Bhakts and many Sufis constitute the collective consciousness of Punjab and Punjabi society. This is why dismantling that space has always remained difficult. Despite all efforts by the state to streamline religious beliefs of the common masses by constructing artificial boundaries between religious traditions or by inventing a certain sort of religious tradition which is inimical to diversity or plurality and

syncretism, the common Punjabis have always stood for their syncretic and composite tradition and precisely this constitutes one of the main reason for the ubiquity of tradition like deras.

Now I am going to explain the difference between the worldview emanating from the statist tradition and the fluid lived spiritual tradition of common masses by giving a personal anecdote. I came to meet a person from Lahore Pakistan studying in South Asian University Delhi, his name was Nouman within a short span of time we became good friends. The bond that we shared could be attributed to the common language Punjabi which is the mother tongue of both. The cultural similarities were also quite visible in our friendship, because my family also migrated from West Punjab due to that I had personal interest in Pakistan and wanted to meet and be a friend with someone from Pakistan. Interestingly Nouman who was a Christian from Lahore had some relatives living in Amritsar in Indian Punjab. Nouman's family converted to Christianity from Hinduism in 1980s during the time of General Zia ul-Haq infamous for his intolerant version of Islam and dictatorship. It was during Zia's era that Pakistani society got radicalized. And in the same period Nouman's family changed their religion from Hinduism to Christianity. Nouman's uncle who was a Hindu from Valmiki caste used to stay in Amristar in Indian Punjab just 40 kms from Lahore.

Because of the difficult visa regime between India and Pakistan Nouman's family couldn't meet his uncle's family for around twenty years. When Nouman got the chance to study in India he was quite interested in meeting his uncle living in Amritsar. I decided that I would join Nouman to Amritsar and will facilitate the meeting with his uncle whom he was meeting after twenty years. We decided to go to Amritsar and planned to stay in his uncle's home.

His uncle's family though they were Hindu from Valmiki caste followed a quite syncretic culture and the small temple in their home had photos of Jesus Christ , Lord shiva, some photos of local Pirs and Sufis and a small photo of Mecca sharif. Nouman and I had different reactions to that syncrteic culture that we saw in his uncle's house, I

was quite pleased by that culture because I knew that this was very common in Punjab and such sort of syncretism is quite endemic to that region and that also promoted communal harmony. Nouman on the other hand was quite baffled and also got angry by seeing the photo of Jesus Christ with Hindu gods and Muslim Sufi Pirs. He told his aunty with an assertive tone and in a condescending manner that if you believe in Jesus Christ then only believes in him and it is blasphemous on your part to include local Sufi pirs and Hindu gods while worshipping Christ. His aunt who was speaking from the perspective of a common Punjabi replied that we believe and respect all gods and holy man and we are following Christ and Church for some years but we can't leave our local Sufi Pirs because that is our culture.

In that particular moment I Intervened and tried explaining Nouman about the syncretic and composite culture of Punjab and how Lahore also used to be same sort of place some years back. But Nouman was quite adamant is his approach and was not ready to change his worldview which was shaped by a tradition that was following the logic of modern state; in which any sort of deliberation and interaction between spiritual traditions is seen with contempt. The puritanical attitude of Nouman was symbolic of the society he was living in and grown up. West Punjabi or Pakistani Society got highly radicalized after partition and any trace of composite culture that remained got destroyed during the Islamization process promoting Wahhabi version of Islam under the regime of General Zia-ul Haq.

The conversation between Nouman and his aunt was a perfect manifestation or symbolic of the two Punjab's and their dominant spiritual culture. West Punjab which had major Sufi shrines and which was quite composite and plural some decades ago got radically transformed under different modern statist regimes, on the other hand East Punjab or the Indian Side of Punjab remained that eclectic, plural and syncretic space though facing the constant threat from the Statist Sikh tradition which is the mirror image of Pakistani Islamic modernist statist tradition. But somehow East Punjab has not completely lost that plural and composite culture and that got manifested in the

worldview and lifestyle of the family that we visited in Amritsar. This personal anecdote was given to differentiate two spiritual traditions of Punjab, one is the statist tradition that is dominant in West Punjab or Pakistan and other is plural, syncretic and fuzzy tradition that got manifested in the composite culture followed by the family in Amritsar.

Spiritual Traditions, Collective Consciousness and Quantum Mind

Apart from defining and juxtaposing two worlviews emanating from two different spiritual traditions i.e. the monolithic institutionalized Khalsa Sikh tradition and the fuzzy, open and syncretic Dera tradition , the unique intervention that I am trying to make at an epistemological level in this work is related to a larger debate in social science or human sciences regarding the discipline's relation with the physical reality or how the physical reality or it is better to use to use physical ontology is related to social ontology. This intervention at an epistemological level and to incorporate it in this work on religion and modernity is a risky task and is not without the risk of complete repudiation, but simulatenously it opens new avenues to study unique and enigmatic religious phenomenon like the deras by going beyong the frontiers of disciplinary boundaries.

This new approach or framework also transcends the old approach of political economy and sociology of religion in studying phenomenon of religious and spiritual nature, by focusing more on the aspect of consciousness of a region than on the question of materiality. By comparing the pheneomeon of Dera and modernist Sikh culture, I am trying to argue that certain spiritual tradition are endemic to a particular region and therefore are organic in nature i.e. those spiritual traditions are part of the collective consciousness of that region. This conjecture that I am formulating in this work is based or premised on a fundamental debate initiated by Alexander Wendt in his book 'Quantum Mind and Social Science Unifying Physical and Social Ontology'.

In this work Wendt is trying to bridge the gap that exist between social and the physical reality or ontology and coming up with a proposition that humans in a society are not atomized beings separated from each other, but in fact we are like walking wave functions which means we are entangled at the very basic or quantum level and the decoherence or demarcation that is usually accepted by physicists by making a division between quantum (the world of subatomic particles) and social (the world of macro human subjects),that strict division doesn't get sustained according to Wendt.[5] In fact humans according to Wendt are also like wave functions and all the Quantum Weirdness should applied to humans as well and to the larger society that is made up of humans. So, the entanglement that a quantum particle shares with the other particle is also being shared by humans i.e. humans are entangled with each other and societal functioning is contingent on that entanglement.

Wendt's proposition also repudiates Philosophical materialism (Causal closure of Physics) which is accepted by more or less by all social scientist wittingly or unwittingly. Wendt argues that many natural scientists are now rejecting this materialist supposition and social scientist should also reject materialist causal closure of physics (in which humans are treated as atomized or individualized beings and consciousness is seen as epiphenomenal and contingent on material reality)[6]. If we accept this premise of Wendt which is panpsychist in nature and that means consciousness is a fundamental aspect of the world much similar to space and time and is not secondary to material reality. With this proposition our social understanding or understanding of social or religious phenomenon would be different and if apply this proposition propounded by Wendt to our work on Deras and Sikh Culture in Punjab then we can sustain our proposition regarding spiritual tradition of Deras of Punjab in which (Guru- Bhakti or Piri–Mureedi) is fundamental aspect as part of the collective psyche or consciousness of Punjabis irrespective of the religious consideration or material reality.

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5 Alexander Wendt, *Quantum Mind and Social Science: Unifying Physical and Social Ontology, (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

6 Ibid.

This application of quantum physics to social world by Alexander Wendt has striking resemblance with the ideas of great Swiss psychologist Carl Jung. Jung proposed a psychology which is non material but still real in which archetypes and notion of collective unconscious determines our thoughts and beliefs. Jung collaboration with the famous physicist Wolfgang Pauli, one of the pioneers of Quantum Mechanics exemplifies a bold attempt of collaborating quantum physics with psychology, though they didn't go as far as applying their ideas to social world, but Wendt in my view has done that job.[7]

This intervention of using idiosyncratic ideas from the domain of physics and psychology might seems to be of no use to many, but I feel this should be seen as a bold attempt to move beyond the casual explanation of religious or spiritual phenomenon either from the perspective of political economy or from the perspective of positivist sociology, which though explains a lot of stuff or phenomena of social and political nature ,but still remains unsuccessful in explaining some of the inexplicable phenomenon especially the phenomenon of religious nature.The central problem that usually comes in explaining the phenomenon of deras and other spiritual traditions of Punjab is associated with it ubiquity, to unravel such enigma one has to look beyond the familiar stuff of political economy and sociology of religion. To explore and extrapolate ideas from unfamiliar domain can be seen as key to understand the ubiquity of such traditions.

Modernity, State and Religious Boundaries in Punjab

After exploring the interplay between Modernity and Spiritual traditions in Punjab and by incorporating uinique ideas from the field of Qunatum Physics and Philosphy of Mind to study phenomenon like the deras and Khalsa Sikh spiritual tradition, it becomes

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[7] Diogo Valadas Ponte and Lothar Schafer, "Carl Gustav Jung, Quantum Physics and the Spiritual Mind: A Mystical Vision of the Twenty-First Century," *Behavioral Sciences*, 3(4), 601-618. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4217602/

vital to look into the debate of boundaries and categories of religion in Punjab therefore this theme is thoroughly explored in this work. The issue of the use and relevance of the very category of 'religion' has been explored in this work on religion and modernity in Punjab. Looking closely on the work done on religion in Punjab one can easily get an impression that most scholars tend to use the category of religion unequivocally, without questioning its limitation to explain the complexity of religious phenomenon in Punjab, they tend to speak and write about Sikhism, Hinduism and Islam without considering and contemplating on the question and issue of clear-cut categories.

To put it differently they hardly contemplate whether such categories of Sikhism, Hinduism and Islam actually found any expression in the consciousness, actions and cultural performance of the people on whom they ascribe those clear-cut categories.[8] And whether even the category of 'religion' itself found any suitable expression in the collective consciousness of the region and the masses of that region? The Social Anthropologist Harjot Oberoi asks this aforementioned question in his work 'Construction of Religious Boundaries, Culture, Identity and Diversity within Sikh Tradition'. The question asked by Oberoi is in the context of the nineteenth century Punjab and the amorphous identity and consciousness of Punjabis at that time. Oberoi, on the very introduction of his work, frames this question of how religion and especially Punjabi religion should be conceptualized and what does it mean to be a Sikh or a Hindu in the nineteenth century? Oberoi has used a memoir of Ruchi Ram Sahni in the introdcution of his work only, Sahni was a widely respected professor of chemistry at Government College, Lahore and the memoir provides the description of his father's religious rituals:

> He had his daily routine of idol worship with all the warmth of a sincere
> believer, so much so that when he was ill, he would ask me to go through
> the forms and formalities of washing the idols in the morning, properly

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[8] Harjot Oberoi, *The construction of religious boundaries, culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (India: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1.

dressing them, and making them the usual offerings of flowers, sweets and scents. On such occasions, my father's cot was carried to where the idols were, and he would himself sing the hymns at the appropriate places. I never questioned myself whether it was right or wrong to do what I was bidden by father to do. It was enough for me that I was carrying out my father's wishes. To judge from the warmth of feeling and the regularity with which the worship was conducted, I have every reason to conclude that my father was a sincere idol worshipper. The only thing that now raises doubts in my mind is the fact that both in the morning and at night he recited, with equal warmth and regularity, the Sikh scriptures Rehres and Sukhmani Sahib[9].

Having noted his father's routine, Sahni goes on to speculate on why his father combined the worship of idols with Sikh sacred writings:

How he could reconcile these recitations with idol worship I do not know. Probably, like millions of other people, he had never troubled himself with such questions. It was enough for him that he was enchanted by the puja as much as by the recitation of purely theistic writing of one god without form, unborn, unbreakable, eternal, omnipresent and omnipotent i.e. the god in Sikh Scriptures.[10]

This personal account of Sahni's father is quintessential of the fluid religious identities and heterogeneity of Pre- modern Punjab. And it is not something unique in fact it was a common cultural practice of nineteenth century Punjab that according to Harjot Oberoi got obliterated with colonial modernity and modern reformist movement like Singh Sabha and Arya Samaj that were working in collusion with the modern state and its

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9 Ruchi Ram Sahni, 'Self -Revelations of an octogenarian', MS,p.127 quoted in Harjot Oberoi, *Construction of Religious Boundaries, Culture , Identity and diversity in the Sikh Tradition,* (Delhi: Oxford University press, 1994),.2.

10 Ibid.

anti-syncretic and homogenizing logic. This proposition of Oberoi albeit plausible, but presumes that heterogeneity and fluidity of pre- modern Punjab got completely obliterated with the aforementioned movements and with modernity and colonial state. This in my view is not the complete story and the fact is that heterogeneity, syncretism and fluidity which were the main characteristic of pre-modern Sanantan Sikh tradition remained though became less overt.and apparent. The culture of Non Sikh Deras in Punjab remained in my view the bastion of loosely syncretic values and with this Dera tradition/culture the heterogeneity and fluidity of religious identity that is represented in the account presented above remained alive in the form of popular religiosity though became dormant with the hegemonic nationalist khalsa religious tradition.

The Spiritual traditions of Punjab cannot be neatly categorized into the hegemonic 'Hindu', 'Sikh' and 'Muslim' traditions and the very binary of Hindu –Sikh that is constructed by the Modern state and its logic of enumeration is difficult to sustain even in the present time and the space of religious belief represented by the likes of Sahni's father is not anachronistic. The attempts have been made by nationalist and communal discourses to jettison those space by creating or constructing sharp religious boundaries in Punjab, but in my view that discourse didn't gain much success and the prime reason for that is the idiosyncratic nature of Punjabi spiritual traditions, which cannot be termed or categorized as religion in the classical definition of the term.

The space of these sort of beliefs in which identity construction in terms of religion are not given importance and an informal domain of spirituality predominates one's life can be represented by the category of Panthic religion .Roger Ballard has formulated four dimension of Punjabi religion and these are Panthic, Kismetic, Dharmic and Quamic . These four dimensions of religion are peculiar to Punjab and Punjabi religion. Panthic dimension of religion signifies an informal sort of spiritual relation between the Master and the disciple. The term panth is of course a familiar term in vernacular Punjabi, where it is used to identify those who follow a particular spiritual teacher, as in the case of Nanak-panthi, Kabir-panthi and so forth. The panthic dimension

of religion in Punjab does not constitute a separate religion in fact this dimension of religion was not interested in creating/constructing new religious dogmas, but was only primarily concerned with gaining Gnostic or Mystical experience and that made the panthic dimension the most active feature of popular Punjabi religion.[11]

Although scholars on Punjab and Sikhism like Arvind Pal Mandair following the likes of Richard king and Talal Asad has questioned the very category of 'religion' to describe Punjab's spiritual tradition and especially 'Sikhi' which he distinguishes from 'Sikhism'. Mandair believes that the category of religion in Punjab's context is a construct which entraps the follower of the spiritual practice into the binary of religious-secular and because secular is the domain of modern state and hence the logical corollary to that proposition is 'religious' is the domain of the private[12]. religious-secular binary in other words is premised on public –private binary and subsequently relegates the 'religious' to the private sphere and with this scuttles or prevent political subjectivity of that particular community. Mandair's proposition albeit sounds plausible but ignores the salience of the category of 'religion' in Punjab's context and the lived experience of ordinary Punjabi. Mandair in his work proposes post theistic Sikh Ontology which is not comprehensible to ordinary religious Punjabi, even in their fight with the mighty state. I personally subscribes to the notion of immanent critique in this work by using the category of religion and not by negating it completely but by critically engaging with it while following and accepting the premise and by identifying the contradictions within the critique.

I concur with the critics that the concept and notion of 'religion' is not free of politics and has been used to entrap the political subjectivity. The concept of religion has been used by the West to judge other cultures as inferior to them and to privatize their

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[11] Roger Ballard, *"Panth, kismet, Dharm te Quam , Continuity and Change in the four dimension of Punjabi Religion*, In Pritam Singh and Shinder S Thandi , eds *Punjabi identiy in Global Context*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).

[12] Arvind –Pal S.Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West, Sikhism, India, Post coloniality and the Politics of Translation (*New York: Columbia University press, 2009).

traditions to impose the hegemony of modern state. But simultaneously we also need to take cognizance of the fact that there exists no term /idea whose history and implications is without politics or free of politics, none of our thinking is without ideological baggage and the ideas postulated by scholars like Nicholas Dirks and Richard king are used by certain conservative forces to justify irrational tradition. Arvind Manadir's work can also be appropriated and used to justify the same nationalist Sikh traditions that he criticized in his work.

I would only argue that the ingenuous realism about the religion is indefensible, but we can sort of create or construct a critical realist view in which one takes into cognizance the history of the semantics of the concept/ idea but without thoroughly repudiating the concept whole together. In fact I believe that the concept of religion and secular needs to be further looked at especially for the Indian context and their definition should be stretched to incorporate the various other Indic phenomena that are left out from the western hegemonic category of religion and modernity. The liberatory potential of the category of religion to counter global capitalism and its cultural offshoots should be considered especially by those on the left of the political spectrum. Therefore in this work I would not support a thorough rejection of the category of religion to study Punjabi spiritual traditions, but would only critically embrace it to counter the hegemonic prevalent understanding of the category of religion in the academia.

Outlining the chapters

The **First chapter** is an attempt to look for a conceptual framework for the study of Religion and Modernity in Punjab. It analyses different spiritual traditions of Punjab using the theoretical approach that transcends the formal notions of the discipline of social science. It incorporates new ideas from diverse fields like Quantum Physics and Philosophy of Mind and applies them to the study of religion or spiritual traditions in Punjab. The chapter tries to look for Non-dual and Non-modern spiritual traditions that are not guided by the logic of modern state and modern Newtonian science or worldview and asserts that the informal spirituality that manifests in the forms of diverse deras in

Punjab reflects or symbolizes the same sort of spiritual traditions. It also analyses the debate on the very category of 'religion' and its relevance for the study of Indic or Punjabi spiritual traditions.

The work does not categorically reject the idea of 'religion' for the study of Punjabi spiritual traditions, but critically engages with the idea of religion and hence does not shun the use of the category of 'religion' for studying Punjabi spiritual traditions. The chapter attempts to look into the contradiction within the modern framework for the study of religion and tries to develop a new framework that transcends modern Newtonian framework and its duality by acknowledging the importance of consciousness in the study of social and religious phenomenon by not reducing the popularity and ubiquity of spiritual traditions to mere economic causes. The work also tries to assert that Punjabi spiritual traditions like Dera culture is unique because it transcends the logic of binary that emanates from modern science and state.

The **Second chapter** is an attempt to explore Sikh and Dera tradition thoroughly in the light of modern governmentality and syncretism. The chapter focuses on the comparative study of two main categories of Punjabi spiritual traditions. It analyses the mainstream argument and belief that views Sikh and Dera tradition or culture as monolithic and homogenous the work also explores the aspect of diversity within the Sikh tradition and also the diversity within Deras. Most of the work on Sikh and Deras treat them as monolithic and homogenous traditions and ignores the enormous diversity within these traditions. The other thing that is explored in Second chapter revolves around the question of State and governmentality and how these two constructs and governs certain spiritual traditions or to put it in other words, how and why some spiritual traditions becomes govermentalized traditions and becomes anti –syncretic or anti-plural or homogenous while others remains syncretic, plural and accommodative because of their non-governmentalized disposition.

The question of Dera Tradition or culture in Punjab is framed by using the analogy of 'political society'; in other word the Deras of Punjab constitutes or inherits the

characteristics of political society, like political society the deras are also outside the domain of legality i.e. the followers of dera does not subscribe to any of the religious identity conferred by the state .The informal and the non governmentalized spiritual space that Dera is makes it the 'political society' of spiritual domain and the Sikh tradition the civil society or the legal spiritual domain. By using the analogy of political society for Dera the intent is to frame the subaltern spiritual question in a more popular and tangible category. Partha chatterjee creates a binary of political /civil society, in which the domain of political society is often marked by the stamp of illegality; nonethelsss contributes to the vast democratic churning that characterizes much of the third world.[13]

The reason why I am using a designation or term Political society to explain such phenomenon is because as political society is domain of informal negotiation between the state and the masses or population and is also outside the purview of elite citizens or civil society, in the same manner deras are also a space of negotiation and deliberation between the master and the disciple and predominately caters to the need of common masses.

The question of social structure or the issue of caste assertion and its link with dera culture of Punjab has been explored. The chapter in a way questions the dominant mainstream belief in academia that deras are the bastion of Dalit assertion or Caste assertion though acknowledges the diversity of deras and the existence of many specific caste based deras like Dera Sachkhand Ballan or Ravidasi Deras but it views those example of specific caste based dera as half- picture and not the full reality when it comes to the study of Dera phenomenon. It does this by presenting the case study of some very popular deras where caste and any sort of religious identity gets dissolves and it is not the discourse of identity but the notion of Guru- Bhakti or Piri- Mureedi (which constitutes

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[13] Nissim Mannathukkaren, 'The poverty of political society: Partha chaterjee and people's plan campaign in kerala, India,' *Thirld World Quarterly* 31, no.2:17.

the collective consciousness of Punjabi religiosity or spirituality) and Saint Veneration that dominates and forms the main narrative in those deras.

Finally, the **third chapter** is an attempt to revisit the debates of Communalism in Punjab. The idea that is conveyed in the chapter is that the prominent debate on communalism in Punjab has completely ignored the aspect of shared and plural traditions in Punjab that emanates from shrine and dera culture of Punjab. The major debate on communalism in Punjab has approached the issue of communal either from the perspective of Political economy or from the Cultural logic and interpretation. Both the perspective due to their modernist lens has not bothered to look into those spaces where religious identities of Hindu and Sikh gets dissolves and what remains is mere spirituality or deep veneration. Both the major perspective have used 'Hindu' and 'Sikh' as mutually exclusive and sharp categories without looking into the aspect of lived religion of common Punjabis and How it is different and not contingent on state driven category of 'Hindu' and 'Sikh' in Punjab.

In this way both the perspectives have fallen into the trap of modern state that constructs and sustains the 'Hindu' and 'Sikh' category in Punjab. This statist Hindu-Sikh binary and its manifestation in Punjab have been questioned in the third chapter of the thesis and effort has been done to explore the question of 'why communalism has failed in Punjab'. By looking for organic spiritual spaces which keeps communal consciousness ate bay. The issue of Sikh Nationalism and its relation with communalism and communal consciousness also been explored in the third chapter. The question of Sikh Nationalism has been conceptualized in manner that transcends the shadow of territoriality and that does not entail the construction of an 'inimical' other.

Methodology

The research methodology of the work is based upon the qualitative approach.The theoretical aspect of the work will be examined and analyzed, based upon the exisiting literature and historical religious documents and interviews as primary source. The

process of qualitative research will be based on narrative and phenomenological approach to comprehend the lived experience and lived reality of people and region of Punjab. The use of various anecdotes personal as well as those gathered from field work constitutes the main part of research in terms of methodology. Different concepts and categories prominent in social and physical sciences will be analyzed and debated to construct a new framework to study religion. Extensive observation of religious phenomenon will be based on observing the culture not through participation, but through observation at a distance.

Chapter one

Religion and Modernity in Punjab: A Conceptual Framework

Introduction:

There are various theoretical and conceptual frameworks that are used to study religion and modernity in India generally and Punjab specifically. The framework that I am trying to develop for the study of Religion and Modernity in Punjab is inextricably linked with new debates in philosophy of science and philosophy of mind. My proposition deals with the missing aspect of consciousness in debates on religion and modernity and analyses the dominance of Newtonian classical mechanics which entails principles of separability, locality, regularity and determinism and which is rooted or forms the undercurrent for the discipline of social science. The contention that I am trying to make here in this chapter challenges the various frameworks that are used for the study of religion and modernity in Punjab.

In this chapter, I am trying to argue that the debates surrounding religion and modernity in social science is rooted in a certain understanding of religion and science which is Newtonian in its disposition. By the term Newtonian I mean the binary perception of the world. The binary of the modern Newtonian science creates false dichotomy between different spiritual traditions and constructs sharply differentiated categories of religion. Mutual exclusion and antagonism between spiritual traditions are inherent in the logic of these sharply differentiated categories. This Modern binary gets manifested in the debates regarding religion in Punjab. The fuzziness of spirituality in Punjab gets obliterated with this modern binary and a believer is compelled to choose between certain given categories constructed by Modern state. The debate surrounding Religion, Modernity and Secular in Indian and Punjab's context is also afflicted by the same ailment emanating from the same Modern Newtonian worldview.

Firstly, the larger debate on religion and modernity has been explored by framing it in the light of Alexander Wendt's work on Quantum Mind and Social science Unifying Physical and Social Ontology. The attempt to unify physical and social ontology by Wendt has been explored and its implication for the debate on religion has been looked at. What follows is the critical survey of literature indicating towards the gap in the available framework of understanding religion and modernity in the specific context of Punjab. I have also attempted to develop a new framework which I think takes cognizance of these gaps. I must make it clear that by no means I would like to reject the category of religion entirely, however, I would like argue that a reconceptualization of religion and modernity in the context of Punjab needs to done and this what I have tried in my work.

Two Figures, Two Traditions: Juxtaposing Two Worldviews

To substantiate my aforementioned proposition regarding the fuzziness of religion in Punjab and the logic of binary emanating from modern Newtonian science and Modern state, I would present two examples or interviews of two prominent figures from Punjab. First example is that of Gurdas Maan, the famous Punjabi folk singer known for his pluralism, who should also be seen as an epitome of Punjabiyat.[14] Gurdas Maan was born in a Sikh family of the Malwa region of Punjab and from his early days he started singing kalams(poetry) of Sufis of Punjab along with songs and composition of Sikh Gurus and Goddess Durga. This genre of singing reflecting the plural and syncretic character of Punjab and Punjabi folk was nothing new, but, Gurdas Maan took it to a new height of popularity. He became the disciple (Mureed) of a Sufi Pir named Laadi Shah of Dera Baba Murad shah of Nakodar (Jalandhar). In an interview given to a web channel Lallantop regarding his belief in a Sufi Pir, Maan mentions an anecdote that will signify

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[14] The term Punjabiyat can be defined as shared or composite culture of Punjab, in which there is no space for exclusive religious boundaries and mutual respect of each other's belief dominates the worldview of masses. Famous Sufi Singer and Professor Madan Gopal Singh has defined or explained the idea of Punjabiyat through a phrase that Punjabiyat is not about tolerance because to be tolerant towards others and their belief is an act of conscious condescension. On the other hand Punjabiyat is a way of life in which a 'part of you lives in me and a part of me lives in you', i.e. we are entangled and hence there is no exclusive religious and other identities or worldviews.

the fuzziness of religious categories in Punjab or the idiosyncrasy that works in Punjabi spirituality.

The story that Mann mentions in the interview is about a Nihang Sikh (The warrior class of Sikhs seen as pure Khalsa), who came to the dera of Baba Murad Shah; As it generally happens people present at the dera were taking the blessings of Baba/ Pir Laddi Shah. Nihangs who are seen as Pure Sikhs or the epitome of Khalsa and are not supposed to bow down to any living Guru or Pir, because it goes against the Sikh Rehat Maryada (Sikh Code of Conduct). Following the tradition the Nihang firstly was quite hesitant in paying reverence to the Pir. Maan narrated further that understanding this tradition Laddi Shah himself stopped the Nihang Sikh for paying obeisance and said, 'You should not bow in front of me, because you represent the army of Akal (the immortal god) and also represent the kesari flag (Sikh flag) and in fact we pay our obeisance to that flag, therefore, you should not engage in this act of bowing to a Faqir'.

However, this moved the Nihang and breaking the tradition he paid his obeisance and respect to the Faqir.[15] Here I would like to suggest that this anecdote might not be of any value to many people, but for me this story or incident reflects the true character of Punjabi religion and Punjabi collective consciousness. This story symbolizes the plural and syncretic disposition of Punjabi spirituality, which is not afflicted by the modern logic of exclusivist faith and religiosity, where even a Nihang Sikh, who going by the textual logic of his religion should not go to such deras/shrines, not only goes to such places but also accept these Faqirs or Saint as gurus and pays obeisance. This anecdote symbolizes the dominance of fluid spiritual tradition and fuzzy collective consciousness over modern textual, ossified religiosity.

The second example or figure signifies the modernist exclusivist logic of constructing binary opposites in religious context which is antithetical to the figure of Nihang Sikh presented in the anecdote of Gurdas Maan. Figure of Sikh extremist Jarnail

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[15] Varun Sharma, The Lallantop, "Gurdas Maan ka Interview Part 2 ". *YouTube video*, 20:33 Aug, 13 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJzPI3RycEA.

Singh Bhindranwale is symbolic of that modernist binary logic. One should not have any hesitation in accepting his vehement opposition to the heterodox sect like Nirankaris and Radha Swamis is the manifestation of the fundamentalist and exclusivist logic that also imbricates with the logic of the modern state. It has been well theorized that modern state has an overriding tendency to homogenize and categorize its population by creating strict boundaries between religions, which is in tune with the Newtonian classical mechanics mentioned previously where separability, and strict compartmentalization of entity is the norm. Similarly, Jarrnail Singh Bhindrawala as an extremist figure was against the heterogeneity and fluidity within religious tradition and therefore due to the same reasons he opposed the heterodox sects of Nirankaris. He talked of his mission in the following way, "My Mission is to administer Amrit and preach Gurbani and to apprise people that a Hindu should be a firm Hindu, a Muslim should be a firm Muslim and a Sikh should be a firm Sikh."[16] In this way he opposed any sort of intermingling of religious tradition and termed it as corruption or distortion.

In my view these two examples of Nihang Singh and Bhindrawala represents two worldviews. One represents a Non-Modernist and Non-Newtonian worldview quintessential of Punjabi collective consciousness and Punjabi spirituality; the other represents the worldview of modernist Newtonian understanding in terms of religion, spirituality and compartmentalization of religious/spiritual boundaries which is corresponds with the logic of modernity, modern Newtonian science and modern state.

Quantum Physics, Non-Duality and Spiritual traditions

As mentioned earlier, I am trying to make an intervention at an epistemological level, which is related to a larger debate in social science or human sciences regarding the discipline's relation with the physical reality. In other word the relation between physical ontology and social ontology. The aim of this intervention is to create a space for inter-subjectivity at an epistemological level. In this work on religion and modernity in Punjab,

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[16] Jarnail Singh Bhindrawnale, Interview dated February 22, 1984 quoted from Harjinder Singh Reflection on 1984 (2014: 44) for *Struggle justice, speeches and conversation of jarnail singh Bhindranwale*, Ohio.

I am trying to look at the phenomenon of Deras and modernist Sikh culture and trying to argue that certain spiritual traditions are endemic to a particular region and therefore, are organic in nature. Those spiritual traditions are part of the collective consciousness of that region. By counterposing the Dera and Sikh culture, the two prominent religious forms in Punjab, I intend to demonstrate that the creation of rigid religious boundaries is definitely artificial and antithetical to what religion stands for. I would like to argue with the help of Wendt's intervention in the philosophy of social science that creation of such rigid boundary is one of the consequences of the dominance of modernity, which is in turn guided by positivist epistemology.

In his work 'Quantum Mind and Social Science Unifying Physical and Social Ontology', Alexander Wendt is trying to bridge the gap that exist between social and the physical reality or ontology. Most importantly he has come up with a proposition that humans in a society are not atomized beings separated from each other, but in fact we are like walking wave functions, which means, we are entangled at the very basic or quantum level and the decoherence or demarcation that is usually accepted by physicists by making a division between Quantum (the world of subatomic particles) and social (the world of macro human subjects), that strict division doesn't get sustained according to Wendt.[17]

Once we accept that human beings are like the wave functions then we should have no problem in agreeing with Wendt that all the Quantum Weirdness should applicable to humans as well their collectives including the larger society. So, he extends that argument to suggest that the entanglement that a quantum particle shares with the other particles is also being shared by humans i.e. human beings are entangled with each other and societal functioning is contingent on that entanglement.

Alexander Wendt begins with an argument that the mind –body problem, which is mostly ignored in the discipline of social science, is fundamental to the foundational core

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[17] Alexander Wendt, *Quantum Mind and Social Science: Unifying Physical and Social Ontology, (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

of social theory. He further argues that the future trajectory and relevance of social science or social theory lies in the inference of the aforementioned debate of mind-body. Wendt initiates the discussion by framing a question, that what if 'we are walking wave functions'. And by this he means that individuals are not just macroscopic agents determined or governed by abstract structures, but they are quantum mechanical wave functions which are non-deterministic in nature and therefore we need to conceptualize them beyond the mechanistic paradigm of classical physics.

Alexander Wendt acknowledges that his work is a metaphysical conjecture but argues that the dominant viewpoint in the philosophy of mind, neuroscience and Newtonian physics which is nothing but materialism that entails separbility, locality, regularity and determinism is also metaphysical in nature. Materialism, he argues, has failed in solving the major anomalies of mind –body problem and also the anomaly of wrong predictions of classic decision theory, game theory or rational choice in the prediction of human behavior. Wendt then goes on arguing that the quantum revolution in physics started in 1930s and recent research in the neuroscience has given us a tool to understand not just human mind and its potential but also has helped us in developing theories like quantum decision theory , quantum probability theory etc based on the principles of quantum mechanics. These theories have worked accurately in predicting the human behavior where as the classical theory has almost failed. The lack of interest in the social science circles in taking cognizance of these theories reflects their rigidity and obsession with the theories that are modeled on fundamentals of classical physics.

Wendt further asserts that social scientist are constrained by the causal closure of physics which means that they all agree that social phenomenon are bounded by or constrainted by the fundamental laws of physics. Consequently, anything or any phenomenon that violates the laws of physics like reincarnation etc must not be true and is therefore not worthy of social science investigation. Wendt believes that there are two major groups of social scientists: Positivist and the other is interpretivist. The positivist group wants to develop social science on the model of physics by developing some sort

of social physics and it willingly agrees to and accepts the causal closure of physics. But, according to Wendt it is surprising to find even the interpretivist group and post modernists who are generally against naturalism and are skeptical on building social science imitating the model of natural science, tacitly accepts the causal closure of physics and Materialism.[18] This causal closure of physics that both the groups agree to whether explicitly or tacitly is the Causal Closure of Physics of the classical physics. What Wendt goes on developing in his book is a new Causal Closure of Physics which is based not on the model of classical physics but the quantum one.

By extending this idea developed by Wendt in his work Quantum mind and Social Science on the debate between religion and modernity in Punjab and the conceptual framework for the study of religion and modernity in Punjab. I would like to argue that there could be some implication of the work of Wendt on the debate between religion and modernity. The central proposition that has come out of the work of Wendt is that the consciousness is not epiphenomenal and hence part of the structure of the universe and therefore the implication of this hypothesis could be that religion/spiritual traditions gets transformed with the change in material reality but still religion forms the basic core of many societies partly because religion and certain notion of spirituality is part of the collective consciousness of that region.

This proposition that has been propounded in this work gets substantiated by Wendt's work on consciousness. Albeit, I would like to make it clear Wendt does not draw this conclusion himself, however, his argument on the nature of consciounsness sustains this beyond doubt. It is interesting to note that Wendt also makes no reference to Indic or Buddhist traditions of monism and panpsychism[19] (the doctrine that there is consciousness at the fundamental level of the natural order) and also to the work of Carl Jung whose analytical psychology also transcends the materialist paradigm and has

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Panpsychism is a belief propounded by philsophers of mind like David Chalmer, who views it as a doctrine that falls or fit in between Dualism and Materialism. Panpsychist also argues that everything material has an element of consciousness; it can be both rudimentary and complex.

striking similarity with many interpretations of quantum physics.[20] However, many western philosophers like Schopenhauer earlier have worked on this aspect and has taken Indic tradition and thinking or worldview with utmost seriousness.

One would be interested in knowing the reason behind this conspicuous absence. One obvious explnantion seems to be that he was not comfortable with the idea of making any overt spiritual connections, while making a rigorous scientific and philosophical argument due to the peer pressure.This is not very unlikely as one finds several such examples of fearing the rejection of the entire argument by the community of philosophers on the basis of of invocation of some spiritual element in it.

There is no doubt that Wendt's work is scathing attack on Newtonian model or mechanics which is ubiquitous in both natural and social science. I would like to suggest that Wendt's proposition of Quantum mind helps us in developing an alternative framework for understanding religion in Punjab or Punjabi religion and its interplay with modernity and modern state. The idea of Quantum Mind conveys non-dualistic and non-modernist imagination which can be used for the study of religion. In Punjab's context specifically the non-modernist spiritual traditions in my view are part of the collective consciousness of Punjab and represents Punjabiyat. My assertion is that we should see them as non-modern, non-newtonian or quantum spiritual traditions in which entanglement and not the rigid binaries or boundaries are maintained. I would try to argue that the Sufi dera tradition of Punjab specifically is the perfect manifestation of the entangled spirituality which is non-modern and non-statist. This non-modernist and non-statist nature of dera tradition could be attributed as the main reason for its ubiquity and popularity. In the next section I will explore the idea and category of 'religion' in Punjab by looking into the literature on the area and the problem that categories or categorization of religion and religious boundaries in Punjab brings.

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[20] Diogo Valadas Ponte and Lothar Schafer, "Carl Gustav Jung, Quantum Physics and the Spiritual Mind: A Mystical Vision of the Twenty-First Century," *Behavioral Sciences*, 3(4), 601-618. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4217602/

Religion in Punjab and the problem of categories

Now after exploring Wendt's work and its implication for the framework to understand religion, we can now analyze the debate regarding the very category of religion and modernity in Punjab.I would like to take help of an Egyptologist and anthropologist named Jan Assmann and will use his framework of Mosaic distinction and Translatability that he has employed in his famous work, 'The price of Monotheism' to comprehend the intricacies of the debate around religion and modernity in Punjab. In this work Jan Assmann looked at the formation of monotheistic faith and argues that the mythic figure of Moses constructed a division between primary religion and secondary religion. It was the figure of Moses who follows a strict monotheistic religion, according to Assmann, that introduced to the Jews the concept of an exclusive God. Moses imposed a strict law that separates between 'true 'and 'false' religion a concept that Assmann calls 'Mosaic distinction' throughout the book.

According to Assmann, the logic of Mosaic distinction operates similar to the law of the excluded middle introduced by the Greek philosopher, Parmenides, in the sixth century BCE. This law of logic is characterized in its very core by "differentiation, negation, and exclusion." Assmann explains further that the primary religion usually works within the hermeneutics of translation. This can be called the technique of translatability in which the deity is translatable to other forms of deity. Accoring to this religion functioned as a medium of communication or transmission, not exclusion in the worldview of the followers of primary religion.The principle of the translatability of divine name in primary religion assited to control the primitive ethnocentrism of the tribal religions, to establish relations between cultures, and to make these cultures more transparent to each other.

Conversely, monotheism or the secondary religion functions within the hermeneutics of difference. It "assures itself of what is its own by staking its distance from the other, proceeding in accordance with the principle 'Omnis determinatio est

negatio.'[21] For Assmann, explaining this exclusive and intolerant nature of monotheistic religion does not have to lead to anti- Semitism or anti-monotheism. Both monotheism and the Greek scientific understanding are "the civilizational achievements of the highest order." They are good because they contribute to a people's ability to "have their own criteria of validity, verifiability, and falsifiability" by which they make a distinction between truth and lies. Assmann argues that he is actually not advocating a return to the primary religion. He explains, "I am not advocating anything; my aim is rather to describe and understand."[22]

The framework deployed by Assmann in his work can be used to understand the context of religion and modernity in Punjab. In Punjab modern Sikhism emerged as a new monotheistic faith in which the concept of false and true religion was ingrained under the influence of colonial modernity and its binary logic. The alterities and exclusion that emanates from the formation of a monotheistic faith and from a new political order got clearly tangible in Punjab of nineteenth century and its ramification got more prominent in the crisis of 1984. However applying the logic of mosaic distinction on Sikhism has certain flaws because in the case of India and Punjab specifically the category of religion was not as sharp and tangible as was the case with medieval Islam and Christianity the frame of reference used by Assmann.

The category of religion is generally considered as an uncontested or given category and a general cultural universal in almost all political and social discourse. Scholars such as Richard King , Peter Ven der veer, Timothy Fitzgerald, Talal Asad and Arvind Mandair questions that assumption. Richard king in his famous work 'Orientalism and Religion' argues that in the contemporary era we can see a great deal of continuity between modern conception of religion and the Christian understanding of religion. Both tend to place a great deal of emphasis upon faith as adherence to a doctrine and to sacred texts and also the Christian interest of truth and falsity of religion is of utmost importance

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[21] Jan Assmann, *The price of Monotheism* (Stanford: Stanford university press, 2009), 23.

[22] Ibid.,13.

and simultaneously the question of historicity of gospel and falsity of pagan mythologies.

This Christian approach to religion and its import in Indian and Punjab's context has paved the way for the crisis by giving birth to world religion like Sikhism. Also simultaneously through the nationalization of the spiritual tradition of the East by making them world religions and hence not part of the public sphere, because in Public sphere only non-religious arguments are entertained and accepted and hence when Sikhism became religion in 19th century Sikh principles lost credibility of being included in Public sphere. This relegation of the Punjabi/Sikh tradition to private sphere can be called as politics of privatization. This politics of privatization has strengthened the secular-religious binary constructed by the modern state and which christain roots. Richard King in his works argues that we should be conscious of the fact that the focal descriptive category of religious studies namely the concept or notion of 'religion' itself is a Christian theological category in other words religion is a cultural specific social construction with a particular genealogy of its own.[23]

The post colonial scholars like Ashis Nandy who in one of his most popular and important work, 'The politics of secularism and the recovery of religious tolerance' has argued against a particular kind of religion which he calls 'religion as ideology' which promotes/fosters communalism and communalism/ fundamentalism and secularism in Nandy's framework are two sides of the same coin. Nandy in his work supports the kind of religion which is 'religion as faith' as opposed to 'religion as ideology'[24]. But even Postcolonial scholar like Ashis Nandy who is very critical of the modernist framework does not problematize the very category of 'religion' and takes it as a given category and in this way fails to transcend the modernist framework of religion-secular binary, because

[23] Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion, Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (NewYork: Oxford University Press, 1999), 40.

[24] Ashis Nandy, The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance', In R. Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and Its Critics*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

in the modernist framework only state has the power to authorize and religion by its very fact of being religion relegates to the private domain of spirituality. Therefore, Ashis Nandy despite its postcolonial rhetoric is complicit in the epistemic violence propounded by the modernist/newtonian framework.

Arvind Mandair's book 'Religion and the Specter of the West, Sikhism,India, Postcoloniality and the Politics of Translation', along with Richard king's work challenges this uncontested notion that "religion" or the category of religion is a universal category which can be applied in all contexts without the consideration of temporality and spatiality. The book by Mandair can be quite challenging for lay reader and also for many academics due to its sheer length and complicated philosophical arguments. The book can also be seen an important intervention in study of religion, South Asian studies and continental philosophy. It covers many topics ranging from the category of religion to translation theory to post colonial and post secular theory and the continuing imperialism in the academic/ theoretical and at the geopolitical level. Mandair in the book formulates the fundamental question as argued by Derrida, i.e. "What if the Religio remains untranslatable"[25], in other words the fundamental question that also forms the undercurrent of Mandair's endeavor in the book is that why is a category of "religion" which according to Mandair is a modern category and has its origin in the west and was born along with the category of secular has gained so much salience in the colonized world.

Part of Mandair's work focuses on Indian religions and Western thought. The major contribution of this part is to bring into cognizance the relative imaginary of the West. Mandair does this through a meticuluous examination of the persistence of ontotheology - the metaphysical concept of European identity that essentially connects Greek philosophy, Christian theology and modern secular humanism. More than anywhere else in European thought, this metaphysical continuity and its influence on

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[25] Arvind –Pal S.Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West, Sikhism, India, post coloniality and the politics of Translation (*New York: Columbia University press, 2009), 422.

discourse of religions is evident in Hegel. According to Mandair, Hegel in his lectures on the philosophy of history and religion equated evolution of history with the evolution of religion.

Christianity was on the pinnacle and the oriental spiritual tradition which Hegel categorized as religion was far behind the ideal 'Christianity'. Part of his work also focuses on the theme of Theology as Cultural translation, in which the question of the "Politics of Religion Making" becomes the crucial question. Orientalist and Indologist like Ernest Trumpp, Macauliffe interpreted Indic tradition and especially "Sikhi" (Pre-colonial form of Sikh tradition different from modern Sikhism) in the light of western tradition. This transformation from Sikhi to modern Sikhism was carried out by interplay between Neo colonial Elites like Singh Sabha Scholar and the Colonial authorities/ Orientalist.

Singh Sabha scholars, according to Mandair, were suffering from an 'effect of shame' due to their perceived lack of 'Transcendence' and 'Theology' in their tradition.[26] Early colonial accounts of Sikhism by Max Arthur Macauliffe and Ernest Trumpp has shown Sikhism in a light where it is seen to have lacked the basic moral cosmology due to its pantheistic character and lack of systematic theology and this pantheism or pantheistic account of Sikhism offended the reformist Singh Sabha Scholar. After that account Singh Sabha Scholar inadvertently fell into the trap of western ontotheology and unconsciously interpreted "Sikhi" in the modern colonial framework.

In my view with this account "Sikhi" got completely transformed into "Sikhism" a modern world religion and with secular as its binary opposite. In this way "Sikhi" got entrapped in the logic of modern state and the modernist Newtonian world view became part of the Sikh worldview. This transformation has captured Sikh Political Subjectivity and made any attempt of assertion or affirmation of independent political Sikh subjectivity illegitimate, because in modern framework only State has the power and

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[26] Arvind -Pal S.Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West, Sikhism, India, post coloniality and the politics of Translation (*New York: Columbia University press, 2009).

authority to be Sovereign and because by this logic "Sikhi" has become a religion, therefore lost any legitimacy of being Sovereign under the eyes of Nation-State.[27] Sikhs with this has lost all the legitimacy to assert their political aspiration because in modern framework religious groups and religion/spiritual has no right to intervene in the political sphere because of the strict logical binary of religious-political of the modern state. In modernity or in modern framework sovereignty lies with the State and therefore it renders all attempts to assert an independent sovereign political Sikh subjectivity as futile. This impasse got manifested in the crisis of 1984 in Punjab. In an agreement with Mandair I believe that the crisis in Punjab in 1984 was a reflection of the abovementioned aporia or paradox.

Arvind Mandair's work also strives for Post Colonial Exits to this aporia or impasse by drawing upon a new interpretation of Gurmat and other main techniques of Sikh spiritual tradition like Nam Simran , Sabda Guru etc. In this interpretation by Mandair these spiritual experiences are not treated as a part of theology but as techniques of pure spiritual experience without any association or need for transcendence and metaphysics in other word without the baggage of ontotheology of the dominant western framework. Mandair has rescued Gurmat in this theme from the baggage of theology and this has paved the way for a Sikh Subjectivity which is no more burdened with modern colonial framework of secular – religious binary.

In the same theme Mandair has questioned the identity politics that the modern Sikhism has fallen into. He is not arguing that there was no Sikh identity prior to Colonialism; In fact he is arguing that Sikh identity, though in its nascent form, came into existence in 15th and 16th century, but that identity was an amorphous identity which was part of a different non-modernist and non-Newtonian worldview. To explicate it better the logic of identity prior to colonialism was fuzzy and amorphous i.e. if A=A and B=B but also A=B, but this picture got completely transformed after colonialism or with the logic of colonial modernity in which if A=A and B=B but A is not equal to B. In other words

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[27] Ibid.

Mandair corroborates what Sudipta kaviraj has argued in his work regarding fuzzy and enumerated identities before and after colonialism[28].

Mandair in his work has also critiqued the post colonial and subaltern studies attempt to give voice to the marginalized and subaltern people of the colonized world. He argues that post colonial theory in spite of its embracing of subaltern resistance hardly merits subaltern resistance that does not work according to its own secular terms.[29] So, therefore according to him a truly post colonial exit from the hegemony of imperial and colonial academics would treat the spiritual tradition of the East not as religions and therefore would eschew the religious – secular binary of the modern colonial framework. It would also pave the way for a true post colonial Sikh subjectivity that would resist the flows of dominant global consciousness and global capitalism without falling into the trap of identity politics and nation state.

The Method employed by Arvind Mandair in his book to critique the western dominant symbolic order of Orientalist and Neo Colonial elites like Singh Sabha Scholars is the method or framework deployed by the psychoanalyst Lacan. Lacan in his works argues against the structural linguists that language is an instrument that is used to communicate with the world. On the contrary Lacan formulates that we are born into language and language is there or has been there before we are born[30]. The same method or technique of the ontological function of language found in Lacanian psychoanalysis is employed by Arvind Mandair to formulate or argue for a post- theistic Sikh ontology. His retrieval of foundational elements of Sikh tradition in the figures of Guru Nanak offers a model of subjectivity that goes beyond the impasse of postcolonial Sikh identity politics. He argues that to exit the colonial mimetic or repetition of Singh Sabha there is a need for

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[28] Sudipta kaviraj in his work, 'The imaginary institution of India: Politics and Ideas' (2010), has argued about fuzzy and amorphous identities and how the fixation of identities had to await colonial practices of enumeration.

[29] Arvind -Pal S.Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West, Sikhism, India, post coloniality and the politics of Translation (*New York: Columbia University press, 2009).

[30] Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan*(London:Routledge critical thinkers,2005),.44.

a negation of the first negation of lack, i.e. the lack of proper theology or the element of transcendence. It can transverse the colonizer/ colonized relationship with respect to its demand for universality and for translatability and undo the repression of non modern meaning and understanding in Sikh scriptures.

Mandair, taking a Lacanian perspective argues that the Sikh tradition preserves the ontology of the language insofar as it recognizes that language precedes the self-as-ego, a concept enshrined in the claim that "the text is Guru" (Sabda-guru). Thus, "Sabda-guru" has to be seen as an empty signifier rather than a signifier of presence[31]. This allows for a reading of Sikh scripture which is not based on theology, but one that allows a non- dualistic interpretation of the mulmantra of Sikhi i.e. the non-dual interpretation of "ik omkar"[32]. This interpretation allows for a theme in the text that refuses ontotheological assertion of transcendental sovereign subjectivity through a movement away from eternity and ahistoricity to contingency (temporality). In this way according to Manadair, the postcolonial Sikh subjectivity can avoid the burden of sacred origin or religion and historicity which binds Sikh or other Indic tradition to the same western ontotheological binary logic of secular-religious and suppresses the true autonomous postcolonial Sikh subjectivity[33].

The true postcolonial Sikh subjectivity according to Mandair would be based on a reorientation of consciousness derived from the (impersonal) 'sabda' and this reorientation occurs mainly at the level of language or word. Hence eschews any ontotheological/metaphysical claims of the dominant western symbolic order, which is responsible for the subjective and epistemic violence in the colonized world by resisting the true postcolonial Sikh subjectivity and hence suppresses any political aspirations of Sikhs or other Indic traditional groups. The last part of the books takes on the post secular

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[31] Arvind -Pal S.Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West, Sikhism, India, post coloniality and the politics of Translation (*New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 359.

[32] Ibid.,369-370.

[33] Ibid.,360.

theory in vogue in the western world .Mandair in this part criticizes the theory and arguments of the world's leading critical theorist Slavoj Zizek, who in his recent work especially the work named 'The Fragile Absolute: or, why is the Christian Legacy worth Fighting for?' has taken cognizance of the emancipatory or liberating potential of Christianity especially the writings of St Paul and argued that only Europe and Christianity can offer a true resistance to the global capitalism of American variety and to Chinese authoritarianism[34].

Zizek argues that the only possibility of any resistance can only come from Europe which will save us from the New Age Mysticism of Asiatic variety which indirectly promotes global capitalism. Mandair in his book 'Religion and Specter' despite agreeing with the Lacanian framework or method deployed by Zizek argues that Zizek contests or denies the full repercussion of his own insights, a denial that is in partly inherited from Hegel[35]. So, the move that can authorize Indian postcolonials to raise their political subjectivity to the level that might resists global capitalism is missing in the discourse of Zizek and through this he continues the imperialistic legacy or Past imperialism of Hegel forward.

Apart from all the creative insights of his work, Mandair's work somehow is not very lucid when it comes to the question of concrete political situation or matters of today's Punjab. Mandair, I believe has not made himself very clear on the questions of the implication of his work. One would like to ask how does post theistic Sikh ontology that Mandair stands for in his book and a new radical interpretation of Gurmat that he offers, which transcends the colonial/ imperial category of religion and secular,[36] manifest when it comes to the daily lived experience of any ordinary Sikh ?. Does the

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[34] Slavoj Zizek , *The Fragile Absolute Or, why is the Christian legacy worth fighting for* ? (New York: Verso, 2000).

[35] Arvind-Pal S. Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West, Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality and the Politics of Translation (*New York: Columbia University Press, 2009),405.

[36] Sian Hawthorne, *Is there a (M)other in the Text? Post -theistic Sikh ontology and the question of the phallus*, Method and Theory in the study of Religion 23 (2011),160.

ordinary Sikh can have any association with the interpretation of Gurmat that Mandair is offering? Can Sikhs fight the excesses of the mighty state power by discarding the category of religion and by subscribing to the traditional interpretation of his text?. Answer to these questions are either not available in his text or they are quite insufficient. Mandair is also not very clear what would be the impact or implication of his interpretation for the Modern Sikh political parties like Akali Dal. Does his interpretation agrees or goes well with the kind of politics that Akali Dal does or subscribes? One has to acknowledge that the Akali Dal also argues for a kind of politics in which Spiritual and Secular/ temporal are not separate but are intertwined.

I think the question of Sikh Sovereignty also needs more meditation and hence these are some of the questions that remain unanswered and even Mandair has failed to provide any satisfactory answer to them. But despite the shortcomings the work 'Religion and the Specter of the West, Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality and the Politics of Translation' by Arvind Pal-Singh Mandair is an avant-garde intervention in critical theory, religious studies and post colonial theory and would be of immense interest and help to those who are looking and striving for an alternate or Indic universals that can counter the global hegemonic universals and symbolic order of the west.

Deliberation over religion in the Punjab studies Circle

Another important scholar we need to engage with is Harjot Oberoi who has extensively worked on religion and culture in Punjab[37]. After analyzing the work of Arvind Mandair on Religion and Modernity and the west, it becomes crucial to compare it with the other important work on Punjab and Sikhism by a noted anthropologist named Harjot Oberoi. The two contemporary scholars whose works are of immense importance when it comes to the analyses of religion and modernity in Punjab or on the politics of Sikhism are the works of Harjot Oberoi and Arvind Pal Singh Mandair. Both the scholars

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[37] Harjot Oberoi's work 'Construction of Religious Bounadries,Culture, Idenity and Diversity in the Sikh tradition' is the first study of its kind, that deals with the aspect of artificial religious boundaries in Punjab and the role played by modern colonial state in establishing a hegemonic discourse of Khalsa Sikhism.

are highly critical of western categories and idioms. Their respective works, the 'Construction of religious boundaries '(1994) and 'Religion and the Specter of the West' (2009), explores the link between language and culture, religion and Secularism, as well as nationalism and communalism.

Both scholars and their work have much in common. They identify the transformation in the Sikh tradition occurring during the colonial period's religious reform movements as discursive field; and both of them attempt to comprehend the Sikh encounter with the British hegemony with a new lens. Oberoi does this via the dialectic of opposed episteme of Sanatan and Tat khalsa Sikhism, and Mandair via critique of the Politics of Translation[38]. Both are critical of academic discourse on Sikhs and Sikhism; Oberoi attempts to describe the cultural development of the notion of the category of religion through the model or method of anthro-history, while Mandair deconstructs the very distinction between secular and religious discourse as they apply conceptually to Sikhs[39]. Oberoi employs a Socio-historical perspective while Manadair employs deconstructionist and Lacanian approach. Finally both see the making of religion as a political process; Harjot Oberoi views it from the perspective of academic historiography, while Mandair shows how religion is inseparable from the secular such that the supposed objectivity of academic discipline is found complicit in the power of colonial state.

Despite so much in common, it is this last point about complicity (which is based upon the recognition that post modernity is a condition of colonial modernity) that makes Mandair's work on religion and modernity more compelling argument than compared to that of Oberoi's work. Although, Oberoi examines how in a certain historical moment dialogical methods of reasoning and association with colonial mechanism of power forced a shift and a fixing of subjectivity, he is limited by his historical method, and the discourse of history as formative of the colonial gaze. In my understanding and here I am

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[38] Balbinder Singh Bhogal, *"Postconial and Postmodern Perspectives on Sikhism", Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies,* ed. Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 289.

[39] Ibid.

agreeing with Arvind Mandair that Oberoi's work of 'Construction of religious boundaries' with its scholarly historiographical method is complicit with an 'epistemological gaze' first framed by colonial administration – wherein religion is accepted as the categorical framework with which Sikhs are prefigured historiographically.

Harjot Oberoi's work formulates the distinction between the movements of the conservative sanatan and progressive Tat khalsa tradition. According to Oberoi the present literature on religion in India treats the categories of 'Hindu' 'Mulsim' and 'Sikh' as unproblematic[40] and therefore has no space for the tradition of syncretism that the area like Punjab followed. Oberoi used the method employed by Foucault in his work and the tool was the concept of 'episteme'. By episteme Foucault means-

> The total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences and possibly formalized systems. The episteme is not a form of knowledge or type of rationality which, crossing the boundaries of the most varied sciences, manifests the sovereign unity of the subject, a spirit, or a period; it is the totality of relations that can be discovered for a given period.[41]

Further in any given culture and at any given moment, there is always one episteme that defines the condition of the possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice.[42] In Oberoi's framework the Sanatan 'episteme' is an enchanted, oral and ahistorical world of plurality and heterogeneity with personal and popular traditions, while the latter Tat Khalsa 'episteme' is a textual, historical, elite, homogenous, progressive and modern one bound by locating fixed

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[40] Harjot Oberoi, *The construction of religious boundaries, culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (India: Oxford University Press, 1994),3.

[41] Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of knowledge*, (London, 1972), .191.

[42] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of Knowledge of Human Sciences*, (New York: Vintage Books 1994), 168.

identities within equally fixed classification. Here I would like to argue that this idea of Harjot Oberoi resonates with Jan Assmann's idea we have discussed earlier, because the Santan episteme of oberoi reflects the characteristics of primary religion as argued by Assmann in which enchantment and enchanted universe plays an important role. On the other hand the Tat khalsa episteme resembles with or resonates with the mosaic distinction of the monotheistic faith because of its disenchantment /disenchanting the world and because of its distinction between Man and Nature, in which Man stands above the Nature and is only subservient to a transcendent God.

Here, I would like to problematize the argument of Oberoi, because one cannot account for the shift from Sanatan orality to Tat Khalsa textuality via the Foucault's concept of 'episteme', because Foucault himself in his later work reconceptualized this mode of analysis to acknowledge how subjects are decentered or displaced through the materiality of language. That is to say, the subject is formed by structures and institutions of power that are permeated with language, and can only be recognized socially by their overdetermination[43]. Mandair also notes, the major effect of this theory is to put the credentials of the knower (the epistemologist) in question and goes on to argue that this is precisely Oberoi's limitation for he fails to acknowledge the continuity and interconnection of his own position as an academic with the disparity in power relations between educational institutions in the west and those in previously colonized countries. Ironically, Mandair writes, 'the effects of Foucault's work are even more applicable to Oberoi's own discourse as long as it continues to hide itself under the liberal humanist idea of impartial /scientific historiography[44].

Here, I would also like to argue that Mandair's work poses a serious challenge to the west by opening the possibility of Non-western others participating in the construction and operation of the voice of universal enunciation. The key difference then

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[43] Balbinder Singh Bhogal, *"Postconial and Postmodern Perspectives on Sikhism", Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies,* ed. Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech (New Delhi: Oxford University Press,2014),290.

[44] Ibid.

between oberoi's framework, Assmann's framework and Manadir's framework is that the first two operates within the western categories of thought while the latter perceives this as a key problem that subalternizes Indic and Gur-Sikh tradition and knowledge (Gian).

Alongside Bruno Latour and others, Mandair argues that the idea of a radical break within Europe from a religious to a secular world is a myth and that a great mistake, because it ignores the essential continuity between different moments in the western traditions[45]. The Greek (onto), the medieval-scholastic (theo) and the modern liberal humanist (logos or logic). This ontotheolgical matrix/ theme are ubiquitous and are clearly perceptible in media, academic and state instituitions. Mandair in his work is not trying to argue that there was no pre-colonial discourse on 'religion' and therefore 'religion' was forged or constructed in the eighteenth and nineteenth century per se[46].But it is only during Colonial times that religion becomes a conceptual category through which the operation of generalized translation occurs and one which persists even till today.

I believe Mandair's framework unlike Oberoi's framework, rejects the invitation to enter the dialogue with the West without first renegotiating the terms of entry into that debate. Despite the ubiquity of the colonial presentation of religion, Mandair (following derrida) claims that the very strength of its repetition could be decimated at any moment, if one were to suspend belief in the translatability of the term "religio". For example by asking by asking the Derridean question, "what if religio remained untranslatable?" a theme/idea that seems to emanate from every page of the Guru Granth Sahib[47].

A Key distinction between the Abrahamic and Indic traditions' conception of the absolute and its relation to the other is that the western/Abrahamic tradition rests on the necessity of conversion i.e. the assimilation that often go hand-in-hand with the epistemic

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[45] Bruno Latour, *We have never been Modern,* (USA: Harvard University Press, 1993), .12.

[46] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The invention of world religions* (University of Chicago press, 2005),7.

[47] Arvind –Pal S.Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West, Sikhism, India, post coloniality and the politics of Translation(* New York: Columbia University Press,2009),422.

violence of European Civilzation. In the Gur-Sikh tradition with its internal diversity, the necessity of conversion is denied and along with the exclusive ownership of the truth.This understanding of Mandair here resonates with Jan Assmann' s view on mosaic distinction and monotheistic faith , but the only difference is that Assmann logic is very much part of western logic of understanding in which the category religion is treated as a universal category and therefore due to the compulsion of this logic gets into the trap of religion-secular binary.

The other scholar whose work can be discussed in the theme over deliberations on religion in Punjab's context is JPS Uberoi his famous work, named Religion, Civil society and the State: A Study of Sikhism tries to demonstrate that Sikhism is the harbinger of Indian modernity. Uberoi's work is an implicit critique of western modernity. Uberoi's work tries to come up with a non-dualistic framework in which the self and the other are not in antagonistic relationship. According to JPS Uberoi Sikhism replaces the Indian medievalism and the duality associated with it. This sort of critique deployed by Uberoi is not new as it has also been used by the many scholars in Subaltern Studies group and in post colonial studies. What is interesting and new in Uberoi's work is that his attempt to bring out the structural resemblance between Sikhism and Gandhism and the tradition or belief in martyrdom in both traditions. JPS Uberoi in his work argues that Sikhism was the earliest and Gandhism the latest attempt to move oneself and India from medievalism to modernity, i.e. from dualism to non-dualism[48].

Uberoi argues that Sikhism like Gandhism presents a revolutionary break, a fundamental rupture in the medievalist course and is thus an essential element of Indian and Punjab's modernist project which strives to bring together, the three domains of religion, state and society, domains which were completely isolated from each other in medieval times[49]. Uberoi work though has idealist undertones and also reflects the Orientalist essentialism in his representation of the Sikh figures and history, which he

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[48] JPS Uberoi, *Religion, Civil Society and the State*,(Delhi :Oxford University Press,1996), 32.

[49] Ibid.

vociferously criticizes. Apart from the idealist undertone and the problem of historiography the work of Uberoi also commits a serious mistake by giving a central place to the category of religion in his work and therefore falls into the trap of the Orientalist modernist project of religion-secular binary and nation state –religion dichotomy, which is detrimental to the larger project of independent Sikh epistemology and postcolonial Sikh discourse.

The other scholar whose work will be of some importance for this theme of deliberation over religion in the Punjab study circle is Farina Mir, who is a noted historian on South Asia and Punjab. Her work on Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives: Rethinking cultural and Religious Syncretism questions the analytic framework of Syncretism employed by Harjot Oberoi in his work to study the difference between Modern Tat Khalsa Sikhism and Sanatan Sikhism. Farina Mir in her work criticizes Oberoi for his analysis because Oberoi in his analysis according to Mir used 'syncretism' to distinguish the popular religion/ Sanatan episteme from Modern Tat Khalsa episteme, to assert that it is difficult to reconstruct "popular religion" or to pinpoint the concepts around which the fabric of popular religion was woven. And what remains central to Oberoi's analysis is an individual's normative religious identity as 'Hindu', 'Sikhs', and 'Muslims'. According to Farina Mir and her reading of nineteenth century Heer Ranjha text reveals that as discourse on "piety" was central to them and this discourse shapes the perceptible outlines of a spiritual community symbolized by the practices of Saint Veneration and adherence to Sufi Values, the discourse of Piety in Heer -Ranjha text represents a form of devotion in which all Punjabis could participate.[50] The story of Hir-Ranjha has in fact been written by authors belonging to different religious persuasions, for example it was written firstly by Damodar Das Gulati a Hindu Khatri then by Waris Shah a Muslim Sufi and lastly by a Sikh named Kishan Singh Arif .

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[50] Farina Mir, *Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives: Rethinking Cultural and Religious Syncretism, Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Jul., 2006), . 754, accessed 5 october,2017, Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3879442

This shared piety, without conflicting with an individual's normative religious identity, constituted a sphere of religiosity and piety that cut across the boundaries that distinguished the Punjab's major religious traditions. She has also argued that Saint Veneration is better understood as constituting a parallel, alternative spiritual practice and devotion and a practice that involved the reinterpretation of piety and constituted beliefs that stood alongside formal categories of religious identity without being in antagonistic relationship with them. The framework deployed by Mir in her work can be used to fathom the intricacies of Dera culture and its popularity among masses in Modern Punjab as sites of Saint veneration and popular religion and piety without necessarily abandoning the normative identity of 'Hindu' and 'Sikh'.

Almost all the scholars (except Mandair and Oberoi to a certain extent) whose work have been reviewed in this section of deliberation over religion in Punjab studies circle in a way falls into the trap of duality that emanates from the Modern Newtonian Science. This duality that allows the perception of the world that entails rigid binaries between entities is visible in most of the discourse available on Punjab and its spiritual traditions. The framework that I am trying to develop in this chapter endeavors to transcend this duality by acknowledging the role of consciousness, especially the collective consciousness for a society and region like Punjab. The framework in which consciousness is not seen as epiphenomenal allows a role for collective consciousness to govern certain society with certain specific ideals and beliefs. Punjabi society in a way has collective consciousness that entails or incorporates fluid traditions, the idea of Guru-Bhakti or Pir- Mureedi that transcends any textual religious notion, the Plurality of beliefs and syncretism which is also endemic to Punjab. This collective consciousness of Punjab is difficult to comprehend with the tools or method of classical approaches like Political economy and varied sociological approaches.

After exploring the ideas of many authors that have worked on religion in Punjab, we will now move to the next section that deals with the idea of public sphere in Punjab and the new conceptualization of the notion of Sikhs in public sphere. And the

concomitant idea and conceptualization of sovereignty that is new and unique to Sikhs and Punjab which allows for diversity to flourish and thereby repudiates the modernist model of sovereignty.

Sikhs and the Public sphere

The idea of sovereignty that I am trying to look at is first developed by Arvind Mandair in his work on Sikh government and sovereignty. Mandair in his work has agrued that the principle of sovereign experience imparted by Guru Nanak and developed by the later Gurus based on the reality of a liberating experience that is inclusive and open and also within everyone's reach. The experience that got realized as shabd-guru and then further materialized as institutions of Guru Granth(Adi garnth) and Guru Panth(khalsa) these principles constituted a model of sovereignty that might be regarded as heteronomic.[51] A heteronomic sovereignty can be envisioned as one whose fundamental rule is the self's relationship to the other: the idea that the self exists in the world on the basis of its relationship to its other (ego loss)[52].The implications of this heteronomic model of sovereignty, was a Sikh lived experience that derived its ideational spirit from the harmony between the institutions of shabad–guru and miri piri.

It refers to a lived –experience that allowed an internal diversity to flourish within the panth, even as the panth continued to evolve rigid and exclusive forms of social and political identity, such as the Khalsa or Tat Khalsa and secondly it did not believe in any metaphysical distinction between the spiritual and the worldly, the religious and the political or the sacred and the profane. Following the encounter with the secularizing and modernizing forces of western modernity and especially since the annexation of Sikh Kingdom in 1849, however the earlier heteronomic model was forced to compete with a very different model of sovereignty imposed by the European Colonial forces and with the successive nationalization and modernization of Sikh tradition by

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[51] Arvind Pal-Singh Mandair, *Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 189.

[52] Ibid.

Sikh Modernists drawn from the Singh Sabha Movement and later on the Akali –SGPC network.[53]

In order to compete against the political groups, modernist Sikhs reformulated Sikhi as a 'world religion' and 'nation' along European lines and the Westphalian model. Roger Ballard and Arvind Pal- Singh Mandair both have argued that by emphasizing or focusing on the term 'quam' as a translation of nation and religion or a religion which is national and political in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century 'Sikhi' got completely transformed into Modern Sikhism and the model of heteronomic sovereignty was superseded by the modernist principle of autonomic sovereignty. The most vitriolic manifestation of autonomic sovereignty was the ethno-nationalist or separatist movement of late 1980s and early 1990s that was in my view a logical culmination of the trajectory that modernist Sikhs have chosen a century ago.

As argued above that in the process of projecting themselves as legitimate body in the public sphere governed by the British law, the earlier principle of heteronomic sovereignty was overpowered and displaced to certain extent by a distinctly modernist principle of autonomic sovereignty characterized by the notion of a people with its proper religion (Sikhism) and their own land (Punjab). Under the hegemonic impact of the modernist form of autonomic sovereignty, whose main marker is the enunciation of an autonomous Sikh self that denies its relationship to the other, the Sikh lived experience is forced to express itself through the dichotomy of the private versus the public which is modernist in disposition .The most malicious form of this autonomic sovereignty as argued earlier was the ethno nationalist or the separatist movement of the late 1980s and the early1990s. Despite the modernization process, however the earlier form of heteronomic sovereignty never really disappeared, but by the early twentieth century it was relegated to the private sphere especially following the birth of the Indian nation-state and it continued to exist in the traditionalist discourse that are kept privatized.[54]

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[53] Ibid.,190.

[54] Ibid.

Here we can sort of create a distinction or comparison between Habermas understanding of religion and the public sphere and that of the Arvind Mandair's. Habermas in his works on religion in public sphere especially after 2002 has endorsed religious citizen's argument in the informal public sphere, but in the formal public sphere of Law making, parliament etc. According to this view, religious citizens who take part in political debates within the context of informal public sphere should be allowed to offer exclusively religious arguments to support the policies they favor. These citizens have the rightand or entitlement to the valid expectation of having their reasons successfully translated into non-religious reasons[55]. He maintains, religious citizens should 'be allowed to enunciate and vindicate their convictions and beliefs in a religious language if they cannot find secular translations for them'.

Arvind Pal –Singh Mandair on the other hand radically differs from Habermas because he believes that Habermas by allowing religion/ religious argument or reason to be a part of public discourse even in informal public sphere accepts the hegemony of the category of religion which according to Mandair will only lead to the binary of religious-secular and in this way the Non-western tradition would suffer from that binary by being classified as religion. Therefore he criticizes the whole discourse of post secular as another form of western imperial ideology to suppress non-western epistemologies and idiosyncratic experiences. The model of sovereignty developed by Mandair to explain western or pre-modern traditions of self rule which is different from the modern

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[55] Habermas main text on the subject is '*Religion in the Public Sphere'* published in 2006. The English translation of this latter text is '*Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the "Public Use of Reason" by Religious and Secular Citizens'*. It is notable that Habermas also elucidates his views on religion in his text 'On the Relations between the Secular Liberal State and Religion' published in Political theologies: Public Religion in a Post Secular world in 2006.

conception of sovereignty is fruitful in explaining the problems of modern conception of sovereignty imposed on Punjab.

But despite the useful attempt by Mandair to transcend the binary of religious-secular to avoid public-private dichotomy and to develop an independent political subjectivity for non-western masses, Mandair in my view suffers from the same problem that afflicts other modern authors working on religion in Punjab. The major component of the problem is the framework deployed to study religious/spiritual traditions which is modern, materialist and Newtonian in nature. And hence despite attempts to transcend modern European framework for the study of religion, Mandair in my view falls in the same trap of modernity which he very vehemently tries to transcend.

Conclusion

The framework that we have looked for in this chapter tries to reconceptualize the very debate on religion and modernity in a manner that can transcend the logic of modern state as well as the notion of embedded separability and binaries that comes with modern science. The question of category of 'religion' has also been looked at critically from the perspectives provided by scholars like Arvind Pal Singh Mandair and others. The framework provided by Alexander Wendt especially the missing aspect of consciousness in both natural science and social science can now be juxtaposed with the debate initiated by Arvind Mandair on Religion and the Spectre of West.

One crucial idea that can be drawn from the work of Wendt is that humans are not atomized beings and entanglement (the idea drawn from quantum physics) is the realtiy, not only in nature or at quantum level but in society also (because according to Wendt humans are walking wavefunctions and hence are entangled). This aspect of entanglement can be used to argue that certain spiritual traditions are entagled spiritual traditions, because they don't believe in constructing artificial binaries and also constitutes the collective consciousness of some societies. The syncretic Sufi dera

tradition in my view represents such sort of entangled spirituality, in which fuzziness and not the binary logic of modern state dominates. After drawing this idea from Wendt's work the question that becomes pertinent here is that can there be some meeting ground between the likes of Mandair and the framework of consciousness provided by Alexander Wendt in his work Quantum Mind? The answer to that would be both 'yes' and 'No'. This ambiguity emanates because Mandair in my view is taking a position which is apparently against a certain sort of modernity and how Indian traditions became victim to that modernity and which even post-colonial discourse is afflicted with. In that way both Mandair and Wendt can share a ground by critiquing the common nemesis of modernity or modern worldview that constructs binary thinking that has its genesis in modern science and that got bolstered by modern state.

But there is also a strong point of contention between them and that contention/ discord results from their different understanding of physical reality and science, albeit both are critical of the dualistic worldview that gets constructed by modernity and strengthened by modern state. And despite that critique of duality of modern world view their philosophical disposition or worldview are quite different, because Wendt's worldview is panpsychist in disposition in which consciousness (whether rudimentary or evolved) exists as fundamental entity in the natural order much like time and space. Mandair in contrast to Wendt is critiquing the duality of modern world from the materialist perspective with strong tendency to disavow any sort of metaphysics (termed ontotheology by Mandair) associated with modernity and modern worldview. This is the reason why the answer to aforementioned question is both 'Yes' and 'No'.

Apart from the points mentioned above in this chapter I have tried mapping the debates surrounding religion and modernity in Punjab and tried incorporating ideas from other domains like quantum physics or mechanics to critique modern binary thinking embedded in the modern discourse on religion. Apropos the deliberation on the category of 'religion' that I have explored in this chapter, we can conclude this chapter by arguing that the category of religion in Punjab's context and in the Indian context that has been

criticized by many scholars mentioned above in the chapter and up to a certain extent endorsed by me but this proposition can be contested and I write this paper with ambivalence. The critics are pursuing the deconstruction of the category of religion and I agree with the critics that the concept of 'religion' is not free of politics and is not guiltless.

The concept of religion has been used by the West to judge other cultures as inferior to them and to privatize their traditions to impose the hegemony of modern state. But simultaneously we also need to take cognizance of the fact that there exists no term / idea whose history and implications is without politics or free of politics None of our thinking is without ideological baggage and the ideas propounded by figures like Nicholas Dirks and Richard king are been used by certain conservative forces to justify irrational tradition. Arvind Manadir's work can also be appropriated and used to justify the same nationalist Sikh traditions that he criticized in his work. I would only argue that the naïve realism about the religion is indefensible, but we can sort of create or construct a critical realist view through the method of immanent critique by exploring and exposing the contradiction within the critique given by the likes of Mandair and by not thoroughly rejecting the category of religion and by formulating an argument in which one takes the cognizance of the history of semantics of the concept/ idea but without thoroughly repudiating the concept.

In fact I believe that the concept of religion, secular and communal needs to be further looked at especially for the Indian context and their definition should be stretched to incorporate the various other Indic phenomena that are left out from the western hegemonic category of religion and modernity. The framework provided by the theory of Alexnder Wendt regarding consciousness in 'Quantum mind and Social Science' needs to be looked at with more seriousness especially in debate regarding religion and social reality and lastly the liberatory/liberating potential of the category of religion to counter global capitalism and its cultural offshoots should be considered especially by those on the left of the political spectrum. Therefore I would not support a thorough rejection of

the category of religion to study Indic and Punjabi traditions, but would only critically embrace in the light of larger debate on social and physical reality to counter the hegemonic prevalent understanding of the category of religion in the academia.

In the second chapter I will try to explore specifically the Dera and Sikh tradition of Punjab in the light of modern governmentality and will explore or trace the contours of the debate surrounding the phenomenon of dera in Punjab. The differentiation and diversity within the ubiquitous phenomenon of deras will be explored. The notion of syncretism as non-modern world view will be looked into. The framework of consciousness as a missing aspect in the modern discourse developed in this chapter would be applied in the study of Dera and Sikh tradition in the next chapter. The notion of Guru-Bhakti or Piri Mureedi as part of the collective consciousness of Punjabi society and the notion of entangled spirituality that is manifested in deras will be explored in the second chapter. The socio-economic and political context of Dera phenomenon and Sikh tradition will also be explored in the second chapter.

Chapter two

Sikhs and Deras: Syncretism vs Modern Governmentality

Introduction:

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze and compare the two dominant sacred tradition of Punjab: the Sikh sacred tradition or Sikh Culture and the Dera Culture of Punjab. I would like to argue here that these two sacred traditions have different conceptions of spiritual and also the group of people that access this sacred tradition for their spiritual needs are different. I have addressed the question of diversity and syncretism within deras.

It has generally been argued by many scholars that Dera mostly caters to the spiritual needs of the subaltern population of Punjab; whereas, the majority of the followers of Sikh Culture of the SGPC sort belong to the dominant Jat community. This proposition or thesis formulated by various scholars has been accepted or acknowledged and at the same time contested in this chapter. In the chapter, I have tried explaining that Sikh or Khalsa tradition in Punjab is embedded in the logic of modern state and its governmentality. It also concomitantly follows the logic of modern Newtonian science that deals in binaries; and it is the Biopower/governementality that is at work in the Sikh tradition which produces a modern Sikh subject who always defines himself and his identity through or via the logic of modern state and governmentality.

The notion of entangled spirituality and deras as the centre where such spirituality gets manifested would also be explored in this chapter. Syncretic Dera culture that symbolizes entagled spirituality in which people of different denominations shares a common space, along with the notion of Punjabiyat epitomizes the fuzziness of religion and spirituality which was the norm in pre-colonial Punjab. It has also been argued that such syncretic culture is also a part of the collective consciousness of Punjab as a region.

The diversity of deras and its internal differentiation has been highlighted to argue against the proposition or hypothesis that treats deras as a monolithic tradition. The chapter also uses the analogy of political and civil society for Dera and Sikh Culture of Punjab, in which the dera tradition is the domain of informal spirituality and the Sikh tradition is the domain of institutionalized and formal spirituality which acts as the space of political religion. The chapter is also looking at the new phenomenon of identity assertion of some deras; wherein this phenomenon is looked as a ramification of the crisis of the state in Punjab; and the work of modern governmentality/biopower which is continuously transforming the Dera from a spiritual space to governmentalized/political space.

Governmentality and the Spiritual traditions

Before elucidating or understanding the difference between Sikh and Dera culture of Punjab, it becomes vital for us to understand the history of modern governmnetality in India .It goes without saying that the modern state took shape during the colonial regime in India. The Sikh religion is a unique religion in the sense that it developed under the controlling technique of colonial state and the modern governmenatlity has produced a modern Sikh subject. The logic of the colonial state is replicated or passed on in post colonial state and to understand the colonial state and its power we first need to comprehend the transformation or replacement of fuzzy communities with enumerated ones (numerical description of communities as Bernard Cohn calls it). It depicted not only the way in which the colonial state attempted to 'know' and subsequently govern the colonized, but it also affected in important ways the understanding of the masses about themselves.

Sudipta Kaviraj has also pointed out, that the fuzziness of the communities did not require its members to ask how many of them there were in the world, and this numerical description of the colonized – their classification into specific religious or caste communities did not reside exclusively in the colonial imagination. It also shaped in turn the mobilization of the masses seeking representation in the state domain as belonging to particular religion, therefore the technique of enumeration also shaped the politics of

representation along religious, caste and community lines. This transformation from a fuzzy into an enumerated community was the reaffirmation of the colonial attempts to define the colonized in terms different from them.

Colonial modernity has brought this technique of enumeration i.e. the transformation/metamorphosis of an approximate, tentative conception of the social world into the quintessential modern vision of mapped and certain identities. Identities of majority/minority got constructed through censuses, giving the majority a sense of "permanent menace" and minorities "permanent helplessness"[56] –what Bernard Cohn calls the "process of objectification of communities", and it had incalculably far reaching consequences for the making and remaking of political identity, including religious ones.[57] Communities used to be "fuzzy" and not "enumerated" with obscure boundaries of spatial and geographical distribution, and with unclear and uncertain numbers of people (and so modern collective political action was not possible which is "an important characteristic of modern politics"), and vague boundaries for language dialects, and "Political disputes are less likely to be of acute nature in any case when the boundary between the self and the other is obscure."[58]

This transformation of fuzzy self into an enumerated one also reflects or manifests the transformation of a fuzzy, plural self of pre modern times into a unified modern self. It has also been argued that the concept of 'religion' in the post colonial world was an imported category imposed upon indigenous societies by the colonizing power. The colonial state facilitated the imagination of collective indigenous identities, including the Indian nation, through the introduction of modern scientific technique of classification

[56]Sudipta, Kaviraj, *Religion, Politics and Modernity,* Staffordshire: Paper presented at School of Arts, (University of Staffordshire, 24 March 1992), 4.

[57]Bernard, Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays,* (Delhi: Oxford University Press 1987).

[58] Mongrel,"Sudipta Kaviraj. Religion, Politics and Modernity," Notes on Scholarly books (blog), May 9, 2009, http://notesonscholarlybooks.blogspot.com/2009/05/sudipta-kaviraj-religion-politics-and.html.

and enumeration that transforms the political scene of South Asia and continues to shape its politics even today in post colonial era. The introduction of the census in particular transformed previously fuzzy into enumerated communities, it has also been argued that traditional Indian society was characterized by the coexistence of a plethora of a potentially contradictory identities as seen through the modern colonial lens, meaning complexities were lost in the process of categorization. In the construction of census operation was the creation of social categories by which India was ordered for administrative purposes.

The census objectified religious, social and cultural differences, the categories of religion and caste were seen as homogenous and mutually exclusive and it was deemed as irrational for someone to claim to be both Sikh and Hindu at the same time and to profess both as one's religious affiliation after objectification and classification through census and social mapping. Enumeration facilitated the transformation of local caste or ethno-religious into national political communities.

Local communities were mapped through the technique of enumeration , the term 'Sikh' and 'Hindu' lost much of their religious and philosophical significance and became markers of distinct, homogenous and potentially conflict driven identities. At an all India level the formation of Hindu Mahasabha or Arya Samaj and Akali Dal or Singh Sabha Movement was the culmination of process initiated by the colonial state. In short, this enumeration, contributed immensely to the thinning out of religious identities by encouraging identification on the basis of loosely defined yet mutually exclusive categories. The enumeration of these categories through the census further facilitated the politicization of religious identities and it can be asserted that the specter or phantom of the colonial state still haunts modern India or south Asia in the form of essentialized religious identities.

This transformation that was initiated by the colonial state was guided by an undercurrent of modern Newtonian Science. The argument developed in the first chapter can be applied here in the second one; i.e. modern state and Modern social science and

especially the discipline like anthropology that was used by the colonial state to map indigenous communities was following the logic of constructing binary opposites. This logic of binary construction along with sharp compartmentalization or categorization was a byproduct of modern thinking that has its origin in the modern Newtonian science. This logic was infused in the Indic religious/spiritual traditions by the process of modern governmentality through the formation of an individualized exclusive religious subject. In other words, modern Sikh identity that got constructed in the 19th century was very much a culmination of the process through which modern state constructed exclusive identities and also inextricably a part of the logic of modern Newtonian science.

Michel Foucault has also explained the use of census and other techniques of enumeration by political regimes from the seventeenth century onward. Indeed, Foucault and thinkers like David Scott have observed and explained that the modern state and the very idea of countable population-were historical co-production, based similaraly on distinctly modern construction of governance, territory and citizenship. Census is the main techniques identified by Foucault as lying at the heart of modern governmentality.[59]Foucault has also argued that tied up with this i.e. with the state are the subject or study of statistics, methods of classification and surveillance that remain essential instrument of every modern state.

After elucidating the technique of modern governance and colonial state it becomes important or extremely crucial to understand, how the modern Sikh identity of Sikh subject first came into being. To understand it we have to deploy the method of genealogy as a historical technique to understand modern Sikh culture. Scholars like Harjot Oberoi have used this method and has identified british rule and colonial encounter as the major precipitant of the move towards Khalsa hegemony that is the hegemonic identity Sikh Fundamentalists subscribes to is the identity constructed by the modern colonial state , "What an individual did with his life, the values that guided him

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[59]Michel, Foucault,"*Governmentality*"*in the Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

in this universe, the cultural equipment through which he interpreted daily experiences, the control over land, labour, and patronage, and the distribution of power was determined not so much by the framework of a single religious community but by what biradari or zat a person belonged to".[60] In turn, "membership of zat and biradari not only cut across religious divisions, it brought members of various religions together in and through the practices of everyday life".[61]In sum, Sikhs moved in and out of identities: village, cults, caste, lineage, or tradition. There was no single source of authority, and multiple definitions of what it means to be a Sikh competed with each other.

Harjot Oberoi identifies British rule and the colonial encounter as the major cause and reason for the move towards Khalsa hegemony in the Sikh worldview or lifeworld. The colonial state constructed ethnic categories in order to classify and administer populations, extract revenue, and govern populations. In the process it created taxonomies that served to join different Sikh traditions into one collective and general identity. For example, the British decided that only the identity of the Khalsa was authentic to the Sikh tradition and those other identities were either spurious or Hindu accretions. The impact of this and related colonial practices was indeed great: for instance, all Sikhs who entered the army had to undergo baptism and adopt the five sacred symbols even if they did not belong to the Khalsa tradition. Oberoi seems to suggest that in order to benefit from the opportunities provided by the colonial state, one had to belong to the right identity group within the Sikh community. This in a major way led to the homogenisation of otherwise plural identities and to the consolidation of Khalsa identity within the Sikh community.

Oberoi's argument is much more comprehensive and sophisticated than other studies on the making of modern identities in India. What is important is the central role

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[60] Harjot, Oberoi: *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition,* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994),.418-419.

[61] Ibid.

that Oberoi gives to the practices of the colonial state and colonial governmentality or modern governmentality. These were to prove crucial because they propelled other moves, such as the move made by sub-elites to forge an identity that would help them in their search for power within the structures of opportunities provided by the colonial state. For instance, the grant of collective goods, such as a quota for the Sikhs in the Indian army on the grounds that the Sikhs constituted a 'martial race', was linked to colonial practices of ethnic categorization, stereotyping, and mapping. Thus these practices generated both the homogenization and the politicization of Sikh identity.

The question of Dera Tradition or culture in Punjab can be framed by using the analogy of 'political society'; in other word the Deras of Punjab constitutes or inherits the characteristics of political society, like political society the deras are also outside the domain of legality i.e. the followers of dera does not subscribe to any of the religious identity conferred by the state .The informal and the non governmentalized spiritual space that Dera is makes it the 'political society' of spiritual domain and the Sikh tradition the civil society or the legal spiritual domain. By using the analogy of political society for Dera the intent is to frame the subaltern spiritual question in a more popular and tangible category. Partha chatterjee creates a binary of political /civil society, in which the domain of political society is often marked by the stamp of illegality, nevertheless contributes to the immense democratic churning that characterizes much of the third world[62]

Partha Chatterjee, following Foucault's conception of 'governmentalization of the state', argues that in contemporary regime of power, enlightenment ideas of citizenship have been substituted by the concept of 'population' and 'instrumentalization' of cost and benefit. Dera culture unlike Sikh tradition does not follow the 'bureaucratic- rational' impulses of the state and definition or self definition through identity assertion was not seen in the prominent deras of Punjab till recent past.

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[62]Nissim Mannathukkaren, 'The poverty of political society : Partha chaterjee and people's plan campaign in kerala, India,' *Thirld World Quarterly* 31,no.2:17

The proposition that one is trying to make here is that the sacred tradition which are 'organic entities', are not endemic to any particular society i.e. It has universal character and undergoes a radical metamorphosis with the technique or the logic of modernity/ modern state. Our theoretical starting point is the observation that modern state has a tendency towards homogenization and categorization of its population and the same has happened in the case of Punjab. The heterogeneity and fuzziness of the community especially Sikh community got obliterated under the impact of modernity and modern state, the diversity of the sacred tradition which is the hallmark of pre modern Punjab and which also formed the basis of the syncretic and plural culture of the region got transformed into a monolithic, ossified and reified/institutionalized religious groups and this process has inbuilt exclusionary traits. This process in a way gets manifested or reflected in the exclusionary character of Sikh religion in contemporary Punjab, in fact the very question of asking an individual in pre colonial or pre modern Punjab if he was a Sikh, Hindu or a Muslim was at an epistemological level quite absurd.

The more relevant question would have been what sacred tradition he belonged to, this transformation from a fuzzy in to an enumerated, unified and ossified self paved the way for a sort of fundamentalism that culminated in Punjab crisis and in the demand for a separate Sikh homeland i.e. in the demand for khalistani. On the other hand Deras in Punjab which are still the bastion of syncretic culture and fuzzy tradition and in which entangled spirituality or non-modern spirituality gets manifested acted as a bulwark against fundamentalist forces and this becomes clear with the violent clash between Akali groups and Dera followers in Punjab. It is a fact that bhindrawala has very categorically argued in his speeches that he would consider an orthodox Hindu to be his brother but would consider a heterodox and a syncretic sect like the Nirankaris as heretics and blasphemous[63]. This is an example or manifestation of the modernist undertone or undercurrent in the speeches of fundmantalist figures like Jarnail Singh bhindranwala

[63] Jarnail Singh Bhindrawnale, Interview dated February 22, 1984 quoted from Harjinder singh Reflection on 1984 (2014: 44) for *Struggle justice, speeches and conversation of jarnail singh Bhindranwale*, Ohio.

who believes in constructing "binaries" and by doing that are in tune or not at odds with the fundamentals of modernity/modern state and the undercurrent of the modern state which is the modern Newtonian science.

The other most vital component in this debate between Dera and Sikh Sacred tradition is the transformation of the very notion of religion under the impact of modernity or modern nation state, this transformation manifests itself in the form of the transition from religion as faith to religion as ideology and this religion as ideology that is at work in fundamentalist discourse. Religion as faith, which is by definition non-monolithic and operationally plural and also incorporates an idea of self which is fluid, on the other hand in the case of region as ideology the very idea of fluid self or fluid definition of self is seen as inimical to the modern state[64]. Hence fluidity and fuzziness as the central tenet is repudiated completely in reified/ institutionalized , organized religious groups which is not the case with Dera culture of Punjab which despite so many other problems has remained faith based and fluid institutions with porous or fuzzy boundaries.

Deras of Punjab caters to the spiritual needs of the subaltern masses of rural Punjab and there are multiple reasons why subaltern groups forms the back bone of Deras, one reason is of course the upper caste exclusivist high culture of organized religion like Sikhism, but the other important reason is that Deras like Radha soami and Sufi deras acts as an embodiment of the plural and eclectic character of Punjab, this eclecticism and syncretism which is a hallmark of rural sacred tradition in which there is no notion of "counter religion" goes well with rural subaltern masses for whom religious experience is spiritual and spirituality is not an instrument for political gain, therefore religion or spirituality for them is not an ideology.

Dera culture unlike Sikh tradition does not follow the 'bureaucratic- rational' impulses of the state and the urge for defining one's tradition or self definition through

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[64]Ashis, Nandy *"An Anti Secularist Manifesto"* India International Centre Quarterly 22(1). India International Centre: 35-64. http//www. Jstor.org/stable/23003710

identity assertion was not seen in the prominent Deras of Punjab till recent past. But the things have started changing especially after the crisis of state got deepened in Punjab, those deras that were predominately apolitical in nature and identity formation and assertion were not central to them, gradually became political in the sense that now these deras with a predominant dalit base have started asserting themselves and consequently they have started using the governmentalized and state given categories for defining themselves.

SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee), Akal Takht and identity driven Sikhism

The gurdwara is an institution intimately associated with Sikh identity.To understand gurdwara simply as a 'religious' space would dissociate it from the political function that it performs. It would also fail to capture the political undertone of the institution like the SGPC. Indeed, it is often asserted that Sikhs constitute a distinct religious-cum-political community and the issue of Sikh identity is inextricably linked to Sikh institutions and it is the SGPC and Akal Takht that decides who can be considered a 'Sikh' and who is a Non- Sikh. Historically speaking the institutionalization of 'Sikhi' started with the conceptualization of 'Miri' and 'Piri' the 'Spiritual' and 'temporal' or 'material' authority by the Sixth Guru Hargobind. The conceptualization of Political Sikhism or Sikhism in the politico-religious sense also started with Miri-Piri. The culmination of that is seen in the Singh Sabha Movement and Gurdwara Reform movement of late 19th and early 20th century, when the institutionalization of 'Sikhi' reached its Zenith and with this the Sikh identity became freezed and ossified and the transformation of 'Sikhi' to 'Sikhism' (the religion in the strict sense of the word) and with politics as its undercurrent gets completed.

The Tat khalsa framed Sikh 'religion' in terms of belief, doctrine and exclusivity and articulated an exclusive Sikh identity in the institutions of 'Guru, Granth, and Gurdwara'. These central institutions were codified in the Sikh Rehat Maryada. The

SGPC and other central institutions are spaces in which a particular kind of 'Sikh' identity is idealized and i.e. the Khalsa Sikh identity. The Gurdwara Reform Act (1925) enumerated Sikhs and ossified their identity and turned all gurdwaras and shrines in Punjab under the authority of the newly established institution, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).We need to understand that SGPC which is called as the 'Sikh Parliament' was formed by the Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925 and because of the very fact that it was formed by an act of legislation and the exclusivity that law brings in and the subject that the Law creates in the Foucaldian sense is applicable to SGPC and its functioning. This particular act is the precise reason I have used the term 'governmentalized' for 'Sikh' tradition. The Sikh Rehat Maryada very clearly enunciates 'Sikh identity' and marginalizes any other form of Sikh articulation which can compete with the dominant or mainstream articulation of being a Sikh.

The marginalization of Sehajdhari Sikhs (A Sehajdhari Sikh is a loose definition for those who may participate in Sikh operative practices but not subscribe to the orthodox ideology). They can be defined as Sikhs who have not been baptized by taking Amrit, do not follow the Khalsa codes of conduct, but may participate in Sikh devotional practice and subscribe to its belief system, thus may be defined as "slowly adopting")[65] from SGPC functioning and taking away the voting rights of Sehajdharis in the SGPC election is a manifestation of the marginalization that stems from Sikh Gurdwara Act and its institutionalization in the form of SGPC(Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee).

It is pertinent to mention here the case of Rababi tradition to highlight the syncretic inclusivity of early Sikhi and also the exclusivity that emanated with Gurdwara Reform Act (1925), a manifestation of modern Sikhism. Rababi tradition owes its origin to Bhai Mardana, who was a Muslim friend and companion of Guru Nanak in his Udasis (travels).Bhai Mardana used to play rabab, the musical instrument to sing the hymns of

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[65] Niranjan Kaur Khalsa, "The Renasissance of Sikh Devotional Music Memory, Identity,Orthopraxy" (PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 2014), 68.

Guru Nanak. His descendents also used to perform kirtan in the inner sanctum of Darbar sahib (Golden Temple) till Gurudwara Reform Act got implemented. Sikh purifying agenda in the form of Gurdwara Act and Sikh Rehat Maryada (Sikh code of conduct) defined a normative Sikh identity based on khalsa orthodoxy.

This act removed Sehajdhari Sikhs and Udasis from the management of gurdwara and Sikh Rehat Maryada established normative code of conduct for the performance of Gurbani kirtan, In article V Article VI it very categorically states that "Sangat vich Gurbani Kirtan keval Sikh hi kar sakde hain"(Only khalsa Amritdhari Sikhs can perform kirtan in the Sangat).[66]This commandment along with SGPC decrees that only Amritdhari Khalsa Sikhs can perform kirtan at historical gurdwara including Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) signifies a shift in the religious world view of Sikhs. The rabbis and other non – khalsa Sikhs have been completely marginalized from the Sikh public sphere and this has happed because of the politicization and ossification of religious boundaries and due to the construction of a nationalized Sikhi that can accommodate itself in the national politics of independent post-colonial state.

In her brilliant paper "Sikh/Muslim Bhai- Bhai? Towards a social history of the rababi tradition of Shabad Kirtan", Navtej kaur Purewal discerns the convoluted disjuncture between Social practice or tradition and text driven religious boundaries, the case of rababis signifies a mode of "boundary crossing between identities not constrained by national or religious ideologies"[67] in other words it can be best defined as quintessential of ' religion as faith working over religion as ideology' as formulated by Ashis Nandy. The nationalist religious agenda, while attempting to protect Sikh identity,

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[66] http://Sgpc.net/rahit_maryada/Section_three_chap_five.html

[67] Navtej Kaur Purewal, "Sikh/Muslim Bhai – Bhai ? Towards a Social history of the Rababi tradition of Shabad Kirtan". *Sikh Formation: Religion, Culture, Theory* .7(3).

at the same time continues a "cultural amnesia of difference" purging the discrete histories and identities in the Sikh tradition into a continuous narrative as Sikhism.[68]

Rababi tradition and its marginalization in the larger Modernist Sikh tradition can be illustrated with example of Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand and Ghulam Hussain rababis (descendent of Bhai Mardana)born in Amritsar and forced to migrate to Lahore during partition. When an interview of Ghulam Hussain the nephew of Bhai Chand was taken recently he replied poignantly that we were Muslims, therefore we had to leave. It did not matter if we were *rababi*. What mattered was our Muslim identity. That became our only identity. In fact, a couple of our *rubabi* even lost their lives during the riots. My father-in-law, Bhai Moti, was one of them. He used to play *tabla* at a *gurdwara* in Patiala. Another *rababi* who used to perform at Guru Amardas' *gurdwara* at Goindwal was also killed.He continued, "My *chacha*, Bhai Chand, was a *rababi* at the Golden Temple. He had three houses in Amritsar, all of which were three storeys high. He was a millionaire at that time. He used to live in *Bhaiyyon ki gali*, named after the *rubabi* family. He became a pauper in Pakistan."

Explaining his Sikh heritage, Hussain said his family's ancestral *gurdwara* was Siyachal Sahib, which lies between Lahore and Amritsar. His father was a *gyani* — one who leads the congregation in prayer — who also gave lectures on Sikhism."My father was the *gadi nasheen* of the *rababi* seat there, which meant he would have taken over his position finally". But Partition changed all that. He says "Not only did we lose our money, we also lost our profession," Hussain said. "While we knew the [Guru] Granth by heart, we knew nothing about being Muslim, besides the *kalma*. The Muslims had no interest in our profession. Thus, we began doing odd jobs — selling *samosa*, *kheer*, meat. "However, Hussain soon started singing *qawwali*, the devotional Sufi music."In those

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[68] Niranjan Kaur Khalsa, "The Renasissance of Sikh Devotional Music Memory,Identity,Orthopraxy"(PhD thesis, University of Michigan,2014),71.

early days, He explains how he struggled because his Urdu pronunciation was weak. He couldn't even read the script, having been trained in Gurmukhi script.[69]"

He further elaborates on the imbrications of Sufi and Sikh tradition or the similarity between Kirtan and Qawwali by asserting that, "There is an old Punjabi saying — a hundred wise men sitting together will end up saying the same thing, while in a group of a hundred fools each one will say a different thing. Bulleh Shah reiterated what Nanak said. Guru Arjan's and Sultan Bahu's message is the same as that of Shah Hussain. Their *kalam* overlaps. In fact, he said he would go to the extent of saying that Guru Nanak elucidated or expounded the Quran. Thus, according to him, *qawwali* and *kirtan* are part of the same tradition."[70]

The words expressed by rababi Ghulam Hussain signify the syncretic pre-modern religiosity/spirituality of Punjab which got lost with ossification of religious boundaries. Bhai Ghulam visited Amritsar in 2005 and he expressed his desire of performing Kirtan at Darbar Sahib or Harmindar Sahib (Golden temple) but he didn't get the permission because now according to Sikh Rehat Maryada (Sikh Religious living or Sikh code of conduct) only an Amritdhari Khalsa Sikh can perform kirtan at the inner sanctum of Golden temple. This example clearly shows the exclusion and marginalization of non-khalsa tradition within the larger Sikh tradition. Expunging the diversity and plurality of Sikh tradition has been the prime motive of modernist reform movement like Singh Sabha and Gurdwara Reform Act and this has marked the end of syncretism in the Sikh faith or tradition. This example also very clearly signifies how the modernist and statist or Newtonian logic works i.e. it works by creating or constructing sharp boundaries within faiths and by obliterating diversity and fuzziness of spiritual/religious tradition.

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[69] Haroon Khalid, "Lost in Partition, the Sikh-Muslim Connection comes alive in the tales of Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana."*Dawn*, April 22, 2018 Accessed 23 April, 2018.http://www.dawn.com/news/1402759.

[70] Ibid.

The institutionalization and centralization of Sikh Spiritual tradition has not only marginalized sehajdharis and rababis but all other Sikh Sects like Nirankaris, Udasis , Nirmalas, Rababis etc and concretized Sikh identity only as Khalsa identity, the only way of being Sikh. Post colonial scholars like Partha chatterjee has praised institutions like SGPC as an example of the kind of "representative public institutions and practices"[71] that can go hand in hand with minority mobilization within a strategic politics of toleration. Partha chatterjee has praised SGPC also because it was one of the first legally constituted public bodies in colonial India for which the principle of Universal suffrage was recognized. But this democratic sort of reform through legality in the form of SGPC and Sikh Act in my view is the part of the problem because of the reason mentioned above i.e. regarding the relation of law with the construction of a subject and the exclusivity that stems from it.

Harjot Oberoi, on the other hand has argued against such formulation, noting that groups claiming to represent religious and other minorities regularly allies or colludes with State in suppressing rights as happened within the Gurdwara Reform movement in the 1920s, when one Sikh group, the Babbar Akalis, sought an alternative vision of Sikh community in which economic justice as the central belief or principle of the community was asserted and this led to the marginalization or ostracization of the Babbar Akalis from the Sikh fold.[72]

Partha chatterjee in his understanding praises communities and sees them as engaged in battles with an oppressive state and argues in support of SGPC as a manifestation of the democratic impulse within India's religious minorities In my view Chaterjee is oblivious to the fact of Babbar Akalis who unlike Akalis were not solely interested in redistribution of political power but were arguing for radical redefinition of

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[71] Partha chatterjee ,"*Religious Minorities and the Secular State: Reflections on an Indian Impasse*", Public culture 8, 1(1995):11-39.

[72] Harjot Oberoi, "*What has a whale got to do with it? A tale of Pogrom and Biblical Allegories*" in Christopher Shackles, Gurharpal Singh and Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair (eds) *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity* (Richmond , Uk: Curzon Press,2001) .186-206.

political community that included economic justice. A hegemonic discourse of homogeneity was challenged by a counter group that took cognizance of the internal differences: social, economic and political. And finally the interest of the colonial state and those of the moderate Akalis coincided resulting in SGPC and Sikh Act legislation which constructed a uniform hegemonic Sikh identity marginalizing other ways of being Sikh apart from the Khalsa way, and that also marked the end of Syncretism in the Sikh tradition.

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee or SGPC has been both criticized and praised in its role as central and fundamental religious as well as political body within the Sikh Community since its inception, with some supporting and advocating for a less comprehensive and less political space for the organization, and others arguing and supporting a more thorough control of SGPC over the Sikh community and for the extension of its authority and control outside of its present domain. SGPC along with Shiromani Akali Dal marked the culmination of political Sikhism that was started with Singh Sabha Movement of late 19th century that created a hegemonic Political Sikh identity which was nothing else apart from the Tat Khalsa identity with no space for internal differentiation, Plurality, fluidity and syncretism.

Dera, Punjabiyat and Diversity

Deras of Punjab are in no way a new phenomenon, they are part of the Punjabi culture since medieval times. Dera is a generic term for the centre or camp of a saintly figure. Its origin in Punjab could be traced back to the Nath tradition of Gorak Nath. Deras substantially differs from each other in terms of various traditions, beliefs and practices. Many scholars have written articles and done some fieldwork on the question of thriving and popularity of deras in contemporary Punjab. Many of them have come to the same conclusion that the recent upsurge in the growth of deras can be attributed to the question of identity assertion of dalits in Punjab. Political scientist and Sociologists such as Ronki Ram, Ashutosh kumar and Surinder S Jhodka and even the documentary film

makers like Ajay Bhardwaj, who has produced a brilliant trilogy on Sufism and Sufi deras in Punjab, also asserts the same relationship between deras and caste.

The major problem with this approach that most scholars are undertaking on the question of Deras is that it falls into the binary of caste and class, which albeit is very significant beyond doubt , but cannot account for the reason why so many non-Dalits visits these deras, especially   the Sufi deras and engages in saint veneration. And, therefore, I think the question of caste and dalit assertion is not the defining element or the core element for the popularity of these deras in Punjab as highlighted by many scholars and agreed upon by Ajay bhardwaj in his documentary films like Kitte Mil ve Mahi(where the twain shall meet) and Milange babe rattan de Mele tey (Let's Meet at Baba Ratan's Fair).

I think the defining or the core element of these centres/ deras in Punjab is the notion of popular religiosity of Saint Veneration / Syncretism / Panthic dimension of religion in Punjab. I do understand that these three ideas are different; however despite the difference of these ideas or techniques towards the question of religiosity or spirituality they still constitute the vital part of the collective consciousness of Punjabi society and are deeply embedded in the Punjabi psyche. These ideas are also quite closely related to the notion of Punjabiyat. I think Punjabiyat which is a shared way of life as argued by Ajay Bhardwaj, Madan Gopal Singh and others got marginalized after partition and were replaced by identity discourse of nation-states. Ajay Bhardwaj in his documentary argues that this shared way of life has not been completely obliterated and gets manifested in the language and memories of an average Punjabi. I think the argument of Ajay Bhardwaj corroborates our proposition that these shrines and deras especially the Sufi one are popular because they manifests and reflects Punjabiyat, which is a shared way of life and also part of the collective consciousness of Punjab.

In Ajay Bhardwaj's word these shrines reflects a universe of cultural co-existence, where monolithic religious boundaries and identities of 'Hindu', 'Sikh' and 'Mulsim' constructed in the project of nation-state not only gets blurred but also gets

subverted in the most imaginative manner. This is nothing but Punjabiyat manifesting in the everday life of a common Punjabi and this constitutes the central element in Sufi Deras, which has been neglected in the study of deras. Though bhardwaj in his documentary talks about Punjabiyat and how it manifests in the everday life of an average Punjabi, but does not see it as a defining element or the core element responsible for the popularity of deras. I think this is the only problem with his documentary and idea, because for him the phenomenon of dera and especially Sufi dera is linked with Dalit idenitity and assertion.I think this argument of deras and dalit identity assertion is plausible, but presents us the half-picture of the phenomenon, because Sufi deras also represents Punjabiyat, which cannot be reduced to any caste or religion as argued by bhardwaj himself, hence I think it is the Punjabiyat and not any identity discourse which is the core or defining element in the deras and especially the Sufi ones.

The idea of panthic dimension of religion also needs special focus here, the category of Panthic dimension of religion which is different from the Kismetic, Dharmic and Quamic dimension is composed by Roger Ballard. These four dimensions of religion are peculiar to Punjab and Punjabi religion. Panthic dimension of religion signifies an informal sort of spiritual relation between the master and the disciple. The term panth is of course a familiar term in vernacular Punjabi, where it is used to identify those who follow a particular spiritual teacher or Guru/Pir as in the case of Nanak-Panthi, Kabir-Panthi and so forth. The panthic dimension of religion in Punjab does not constitute a separate religion in fact this dimension of religion was not interested in creating/ constructing new religious dogmas, but was only primarily concerned with gaining Gnostic or Mystical experience and that made the panthic dimension of religion the most active feature of the popular Punjabi religion.

It can be argued that the spiritual dimension of Punjabi religion can be regarded as the manifestation of the panthic tradition in which Sufi Islam was a major source of inspiration. Scholars like Roger Ballard argues that Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's qawwalis can be regarded as a vivid contemporary representation of the original way in

which Baba Nanak originally taught, but that both are also the heirs of a tradition which stretches back to the dohas of Kabir and kalams of Baba Farid. However heretical such a suggestion may seem to those committed to contemporary essentialist understandings, it is nonetheless in tune with the sensibilities of Punjab's panthic tradition[73]. After all if Nanak were still with us to comment on current developments, it is not irrational to suggest that he would wish to add the phrase "koi na Sikh" to his popular saying "koi na Hindu, koi na Musulman".

Deras in Punjab as argued is not a new phenomenon but the upsurge and the popularity of some of the deras is unprecedented. Deras broadly can be divided into four categories, one is the identity driven dera that are inherently political in nature. Deras like the Dera Sachkhand Ballan or the Ravidasi Dera belongs to the first category. The second one is the institutional or well organized grand deras which strives to carve out a space of religion and act as a separate religion but still not driven by identity centric issues or politics and lacks some of the features of a religion for instance certainty or lack of fuzziness in the context of identity. One can include deras like the Radhasoami and Nirankaris in this category. Third is the informal non institutional deras especially the syncretic Sufi deras like the Dera Baba Murad shah in Nakodar. The work done by the scholars on the deras of Punjab has virtually ignored the third sort of deras and almost either focused on the identity based deras or the grand deras like the Radhasoamis.

The third category of deras despite being ubiquitous in Punjab lacks scholarly attention perhaps due to its ubiquity or may be due to its panthic/non political / spiritual character. Fourth category of dera are basically the Sikh Deras or those deras that were part of mainstream Sikh tradition previously but with time and political modernization or with the logic of modern Sikh religion got marginalized and eventually vanished from Sikh mainstream. Two most importantt dera or centres in this category are Udasi and Nirmala.

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[73] Roger Ballard, "Panth, kismet, Dharm te Quam , Continuity and Change in the four dimension of Punjabi Religion, In *Punjabi identity in Global Context*, ed. Pritam Singh and Shinder Singh Thandi (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 15.

I would like to argue that it is only this panthic dimension or character of these Sufi deras that makes them if not more then at least equally popular with other kind of deras. My proposition regarding the popularity of these Sufi/ Syncretic Deras stems from an understanding of the history of Punjab. As we know Punjab along with Sindh is one of the regions of the subcontinent where Brahamanical Hinduism never gained much strength and material culture or self-indulgence along with certain sort of asceticism remained prominent as a paradoxical scenario. [74] The notion of Guru- Bhakti or Piri Mureedi remained the dominant form in spiritual affairs of the punjabi masses.The Quamic or organized along with dharmic dimension of religion as formulated by Roger Ballard remained dormant till 19th century, though the things changed with the advent of colonialism and with the modern reform movements that were following the logic of Eurocentric modernity.

But despite all the efforts of quamic mobilization and instllation of dharmic and quamic dimension of religion over the panthic and the kismetic one that were more popular in Pre- modern Punjab, the latter dimension remained active though intermittently got latent due to many socio economic reasons but still remained a major feature of Punjabi religiosity. And Sufi deras's popularity even after partition and even after the virtual ethnic cleansing of Muslims from East Punjab can be attributed to the entrenchment that Sufi and bhakti tradition had in the collective psyche or consciousness of Punjabis of all caste, class and creed.

The work that has been done on deras of Punjab has primarily focused on the issue of the political economy of deras and the political sociology of deras, which has significant role in unearthing the social, political and economic aspect of deras, but it still has not been able to unravel the ubiquity of this phenomenon. As argued earlier Deras in

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[74] In Punjab and Sindh, Brahamanism or Brahamanical Hinduism as a tradition was not very strong. The Three prominent spiritual traditions in the medieval Punjab were the Nath Jogi tradition, Sufi tradition and Sikh tradtion or Nanak Panth as it was known at that time. Historians like Harjot Oberoi and Scholars like Yogesh Snehi have argued that there was continuous interaction between the three prominent tradition and followers of these traditions very often transcended their distinct boundaries.

Punjab are not monolithic in character but has highly diverse manifestation. The aspect of diversity of deras has been missed by many scholars precisely because most of them have not been able to differentiate identity driven political deras from spiritual and more grounded or organic village based small deras.

Ubiquity of Dera phenomenon: Theological equivalence and syncretism

One of the main reasons for the popularity and ubiquity of deras that has been ignored by many scholars is their syncretic belief system of accommodation. Dera of all sorts unlike Sikh institutions reflects a character that makes it more accommodative in terms of belief system and more syncretic in terms of fusion of different ideas and beliefs. Though the term syncretism can carry many connotations but here I am using it more as an attitude rather than a fusion of belief system as used by Anshu Malhotra. Malhotra in her essay named 'Panths and Piety in the Nineteenth century' propounds that syncretism is not an amalgamated tool that carries proportionate parts of different religious traditions. But rather it should be understood in terms of attitude that allows a range of interpretive plausibility, create spaces where cultural conversation happen.[75]

Syncretism was a major force in the Santan Sikh tradition which was predominant before 20th century as argued by Harjot Oberoi. With the final replacement of Sanatan Sikhism with the Tat Khalsa one has also replaced syncretism or we shall the possibilities of syncretism with homogeneity and fundamentalism. In my understanding one of the reasons for the possibility of syncretism in many Deras apart from its non-modernist character whether in terms of its attitude towards identity of its believers or towards accommodation of multifarious ideas, is the philosophy of Wahdat al-Wujud. The Sufi Philosophy of Wahdat al –Wujud has strong resonance with Advaita Vedanta and both the philosophies propounds ontological monism or non-duality between creation and the

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[75] Anshu Malhotra," Panths and Piety in the Nineteenth Century: The Gulabdasis of Punjab", in *Punjab Reconsidered History, Culture and Practice* (New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 2012), 215.

creator or in other words the dichotomy between the god and the mortal that is a given norm in many organized religions and that is also a strong component of modernity is not only questioned in these philosophies, but gets completely decimated. In my view because both Wahdat al -wujud and Advaita Vedanta are deeply embedded in Punjabi consciousness/psyche   and because many deras especially Sufi ones propagates these ideas and that can attributed as the major reason for the popularity and ubiquity of these centre/ deras in Punjab.

Ajay bhardwaj has also very lucidly shown the abovementioned relation and the bond that Punjab has with these ideas in his documentary Milange Babe Ratan de Mele te (Let's Meet at Baba Ratan's Fair), The lead character Machandar Khan Miskeen, in his documentary is visually (mis)read as a Sikh, his utterances those of a poet, his laughter of a faqir. His opening words set the scene of a world in which those who have social value place no value in God. He propounds that who is this God that is neglected? Machandar goes on to tell us in a mixture of Vedanta/ Wahdat al- Wujud philosophy that it is none other than our fellow beings and that this God, resides in us all or in all of us. He conveys the idea of Bhai Daya Singh who was a Sikh that look at yourself, if you want to see the form of Ghafoor(Allah), and the creation is within the creator and the creator within creation and human beings are made of the creator's light.[76] In the subsequent part of the movie Machander Miskeen says that Bhai Daya Singh also supported the doctrine of Anal Haq or Ana-al Haq (I am the truth or I am God as proclaimed by Persian Sufi Mansur Al-Hallaj).[77] This invocation of Bhai Daya Singh who was Sikh by Miskeen to embrace Sufi ideas corroborates the notion of syncretsim and theological equivalence as the reason for the ubiquity and prominence of such deras and centres. Machander Miskeen further goes on to argue that God does not live in temples or Mosques, and then to tell us, that God is waiting to be realized in all of us.

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[76] Ajayunmukt, "Trailer: Milange Babey Ratan De Mele Te/ Let's Meet at Baba Ratan's Fair (2012): Ajay Bhardwaj". *YouTube* video, 3:35, Sep 3 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DAxT7C5Pysg.

[77] Ibid.

Indeed, he tells the story of Majnu, a figure from a popular folk ballad, being called by a messenger of Allah to meet him, Majnu refuses to go, saying: "Send me Laila and I will fall in love with her and through that find Allah!"[78] Exactly these phrases with respect to popular folk lore are used and sung by many sufi singers on many dargahs and deras in punjab during Qawwali's, and in fact these ideas are almost ubiquitous and sung by popular folk singers in deras and this corroborates our proposition regarding the relation between Sufi Deras, the philosophy of Wahdat al- Wujud/Advaita Vedanta and Punjabi collective consciousness/psyche. This example also validates our proposition that certain sort of collective consciousness are integral part of certain regions and are endemic to those regions, Sufi consciousness and Guru- Bhakti along with the philosophy mentioned above is part of collective consciousness of Punjab and many deras in Punjab symbolizes that fuzzy collective consciousness.

To make things more lucid I would like to give the example of such Sufi dera in the doaba region of East Punjab, the name of dera is shrine is Dera Baba Murad Shah located in Nakodar in district Jalandhar. The interesting anecdote of this dera illustrates the syncretic and catholic character of this shrine. The shrine is dedicated to a Qadri saints Sher Shah, Baba Murad Shah, Baba Laddi Shah and Baba Ami Chand. According to the popular anecdote Sain sher shah was a prominent Muslim Sufi saint of the nakodar and Vidyasagar bhalla a Hindu khatri belonging to the merchant caste was his famous disciple.

When partition of the subcontinent happened Sher shah was being coerced by his family to move to Pakistan the newly created state for the Muslims, but he refused, then

[78] Virender Kalra, 'Let's Meet –On Ajay bhardawaj's 'Milange Babe Ratan de Mele Te', Review of Milange Babe Ratan de Mele te(Let's Meet at Baba Ratan's Fair), 2012 by Ajay Bhardwaj, apnaorg.com/article/virender/index.shtml.

after under tremendous pressure he was forced to move away from his beloved nakodar city and his student Vidyasagar Bhalla. While moving away from his Murid(disciple) and city, Sher Shah gave his position to his Hindu Murid and bestowed upon him the capacity to fulfill all the wishes of the people and changed his name from Vidyasagar to Murad (One who fullfills people's wishes).And it is from there the centre got its name 'Dera Baba Murad Shah', this anecdote might seem a very ordinary story to many, but with insight we can decipher the underlying syncretic and plural message of such stories.

At the entrance of the dargah/dera Murad Shah one easily find the symbols of the dominant sacred traditions. These religious symbols include the 'crescent moon and the star', '786' (Islamic) on the one side and 'Ek oankar' (Sikhism), 'Om' (Hinduism), 'Cross' (Christian) in the centre. This combination of multiple religious Symbols reflect upon the unitary principles of the major religious traditions. One reductionist way to understand the representation of these symbols at such shrine could be indeed to link them to the political economy of the sacred centre, to the clientele of the shrine. However, it is difficult to deny that such spaces also articulate an ideology of liberal discourse of the Chisti and Qadri Sufi mysticism and dissent the dominant religious discourse.

I would like to mention that Gurdas Mann the famous folk singer of Punjab is now the chairman of Dera Baba Murad shah. He belongs to the dominant jatt caste of Punjab and he has also been a member and murid of so many other Sufi deras. This particular example of Gurdas Mann shows that people of all caste and class become part of the dera and it is highly unlikely that deras and especially Sufi deras of Punjab are only a space for the dalit community and dalit assertion. I am not denying that the importance of caste and class in the functioning of Sufi deras but reducing this phenomenon to the binaries of class and caste would not be quite beneficial in understanding the immense popularity and ubiquity of these shrines which cuts across class, caste and gender categories.

The Dera of Baba Murad Shah highlighted above is a perfect example of the Kismetic and panthic dimension of religion functioning at the ground level. Kismetic because these shrines are seen as centres/ places where wishes of people gets fulfilled and where sorcery and magic is performed by the Pir and where the Pir takes away all the problems of his Murid and with this Murid's faith on his Pir gets more entrenched. One can argue that these sorts of shrines are the bastions of superstition in Punjab, which is true up to a certain extent but then the kismetic dimension of religion as argued by Roger Ballard is all about these things and despite being the centre where these practices are promoted, the importance of these centres in contemporary Indian Punjab cannot be undermined. This is only due to the fact that these centres/deras /shrines should be seen as a unique space where shared culture and the idea of shared space that is the epitome of Punjabiyat plays itself out or remains intact even during the time when the quamic dimension of religious mobilization along the communal line is the dominant form of religiosity.

One way to look at the Sufi deras like Dera Baba Murad Shah is to look at the political economy of the dera. The question of land, money and power becomes crucial in the functioning of all sorts of deras. It has been argued by many that deras of all sorts acts as power centres in Punjab and as a site where informal networking or informal channels works in helping people to deal with mundane affairs of their life. Notwithstanding the fact that these aforementioned reasons are plausible and carries a strong argument or answer to why do people go to deras ?, However it lacks something which has not been taken into cognizance and that is the need for deh (human guru) especially in precarious times, when uncertainty and insecurity has become so strong and entrenched that it is very difficult to deal it with the orthodox technique or method of traditional Sikhism i.e. with the method of going back to the granth.

I am trying to argue that the Guru-chela and Piri-Mureedi tradition of Punjab gives enormous solace and psychological relief to an individual suffering from all sorts of crisis (social, economical and spiritual, which the traditional and identity centric Sikhism

and Hinduism can't provide. The non-sectarian nature of these deras especially Sufi deras makes them extremely accessible and popular among the masses because even when they have acquired the status of a sect, they do not force their adherents to follow an exclusive normative system. Dera identity has traditionally been more like an 'add-on' identity; one continues to be a Sikh or a Hindu or a Muslim and still gets blessings or naam from the guru or the *pir* at the dera.[79] Not only would a quintessential follower of a dera continue to visit and pay obeisance to the more 'mainstream' shrines of their respective faith or normative systems, he would also visit more than one dera and could in fact have multiple gurus/pirs. The best example of this is the famous folk singer Gurdas Mann who is the chairman and murid of not only a single Sufi dera but multiple Sufi deras in Punjab.

These multiple factors ranging from syncretism or theological equivalence to the entrenchment of Sufi philosophy of Wahdat ul-Wujud in a collective consciousness/psyche of a region, to the need for deh or body (i.e. living gurus) and not religious book, which is also a manifestation of Sufi/Bhakti tradition of Punjab are the prime reasons apart from the more well known power centric and political economy based reasons for the ubiquity and popularity of sufi deras like Dera Baba Murad Shah in Punjab. In the precarious times when uncertainty of all sorts from existential to economic to spiritual is very high these centres or deras not only provide solace and security but also meaning to its adherents in a society which is losing its enchanted universe to modernity.

The other category of deras in Punjab is that of Udasi and Nirmal deras and with sufi deras they shares some of the traits like syncretism and eclecticism which is a common thread in both the Udasi, Nirmal deras and Sufi deras. These two deras were also once part of the mainstream Sikh tradition, but with the metamorphosis in Sikh tradition and institutions they lost their hegemonic position to Tat khalsa tradition and now there is a tremendous cognitive shutdown with regard to these traditions and no major work have come out on these deras.

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[79] Surinder Jodhka, *Why Do People Go to the Dera* ?, The Wire, Aug 27,2017.

These Udasi and Nirmala centres are also known as Akaras. Both the Udasis and Nirmalas have highly eclectic tradition bordering on religious heterodoxy. The Udasi and Nirmala Akhara/ Dera represent early Sikh traditions close links with the Hindu monastic sects. The anthropological past and history of the Udasi dera or sampradi is intertwined with early Sikhism and its close proximity with present –day Sikhism can be established by the fact that its founder Sri Chand was the elder son of Guru Nanak. According to some scholars like G.S Ghurye both Udasi and Nirmala was in origin a reaction of synthesis to the impact of Islam, Ghurye also maintains that the word udasi owes its origin to the estrangement of Sri Chand from his father, Guru Nanak.[80]The most frequently used term for their establishment is Akhara. The Udasi Akhara grew in strength during the period of Maharaja Ranjit Singh implying the state patronage that Udasi dera/ Akhara got that time.

There was a particular time period in Sikh history when Udasis in Punjab were among the few religious tradition in Punjab that kept Sikhism alive both at the level of doctrine and rituals through the maintenance of gurudwaras. The monastic asceticism of Udasis also helped in its dissemination in the larger North India. Contrary to Sikh principles Udasi order propagated renunciation, asceticism and celibacy. Ghurye classifies Udasis as both reformist and revivalist due to their claim as followers of Sruti and because of their worshipping a combination of five deities, namely, Shiva, Vishnu, Surya, Goddess Durga and Ganpati. However, their philosophy is monistic Vedanta. When one Udasi meets another, the mutual greeting is "Om Namo Brahmane", i.e. 'Bow to Brahman'[81]. At the same time they also venerate Guru Granth Sahib. This Fusion or union of Hindu and Sikh religious practices and texts signifies the syncretic tradition that Udasi follows the only difference that one can discern between between Udasi dera/ akhar and some of the Sufi Dera Syncretism is that Sufi dera syncretism attempts a fusion

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[80] G.S, Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*,(Bombay: Popular Prakshan. 1953),103.

[81] Ibid., 145.

of Hindu, Islamic and Sikh traditions and on the other hand Udasi syncretism stems from only Hindu and Sikh tradition's fusion.

The dominance of Udasi tradition within the larger Sikh tradition got gradually supplanted by Tat Khalsa world view and after Singh Sabha movement of 1880's and Gurudwara reform movement of 1925 and with the formation of Akali Dal the Udasi world view lost its dominance to the Akali/ Tat Khalsa world view. This metamorphosis is also been described as the epistemic shift from Sanatan Sikhism to Tat khalsa Sikhism by anthropologist Harjot Oberoi in his famous book Construction of religious boundaries, Culture , identity and diversity within Sikh traditions. And with this the plurality that manifested in the form of the synthesis of Guru Granth Sahib and Vedantic tradition got obliterated from the larger Sikh world view and the hegemony of Tat Khalsa world view got established and this also marked the end of syncretism in the Sikh tradition.

Much smaller in number than the Udasis, but equally significant in the development of Sanatan Sikhism, is the ascetic order of the Nirmalas. In line with the Udasis, central to the religious life of the Nirmalas is the Akhara, headed by a Mahanat.The Nirmalas are close to the Udasis on account of asceticism, celibacy and vedantic grounding[82].It is important to note that many prominent Nirmala Sants in Punjab preached mainstream Sikhism. In other words Nirmalas are in close proximity with the khalsa in Punjab as compare to Udasis and this explains the invention of tradition by the Sikh mainstream which runs parallel to the Hindu tradition.

It can be argued that both the Nirmala and Udasi Akharas/deras are seminaries which are imparting knowledge, skill and training. Both the Akharas have some similarity as well as differences. Whereas Udasis continue with the Synthesis of the Guru Granth Sahib and Vedantic tradition, the Nirmala have maintained close proximity with the Khalsa tradition, while at the same time continuing with Vedantic philosophy. Both these spiritual traditions constituted an important part of Sanatan Sikhism and gradually with

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[82] Paramjit Singh Judge, *"Taksals, Akharas, Deras", Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, ed. Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech (New Delhi: Oxford university Press, 2014), 377.

intervention of modern colonial state pluralist and eclectic paradigm of Sanatan Sikhism got lost or replaced by monolithic and hegemonic Tat khalsa Sikhism.And with this what was mainstream in terms of tradition like Nirmalas and Udasis Sampraday/Akharas / Deras ,before 19th century got pushed to the margin and became fringe.

This is how the fluidity, plurality and porosity of religious tradition got obliterated and this has marked the end of syncretism in the formal Sikh tradition. But the enchanted universe and popular religiosity of Sanatan Sikhism never got completely lost and this get manifested in the popularity of many Sufi deras as well as many Udasi and Nirmal centres, only because syncretism, fluidity and plurality somehow are an integral part of Punjabi religious traditions or Punjabi collective consciousness and its Panthic dimension as explained by Roger Ballard. The resilience of this dimension is enormous and this is the reason why it can never be completely replaced by the Quamic dimension despite all the efforts of the State and its apparatus to do the same.

The other group of Deras in the category are deras like Radhasoami and Nirankari deras both these deras are grand deras and in fact many people who have worked on these deras especially the Radhasoami dera has called it a New Religious movement as it tries to emulate many aspects and traits of a religion especially modern religion. Mark Juergensymeyer in his famous work the Radhasoami Reality has argued that the Radhasoami dera and Sant Mat follows the logic of the modern faith and it is also a faith that is modern in a distinctively Indian way, its central notions that makes it Indian and modern simultaneously is that the truth and authority can be embodied in a person and the self can be transformed through the purification of perception and energy and that love and community can be experience in dispersion all these notions makes it modern and even in some case post modern religion[83].

Radhasoami dera with its focus on both individualism and community oriented services caters to needs of both Indians as well foreigners, because Indians especially

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[83] Mark Juergensmeyer , *Radhasoami Reality: The Logic of Modern Faith*(Princeton: Princeton University Press,1991),227.

those Punjabis who are not interested in the traditional Hinduism and Sikhism they see the individuality and personal transformation through a spiritual guide in Radhasoami dera as liberating and therapeutic. People coming to Radhasoami dera see or take it as antidote to possessive individualism of the utilitarian variety as well as to the restraints of the traditional community and hierarchies of Hinduism and Sikhism. This mix of individualisms with community is quite interesting and has lead psychoanalyst like Sudhir Kakar to regard it as Radhasoami satsangs most remarkable accomplishment.

According to Mark Juergenseymeyer these two seemingly opposing elements together is a form of leadership that is peculiarly premodern: personal authority. An authority with whom one has an intimate relationship i.e. a spiritual master and that master is capable of not just balancing the individualism with community but can awaken conscience, command sacrifice and engender loyalty and love[84]. The integrative logic of Radhasoami dera makes it postmodern or premodern in the sense that the schism characteristics of modernity in which traditional religious thought is seen as being separated into three distinctive modes of reasoning : cognitive instrumental, moral practical and aesthetic expressive. These three are being united and schism of modernity is repudiated in the Radhasoami faith or dera and this makes it premodern or postmodern.

This trust that a spiritual master confers is uniquely premodern and this trait is not only common in a grand dera like Radhsoami but it is a characteristic feature of all deras in Punjab, and this need for living guru or spiritual master has become more prominent with the current political-economic crisis in Punjab and which cannot be fulfilled by the more institutionalized and governmentalized centres of Sikhism and Hinduism. The other characteristics that makes Deras like Radhasoami vital and popular in Punjab is the non compliance of these deras with the logic of modernity regarding identities i.e. the binary of Hindu –Sikh is easily repudiated and questioned in these sorts of deras and a dera follower even if takes or acknowledges his/ her religious identity, then it is only an add on identity and not the only and fixed identity. Radhasomai dera along

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[84] Ibid.,224.

with other deras like Sufi dera Baba Murad shah mentioned previously shares this non-modern/premodern trait which is not so much a characteristic of an organized religion and this trait or aspect of spirituality along with syncretism which is basically the attitude or space for religious accommodation and dialogue/conversation as argued by Anshu Malhotra ,these traits or aspects in my view are a part of the collective consciousness of Punjabis or Punjab and that makes these centres/deras so popular and is also the cause of their thriving and popularity.

Deras and the Social Structure: Caste and identity assertion

We can now look at the social structures of these Deras mentioned above and different caste or social class that these Deras and Sikh tradition caters to. In Deras different ritual practices are followed. The Radha Soamis, Sacha Sauda, Nirankaris, Namdharis, Divya Jyoti Sansthan, Bhaniarawala and Ravidasis are among the most popular non-Sikh deras. Almost all of them have branches in all the districts of the state as well as in other parts of the country. Some of them are very popular among the Punjabi diaspora and have overseas branches in almost all the continents of the world.

The composition of these deras is along caste lines. Though majority of the follwings in every case comes from dalits, backward castes and poor Jat Sikh peasantry, their command is still in the hands of the upper castes. Among them the chief of the Nirankari deras belonged to the khatri caste, and that of the Sacha Sauda and Radha Soamis come from the jat Sikhs of the Sidhu and Dhillon sub-castes respectively. In the case of Sikh Deras, like mainstream Sikh Deras as well as the Udasis and Nirmals a large majority of their following comes from jat Sikh community and they are invariably run by jat Sikhs. It is rare that the head of a Sikh dera would be a non-jat Sikh. Even if there would be one he could never be a dalit. These deras poses a threat to mainstream Sikhism and the relationship between dera and Sikhism can be understood in terms of the contradiction between dalits and jats of Punjab.

All sorts of deras which are upto a certain extent a non governmentalized space poses a real threat to mainstream Sikhism, because mainstream Sikhism is an organized

religion and organized religions are deeply embedded in the logic of modern state and governmentality. The deras which until now was a space which resisted any attempt of defining or self defining through identity assertion, it seems now that deras are also falling in the same logic of modern state and using state driven identity as a tool of resistance to counter Jat hegemony of mainstream Sikhism.This phenomenon is also seen by some scholars as a manifestation of the deepening of democracy in Punjab.

The existing division between the jats and dalits got intensified during the period of green revolution in the post- 1960 Punjab[85]. The process of green revolution transformed the traditional subsistence character of the agriculture into commercial/ capitalist farming. The market-oriented agriculture favored the big Jat landowners and further marginalized the dalits. Interestingly, it was also during this phase that a new middle class of educated dalits emerged in Punjab. The advent of this new class among the dalits coupled with the rise of the Ambedkarite movement in the region led to the formation of dalit consciousness in the state. The emergence of the dalit consciousness induced the dalit agricultural labourers to ask for higher wages in the rural settings of Punjab, especially in its Doaba subregion. The state led programme of green revolution and later the crisis of state in Punjab during the insurgency time and now with a further deepening of the state and its crisis in Punjab and with strong sense of identity and consciousness in dalits of Punjab the character of the deras have also started changing.

Some deras in Punjab like the Ravidasi dera has also started becoming sectarian and some deras are now exclusively named after a specific dalit community for example Ravidasi deras and in these Deras Ravidasi identity and its assertion becomes fundamental to the existence of dera and hence these deras have started using the governmental categories in defining themselves and the 'other', in that sense these deras are becoming governmentalized. While there are still many deras like Radhasoami, Nirankari, Sufi Dera Baba Murad Shah as well as marginalized Sikh deras like the Udasis

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[85] Ronki Ram , '*Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras: Exploring the myth of casteless Sikh Society in Punjab*', EPW 42, no.40(2007),7.Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40276650.

and Nirmalas etc which still caters to the population of dalits and upto a certain extent have resisted any attempt of definition through identity assertion, partly because the head of these prominent deras are non dalits and are from the upper castes like the khatris and Jatts. The other reason is because these deras are quite syncretic in nature and this syncretism which is a part of Punjabi collective psyche or consciousness as explained resists any assertion along the identity or sectarian lines but this space that resist this sectarianism is very thin can be transformed for political sectarian interest.

Conclusion

We can conclude this chapter by arguing that the relationship between the Dera Sacred tradition and the Sikh tradition of Punjab is a complex one, in which the Sikh tradition can be called as a more Modern tradition and the domain of formal spirituality or the civil society in terms of spirituality or spiritual tradition and in this sense it is more embedded in the logic of modern state and modern governmentality in defining themselves and the 'other' of the community. The Sikh Khalsa tradition apart from being embedded in the modernist logic also symbolizes the undercurrent of the modernist logic which in my understanding is the modern Newtonian worldview which perceives worlds in binaries and perpetually categorizes entities. The logic of separabilty, locality and causality determines this modernist logic which is reflected in the functioning of modern state and through state the functioning of modern religions like Sikhism and the exclusivity that emanates from this process that we have discussed in this chapter gets manifested in the ossified Sikh Khalsa identity and Modern Sikhism which is different from Pre-modern fuzzy tradition of Sikhi, which is inclusive in nature and accomodates diversity.

The Dera tradition which is the domain of informal spirituality or the political society of the spiritual tradition is an epitome of syncretic punjabiyat and is part of collective consciousness of Punjab on the other hand resisted this modernist logic up to a certain extent, but with the emergence of a separate Dalit consciousness in Punjab some deras are attempting to define themselves exclusively using their dalit identity and

creating an inimical other, which is the characteristic of modern governmentalized or political religion. And therefore are gradually getting transformed from a non-governmentalized or purely spiritual space to governmentalized space and category or getting transformed to become more akin to organized modern religion. But there are still many Deras like the Radhasoami, Sufi deras as well Udasi and Niramala Sikh deras that carries the characteristics or traits of syncretism and pre-modern non duality in terms of identity that makes them resist the schisms of modernity and modern Newtonian logic.

These spiritual practices of deras like the Radhasoami or Sufi ones are not identity oriented/driven and quite syncretic in disposition and this non modern and non-dual practice of syncretism along with the notion of punjabiyat is the reason why till now many Sufi deras like Dera Baba Murad shah and Radhasoami dera resist modern state and its logic. And simultaneously this has also precluded any attempt of self definition through identity assertion, and with this has resisted the logic of enumeration which emanates from the modern state/governmentality and its undercurrent modern Newtonian science.

In the next chapter I am going to explore the Sikh and Dera tradition of Punjab in the light of the Secular-Communal debate. Most of the work done on deras of Punjab have not looked into this debate. The question of how the presence of deras in Punjab and their resistance against Hindu-Sikh binary and the concomitant secular-communal debate have not been properly addressed. In that chapter I am trying to argue that the Secular-Communal divide couldn't be sustained in Punjab due to the idiosyncratic nature of its spiritual or religious tradition and the Hindu-Sikh binary that feeds communalism is an artificial modern binary that gets resisted in the spiritual centers like the deras of Punjab. This in my view is the precise reason why communalism, though quite strong at one point of time couldn't survive because the logic that sustains and feeds communalism was not very strong in Punjab.

Chapter Three

Revisiting Communal Question in Punjab: Transcending Hindu- Sikh Binary

Introduction:

According to the census of 2011 Punjab has around 58% of its Population as Sikhs and 40% of its Population as Hindus. In this chapter I will strive to repudiate this enumeration by exploring those traditions that counters the aforementioned enumeration of census and concomitantly transcends the given Hindu-Sikh binary. In this chapter I will also try to revisit the prominent debates on Communalism in Punjab and will question the tacit acknowledgment or acceptance of this binary in those debates. The tradition of Shrines and Deras will also be further explored and the communal question will be reconceptualized in the light of these syncretic traditions. This chapter will also try to look at the Hindu-Sikh binary and the concomitant minority-majority discourse that is engendered by the modern state and its technologies that feed communalism and will juxtapose this modernist and statist discourse on religion in Punjab with the everyday lived reality and lived spirituality of common Punjabis.

The tradition of local Sufi Shrines that forms the backbone of Punjabi popular religiosity and the ubiquitous dera culture that symbolizes entangled spirituality will be further explored to argue that communalism in Punjab was the byproduct of modernity. Modern state and its technologies like census operation constructed ossified and reified religion which rigidifies the boundaries between religious and spiritual traditions of Punjab. This development got culminated in the construction of an 'inimical' other which gave birth to communalism in Punjab. In other words communalism in Punjab is the manifestation of the logic of the modern state. In Punjab's case the space for communalism that was constructed by the modern state and especially its colonial form was challenged by the organic and entangled spiritual traditions like Deras and Sufi

shrines. The uniqueness of this tradition was its syncretic and non-institutional belief system that kept communal frenzy and communal consciousness at bay despite the perpetual onslaught of modern state on these organic belief systems. My contention here resonates with proposition developed in the first and second chapter that these Sufi/Dera traditions which are centers of informal spirituality and non-institutional religion are an integral part of the collective consciousness of Punjabi religion and society. Communalism in Punjab couldn't be understood without taking cognizance of such syncretic and plural traditions that constructs the space for a deliberation of different spiritual traditions and therefore fosters communal harmony and keeps communalism or communal consciousness at bay.

Some of these shrines and deras and their role in keeping the communal consciousness at bay has been explored at length in the chapter. The Hindu-Sikh binary which is a construct of modern state gets more potent with the crisis of the state and that is exactly what has happened in the famous 'Punjab Crisis'. The role of aforementioned spaces in fostering and strengthening Punjabi consciousness or Punjabiyat has been mostly ignored in the debate on the communal question in Punjab, this aspect has particularly been looked at and explored to transcend the statist discourse of Hindu- Sikh Conflict. The question of Sikh nationalism and its relationship with communalism in Punjab and how we can conceptualize Sikh nationalism devoid of territoriality and statist discourse has also been dealt with a new avant-garde approach.

Mapping the debate on Communalism and Punjab Crisis

Punjab was under the shadow of violence since partition. The first round of Violence started with demand for Punjabi Suba (demand for a separate state on linguistic basis) and then the violence perpetuated by the Naxalite movement. There was a fundamental difference between the two movements because the first one was a demand which had communal undertone and the second one was revolutionary violence, but nevertheless violence was equally the part of both the movements. The communal

movement or demand that was initiated by Punjabi Suba Movement of 60s got more entrenched in 1970s and 80s during the time of insurgency.

The most integral component of communalism or fundamentalism of any sort is the construction of the 'other' and in the process of constructing the inimical 'other', the 'self' also gets constructed. This is precisely what has happened in Punjab. The communal discourse of the fundamentalists and militants, particularly Bhindranwala, who constructed the 'other' by constructing a positive 'self', Veena Das has rightly pointed out that in the construction of the positive 'self' there is also concomitant construction of the negative 'other'.[86] The 'other' that is constructed in the process is shown to be distinct from the 'self' and also has apparently has done harm or injury to the 'self'. The discourse of exclusive religious identity and communalism entails construction of an inimical 'other'. In Punjab's case during the time of crisis an exclusive 'Sikh' self got constructed and simultaneously a hostile 'Hindu' other also got constructed[87].

In the process of this construction many traditions are also invented (using Eric Hobsbawm's expression).[88]This gives shape to communalism and fosters the division between religious boundaries. This explanation has immense significance in explaining Punjab communal problem but has its own demerits in the sense that this explanation considers the boundaries between religious traditions to be already fixed and ossified. This perhaps could be the case if one perceives the social reality from the lens of the state, but if one perceives it through the everyday lived experience of common Punjabis then this explanation that assumes categories of 'Hindu' and 'Sikh' as sharp and mutually exclusive falls short of depicting proper social reality.

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[86] Veena Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India.* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[87] Paramjit S .Judge, *Religion, Identity and Nationhood: The Sikh Militant Movement.* (New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 2005), 128-129.

[88] Ibid.

The question of Sikh identity the way it was constructed in the colonial era and the way Sikh identity politics got unfolded contributed to the making of the crisis. Scholars like Dipankar Gupta who worked on Sikh identity, ethnicity and fundamentalism has argued that Sikh identity in peaceful time and in the time of crisis is different[89], but I believe in Sikh's case and in Punjab the identity construction in the time of peace was not entirely independent of its construction in peace times or normal times. In the case of Sikh Community, the issue of identity has had many dimensions, which involve the definition given by and accepted by the SGPC, the colonial construction of Sikh identity as argued by scholars like Richard Fox and Harjot Oberoi, construction of religious boundaries all these dimensions collectively contributed in the construction of an ossified Sikh identity that developed crisis and also accentuated it.

Most explanation of the crisis followed the well laid path of political economy on one hand and the path of cultural determinism on the other hand. Scholars like Robin Jeffrey argued that the 'Punjab Crisis' was the result of rapid and unrestrained modernization which was initiated with Green revolution that transformed both the economy and society of Punjab. Modernization along with urbanization and the disintegration of village communities, consumerism, mass literacy, and the emergence of mass society both intensified expectations and generated discontent among those who failed to benefit from the gains of the green revolution:

The 23 percent of families who own two-thirds of the land in Punjab face the problem of controlling and channeling the sense of deprivation that arises in poorer peasants and the landless. One way to deal with the problem is to encourage a religious fundamentalism in which all believers are invited to share equally[90].

In other words, green revolution brought prosperity only to some landed elites and impoverishment for the small land holders and landless laborers and this created

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[89] Dipankar Gupta. *The Context of Ethnicity*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[90] Robin Jeffrey, *What's happening to India*? (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 33.

alienation, rootlessness and meaninglessness with increasing unemployment for youth especially youth from Jat Sikh caste and constructed a fertile ground for the rise of communalism and messianic consciousness[91]. Political institutions couldn't keep pace with the rapid social and economic changes and the political class of Punjab used the religious idiom to cover up the contradictions that were economic in disposition. This fostered communal consciousness in Punjab and gave impetus to communalism.

This is the general understanding that most scholars have regarding the relationship between Green revolution and the rise of communalism and fundamentalism in Punjab. The enormous increase in rural capital formation brought prosperity to a particular class of farmers and led to the emergence of a class of capitalist farmers, meant that the interests of the rich farming class or Kulak Jat Sikh class came in conflict with the urban bourgeoisie on the one hand, and with the interests of the poor peasantry and agricultural labor on the other. That each of these classes belong to a different caste or religion (the rich peasantry belongs to the Jat Sikh community, the landless peasant and agricultural labourers belong to the scheduled castes – the Mazbi Sikhs and the Ram garhias – and the Hindu Khatris control urban based trade and professions, with the Sikh Khatris occupying a subordinate position) intensified tensions between communities.

Political Scientist Harish Puri working on Punjab wrote that Agriculture and trade are inextricably linked with each other:

During the last fifteen years or so, this link has grown much stronger in the wake of modernization of agriculture and most of the inputs and outputs of agriculturalists in the rural areas have to pass through traders in urban areas. It results in a clash of economic interests between the dominant castes in the two religious categories[92].Victor D' Souza working on Punjab argued that the Sikh trading castes especially the Khatris

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[91] The word Messianic Consciousness is not used in the literal Christian meaning of the term, but it is used to explain the association of communalism in Punjab with the idea of Messianic personalities like Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

[92] Harish K Puri, 'The Akali Agitation: An Analysis of Socio-Economic Bases of Protest', *Economic and Political Weekly,* 22 January 1983,.116.

and Aroras who are in Subordinate positions to the Hindu traders in the urban areas, used religious idioms and symbols to strengthen and defend their trade interest.[93]

Following the similar logic Sucha Singh Gill and K.C. Singhal argued that the basis of the problem lies in the history, in the clash of interest between Jat Sikh Peasantry and the Hindu traders and Moneylenders. After the introduction of the green revolution, agricultural production has become increasingly dependent on the market and market forces started determining and regulating each and every aspect of the relationship between varying classes and castes of Punjab. In Punjab the market is dominated by Hindu traders and Sikh Jat peasantry who were looking for cheap inputs and higher prices for agricultural production clashed with traders who were into business and had monopolies in the trade of chemical fertilizers that forms the main input for agriculture after green revolution. The Akali Dal, which claims to represent the entire Sikh community but in reality represents only the interest of Jat Sikh farmers manipulated this sentiment of antagonism in order to maintain its dominance over the Sikh community.[94]

Purewal is more overt in his attack on religious fundamentalism and communalism and argued that cultural and religious discourse is a mere ploy and that the kulak famers under the leadership of Akali Dal were using religious identity to pursue their economic interest. In Purewal's analysis Communalism in Punjab and religious nationalism cannot be understood by de- linking it from the larger capitalist development in the State and from the workings of national and international capital. The essence of religious nationalism and communalism in Punjab according to Purewal can be understood only in the context of the larger struggle for primacy between agricultural and industrial capital.[95]

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[93] Victor D' Souza, 'Economy, Caste, Religion and Population Distribution: An Analysis of Communal Tension in Punjab', *Economic and Political weekly* 8 May 1982, 783-792.

[94] Sucha Singh Gill & K.C.Singhal, 'The Punjab Problem: Its Historical roots', *Economic and Political Weekly*,7 April 1984,.603-608.

[95] S. Purewal, '*Sikh Ethnonationalism and the political economy of Punjab*', (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

The work of Prof Randhir Singh on Punjab Problem and theorizing Punjab Problem requires some attention here. Though his work also falls under the domain of Political economy approach to understand Punjab tragedy, but his method is also different from the other theorist mentioned above who have worked on Punjab by using the method and approach of Political economy. The biggest difference between them and Randhir Singh's approach is the Randhir Singh had granted a more important role to the concept of religion in his analysis. He has not reduced communal and religious phenomenon to economic contradiction of capitalism. He has argued that communal phenomenon attains a certain level of autonomy from the structure and is irreducible to economic base.

Communal phenomenon according to Randhir Singh has an irreducible basis in religion, and it should be understood not in isolation from the Social whole. The social interconnection of Phenomena is the key to understand the communalism in India, which though has an autonomous existence of its own, but the dynamics of the existence and the working out of the contradiction is conditioned by the structural logic of the economic base.[96] Randhir Singh's approach is not dismissive of religion as an epiphenomenon which should be replaced by a secular and rational worldview; on the contrary he acknowledges the radical tradition and positive potentialities with religion and elucidates that with examples of Liberation Theology.

Those who used the cultural logic and cultural interpretation to understand 'Punjab Crisis' most often employed instrumentalist argument, scholars like Paul Brass suggested that dynamics of elite competition for economic and political advantages lead to politicization of religion in Punjab. According to Brass Sikh elite used religious symbols to demarcate themselves from the Hindus and the language Punjabi which is used both by the Hindus and Sikhs got politicized and this got manifested in the case of

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[96] Randhir Singh, 'Theorizing Communalism- A Fragmentary Note in the Marxist Mode', *Economic and Political Weekly,* 23 July 1988,6.

Punjabi Hindus declaring Hindi as their mother tongue in national census of 50s and 60s.[97]

Brass argued that leaders found religious card useful because it served to mobilize people easily to pursue goals of economic and political interest. In the instrumentalist framework communalism and religious nationalism could be understood as an instrument used by leaders for political mobilization. Among other scholars who subscribe to cultural determinism, Sikh religious nationalism and communalism is seen as a reaction to Hindu majoritarianism. Gurharpal Singh is of the view that Sikh community is united in its strong subjective historicity and its high degree of homogeneity, its fears of assimilation into Hinduism, and its integration of the religious and the political.[98] Singh treats Sikh identity as virtually homogenous and argues against those scholars who sees religious identity as a tool employed by leaders to garner political interest and for political mobilization. Singh treats Sikh identity as continuous and trans-historical.

The theories that have been offered to elucidate the 'Punjab Crisis' and communal picture in Punjab focuses on one dimension of the problem like the contradictions unleashed by the green revolution, the competition between political parties to retain their constituencies, the use of the religious language to cover intra-community contradictions or the fear of minority getting assimilated into the majority. These dimension may be economic; the conflict or clash between groups that are of economic interest. The problem with all these explanations is that they reduce complex processes to one dimension and then tries to study the consequences from the given set of causes. The other major problem with these explanations or what is missing in these accounts is the issue of how state provides structures of opportunity for communalism to erupt and flourish. States also provide the opportunity for groups to compete for the goods provided by it. State in Punjab's context constructed the categories 'Sikh' and 'Hindu' in a

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[97] Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, (Delhi: Sage 1991), 15-16.

[98] Gurharpal Singh, *Ethnic Conflict in India*, (Houndsmill: Macmillan, 2000), 95.

particular time frame and also constructed and consolidated the boundaries between them by reifying those identities.

The work of anthropologist Harjot Oberoi in this context is more nuanced and provides the contextual explanation for the politicization of religion and construction of communal consciousness in Punjab. Oberoi's approach transcends both political economy and cultural deterministic approach .Oberoi takes into account the role played by the colonial state in the formation of identities. Oberoi in his writing has theoretically attacked the idea that Indian religious communities are homogenous and unitary and asserted an approach that acknowledges the diversity of Indian religious traditions.

He argued that it is not possible to speak of clear-cut religious categories such as 'Hinduism' 'Islam' and 'Sikhism' in Punjab till late nineteenth century. For instance Sikhism permitted its followers to belong to a number of groups each of which had its own traditions: the Udasi, Nirmala, Khalsa, Nanak-panthi, Ram Raia, Baba Gurditta, Baba Jawahar Singh, Guru Bhag Singh, Nihand, Kalu Panthi, Ram Dasi, Nirankari, Kuka, and Savaria. Many Sikhs shaved and cut their hair, many smoked, and many did not observe the five external symbols of the faith subscribed to by the Khalsa panth[99]. Plurality of life styles, of rituals and heterogeneity of religious belief were freely allowed, consequently, the Sikh community simply did not possess an essentialized or pure form.[100] Secondly, Punjabis across religious lines have experienced life as members of a zat (caste) or a biradari (lineage) more, and as members of a discrete religious group less:

What an individual did with his life, the values that guided him in this universe, the cultural equipment through which he interpreted daily experiences, the control over land, labour, and patronage, and the distribution of power was determined not so much by

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[99] Neera Chandhoke, "The Political consequences of Ethnic Mapping".*Crisis States Discussion Papers* 14(2005):6, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28334/1/dp14.pdf.

[100] Ibid.

the framework of a single religious community but by what *biradari* or *zat* a person belonged to.[101]

According to Oberoi membership of *zat* and *biradari* not only cut across religious divisions but it brought members of various religious denominations together in the practice of everyday life[102]. According to Oberoi multiple definitions of what it means to be a Sikh competed with each other. Oberoi identified four causes or reasons to cleanse Sikh tradition from plurality and diversity. The first was the Khalsa Sikh hegemony at the end of the 19th century that got established and that was averse to any diversity with the larger Sikh tradition. The new discourse of identity was given the name Tat khalsa means 'pure Sikh' decried diversity and plurality and expressed an essentialized and singular idea of being 'Sikh'. Popular practices were relegated to the domain of superstition visiting shrines, Deras were seen with disdain and Sikhs were assigned with only a single source of religious authority and inspiration, the Guru Granth Sahib, the Gurudwara and the Gurumukhi Script[103].

Secondly, with the inception of intra-elite competition for urban professions and administrative jobs in the 1880s, the Sikh elite used this invented tradition to drive out nemesis and gain from the opportunities provided by the British Raj[104]. Even though this new religious identity did not fit well with the existing traditions that were pantheistic and polytheistic and that included diverse set of practices, it came to dominate political imaginations among the Sikhs simply because it was remunerative. Thirdly, the drive to homogenize the Sikh identity and to forge a monolithic Sikh identity was a response to the fact that other communities were also constructing their own boundaries at precisely

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[101] Harjot Oberoi, *The construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh* Tradition, (*Delhi:* Oxford University Press, 1994), 418.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Neera Chandhoke, "The Political consequences of Ethnic Mapping".*Crisis States Discussion Papers* 14(2005):6, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28334/1/dp14.pdf.

[104] Ibid.,7.

the same time. For example, the Arya Samaj, which tried to cleanse Hinduism of all superstition and attendant beliefs and which was trying to construct a new identity for the Hindus, repudiated religious groups that developed later in the time scale, such as the Sikhs, as non-Hindu or even tried to assimilate them by proposing that Sikhs are in fact just a denomination of Hinduism and especially a distorted one.

The Aligarh movement which was also modernist in its disposition similarly builds a new exclusive identity called Muslim which was in no way tolerant to the syncretic and plural indigenous Sufi Islam that was popular among the Muslim masses in India generally and Punjab specifically. In sum, the definition and the formulation of the sacred was the product of many strands of history that came together in the late nineteenth century and constructed or developed boundaries around religions, hence abrogating or destroying shared practices and histories[105].

But fourthly, and most crucially, Oberoi identifies British rule and the colonial encounter as the major factor and reason of the move towards Khalsa hegemony. The colonial state had the agenda to construct communal categories in order to categorize and administer populations, collect revenue, and govern populations. In the process it constructed classifications that served to combine different Sikh traditions into one general or all- encompassing identity. For instance, the British decided that only the identity of the Khalsa was authentic to the Sikh tradition and those other identities were either bogus or Hindu extension. The impact of this and related colonial practices was indeed great: for instance, all Sikhs who entered the army had to undergo baptism and adopt the five sacred symbols even if they did not belong to the Khalsa tradition[106]. Oberoi in his work is trying to argue that in order to reap benefit from the opportunities provided by the colonial state, one had to belong to the right identity group within the Sikh community. This in a major way led to the homogenization of otherwise plural identities and to the consolidation of Khalsa identity within the Sikh community.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

Oberoi's argument is much more comprehensive and nuanced than other studies on the making of modern identities in India, as he brings a variety of factors into his explanation, the amalgamtion of which were to provide an appropriate context for the construction of discrete community or religious boundaries. What is most interesting is that Oberoi acknowledges the centrality of the practices of colonial state in the construction of community/religious boundaries. These practices were crucial because they fostered other moves, such as the move made by elites to construct or build an identity that would help them in their search for power and provide them the access to the structures of opportunities generated by the colonial state. For example, the grant of collective goods, such as a quota for the Sikhs in the Indian army on the grounds that the Sikhs constituted a 'martial race', was linked to colonial practices and technologies of ethnic categorization, enumeration, stereotyping, and mapping[107]. Thus these practices and techniques constructed both the homogenization and the politicization of Sikh identity and developed a monolithic Sikh community.

The plurality and fuzziness of religious traditions in Punjab can be easily manifested by looking at the data from the first census conducted under British administrative office Denzil Ibbeston. In the first census conducted in Punjab in 1881 around half of the population that is considered as Sikhs now notified their religion as the followers of Sakhi Sarwar, who was a Sufi saint from the frontier district of dera ghazi khan in West Punjab[108]. Thousands of Sikhs from eastern districts of Punjab used to go for pilgrimage to the darbar of Sakhi Sarvar covering the distance of more than five hundred kilometers. This particular sort of tradition lost its popularity with the consolidation of communal consciousness and identity in Punjab.

Most of the study on 'Punjab crisis' and communalism in Punjab tacitly accepts sharp and mutually exclusive categories of 'Hindu' and 'Sikh' as two different religious

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[107] Ibid.

[108] Harjot Oberoi, *The construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh* Tradition, (*Delhi*: Oxford University Press, 1994).

categories and tradition. It is only Harjot Oberoi's work on Punjab problem that tries to contextualize those given categories and formulates or conceptualizes the role of the State in the construction of those categories. The Hindu-Sikh binary that is apparent in most of the discourse on Punjab is questioned by Oberoi up to a certain extent. Bur even his work propounds that fuzziness of boundaries got completely lost with modernity and the unfolding of modern state and also with the establishment of hegemony of the Khalsa way of life.

My contention in this chapter is that the fuzziness and plurality or diversity of religious traditions that Oberoi talks about in his magnum opus 'Construction of religious boundaries: Culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh tradition', didn't get completely lost because that fuzziness and fluidity of spiritual tradition is part of the collective consciousness of Punjabi society and religion. This consciousness and entangled spirituality gets manifested in the enormous popularity (across caste and religious barriers) of such shrines and deras where an individual belonging to any religious identity conferred by the state indulges in the act of popular shared piety or devotion.[109]

Now I will present examples of some these shrines that acted as bulwark against communal onslaught in contemporary East Punjab and resisted the idea of rigid religion and territoriality immanent in the discourse of nationalism and nation- state by maintaining the fluidity of faith spiritual tradition during and after the era of crisis.

Shrines, Fluidity and Communal Scene in Punjab

Before exploring the role of Shrines in undermining communal consciousness in Punjab, it becomes pivotal to understand the history of nature of religion in Punjab. Many scholars who have worked on religion in Punjab have argued that Punjab and Sindh in the Subcontinent have peculiar history when it comes to the case of religion. Punjab specifically has been the centre of many spiritual traditions and there were perpetual

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[109] Farina Mir, *Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives: Rethinking Cultural and Religious Syncretism, Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Jul., 2006), . 754, accessed 4 May ,2018, Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3879442

deliberation between those different spiritual or religious traditions. In the medieval era Nath Panth or Nath Sampradya who is believed to have been founded by the figure known in the popular imagination as Goraknath was extremely popular in Punjab.

It has been argued by many historians that Sufi movement in Punjab and Nath Panth both shared a lot of similarities and also developed together by sharing a symbiotic relationship. At many instances it was sometimes even impossible to distinguish one tradition from the other. Sikh tradition initiated by Guru Nanak was also highly influenced and inspired by these traditions. Guru Nanak used to have dialogue with Nath Jogis and Sufis over matters of spiritual significance. Historians like Richard Eaton have argued that academic scholarship on religion in Punjab has tried to look or search for an 'essence' of religious traditions by analyzing their 'source' and original component and in this process religion gets recognized or established ahistorically as pure and unchanging entity. This has led to many problems in the study of religion in Indian context according to Eaton. In Punjab specifically religious traditions have developed in close interaction with other traditions and many a times their boundaries are imbricatd or overlapped.

It is the discursive dialectic of sacred practices in Punjab that made religious scene in Punjab peculiar. Both Sufi practices and Nath practices and their discursive interface led to the emergence of Nanak Panth[110].The doctrinal precepts of religious traditions never played a central role in the everyday experience of Punjabis. The influence of Sufi and Nath Panth along with the original Nanak Panth has profound influence and is deeply entrenched in the collective psyche of the common masses of Punjab. The shrines especially Sufi shrines and deras in contemporary Punjab reflect or manifest the same collective psyche or consciousness that has its origin in the medieval discursive practices. And these shrines also reflects the domain of entangled spirituality

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[110] Rather than using the religious qualifier 'ism' for religious practices, I prefer to use Indic term *Panth* (translated as community) that is more appropriate term to define historically faith based practices. Therefore rather than using Sikhism which is a more modern term to enunciate Sikh faith, I prefer to locate it within in its historical milieu of sixteenth century *Panths*. This Indic term *Panth* also helps in explaining the practice dimension of the faith over its identity dimension.

in which duality engendered by modenity and modern state is not only rejected but simultaneously religious boundaries also gets transgressed in a way that follower of such shrines often overlooks his state conferred religious identity and becomes part of the shared culture or space. These shrines in a way also act a bulwark against the onslaught of communal consciousness in Punjab and therefore helps transcends Hindu-Sikh binary in Punjab. There are many such shrines in contemporary East Punjab where this binary or for that matter any identity driven discourse gets demolished.

One such shrine is the famous Pirkhana in the Abohar City of Southern Punjab, the other example or Shrine is the Shrine or Dargah of Hayder Sheikh in Malerkotla, a brilliant study is conducted by scholar Anne Bigelow on the role played by the dargah of Haider sheikh in keeping communalism or communal consciousness at bay in the Muslim Majority city of Malerkotla. Other prominent shrine is the darbar of Syed Sultan Ahmed also known as Sakhi Sarwar or lakhdatta Pir in Una which is extremely popular in doaba region of Punjab .Sakhi Sarwar is the same famous Sufi Saint previously mentioned whose original darbar is in Dera Ghazi Khan district of West Punjab (Present day Pakistan).Sakhi Sarwar is the most ubiquitous saint whose small shrines are visible in almost every village of Punjab. Other such shrines are Dargah Baba Haji Ratan and Tilla Baba Farid. Ironically these same shrines came under the attack of religious fundamentalist and communalist in Punjab , only because these shrines in my understanding transcends the statist identities or categories of 'Hindu' and 'Sikh' and are of immense significance for the spiritual realization of common rural Punjabis.

Lived religion in Punjab is extremely diverse and fluid than textual religion. In the case of Punjab religion and identity is always in a state of flux. Social reform and revival movements like Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj had invented an idea of neatly defined boundaries of religion and also discouraged their adherents to follow the practices of other faith or belief system. Despite communal project of reform movements the religious

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practices remained processual and connected[111]. These beliefs and observances of people in Punjab are so uniquely blended and intermingled that it is difficult and often impossible to say in which religious category the people should classify or placed.

One significant example of this shared practice and popular Saint veneration can be found in the continuous rendition of the qissā of Heer-Ranjha from Damodar Das Gulati (Hindu) in the early seventeenth Century to Warish Shah (Muslim) in the eighteenth century, and Kishan Singh Arif (Sikh) in the late nineteenth century. While each re-telling or new rendition critiqued the creed of orthodoxy and social conservatism, their major sources of piety or devotion, spiritual strength and dreams were almost always jogīs and pīrs[112]. Despite being a story of 'Muslim' lovers and the communalization of the contemporary public spheres, it continues to find remarkable resonance in Punjabi identity and religiosity till today. The quintessential Jogi was also the mystical beloved in the writings of Bulleh Shah which even today is extremely popular among all sections, class, and caste of Punjab. These popular narratives show the role that shrines and popular mysticism played in the lived experience or lives and everyday spirituality of common Punjabis. Hir Waris continues to be the leading Sufi text of social critique and constitutes a vital social text on the veneration of Sufi saints.[113] Farina Mir has precisely explored this aspect of popular devotion in her work by looking at or analyzing literary genre of *qisse* in pre-modern Punjab, but in my view that piety

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[111]Yogesh Snehi, *Dreaming Baba, resituating memory: Popular Sufi Shrines and the historiography of contemporary East Punjab: 4,* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265915540.

[112] Yogesh Snehi, "Situating Popular Veneration," NMML Occasional Paper, History and Society New Series 68, 28. https://www.academia.edu/10868771/Situating_Popular_Veneration.

[113] Ajay Bhardwaj's (2005) film Kithe Mil Ve Mahi (where the twain shall Meet) and Milange Babe Ratan De Mele tey (let's meet at Baba Ratan' fair), narrates the role played by the qissa of Hir Waris shah in the lives of common Punjabis especially the Dalit Punjabis. Sufi veneration in Punjab is impossible without the rendition of Hir Waris, which is seen as a spiritual and social text almost equal to Adi Granth in stature by many Punjabis.

which was integral to pre-modern or pre-colonial and which unites Punjabis of all denominations survived and is quite visible in local shrines and deras.

The statist discourse of Hindu- Sikh and Muslim as neat religious categories is oblivious of these lived traditions and these traditions are epitome of Punjabi spirituality which is entangled spirituality and which transcends any modernist religious binaries. The major debate on communalism in Punjab has also ignored such shared and composite tradition. Scholars like Harjot Oberoi talked about these traditions in the context of 19th century Punjab and argues that these practices which he termed as part of the Sanatan Sikh episteme got lost or obliterated by modern reform movements , but he misses the point that Such practices are still very much part of the popular religiosity of Punjabis and hence these traditions or practices are very much alive and acts as a bulwark against communalism and communal consciousness in Punjab by transcending statist Hindu-Sikh binary.

Now I will present examples of some shrines and centers to substantiate my contention that Sufi shrines in Punjab exemplify pluralism and helps in creating a milieu of communal harmony by keeping the issues of religious identity at bay. First example is of a *Pirkhana* in southern Punjab city of Abohar. The practice of constructing Shrines of Saints has been noted and recorded by colonial ethnographer Rose. Sakhi Sarwar, popularly known as Lakhdata pir or Lalanwla or Niagaha wala pir[114] and Haider sheikh

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[114] Sahi Sarwar was the most popular and revered saint in colonial and pre-modern 19th century Punjab. The followers of Sakhi Sarwar were known as Sarvaria, sultani or Sarvar panthi. In the first census conducted in Punjab in 1881 sizeable population of Punjabis denoted themselves as the followers of Sakhi Sarwar. Major fair used to happen in Lahore, Peshawar and Gujranwala at his shrines in pre-partitioned Punjab. His popularity in present day Indian Punjab is still intact and every city and every second village has a small shrine of Sakhi sarwar popularly known as Lakhdatta pir or Nigaha wala Pir. The myth also associate Sakhi Sarwar with the Bhairava , manifestation of god shiva .The question here that haunts state is the question of classification, that where and how to classify such large chunk of followers of Sufi saint in contemporary Punjab in the statist discourse of Hindu-Sikh binary.

[115]continue to be the two most revered saints in these shrines or pirkhanas. Majority of *Pirkhana* in present day Indian Punjab is a continuation of the tradition of venerating *pirs* pre –partition.

The interesting fact is that most of the pirkhanas in Southern Punjab are managed by Punjabi Aggarwal Sabha with Some Arora and Khatri member participation in management. This fact rejects the narrative presented by the likes of Ajay Bhardwaj, the documentary filmmaker in his trilogy on Punjab that Sufi shrines in Punjab are Dalit shrines because only dalits venerate Sufis and is becoming part of their unique identity and also a symbol of their assertion. The popularity of Sufi shrines in Punjab is across the caste lines and people belonging to all caste participate, albeit some shrines are managed by groups of certain specific caste groups. The *Pirkhana* in Abohar is built in the first decade of the twenty first century and is an example of the re-enchantment with these shared practices.

A man named Makhan Lal from Abohar in the Malwa region or Southern Punjab belonging to Aggarwal caste narrates that there was a tradition in his family to visit and pay obeisance to Sheikh Haider of Malerkotla every year or at the birth of a son or on the occasion of a marriage. He narrates that his father was a very rich and prosperous man, but when his father stopped worshipping Pirs and lighting Chirag at the shrine, they started suffering losses in the business. He said he had a dream in which Haider Sheikh of Malerkotla asked him the reason for which his family stopped worshipping *Pirs* post-

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[115] Haider Sheikh is the Saint of Malerkotla, the only Muslim majority city in Indian Punjab and the city famous for its tolerance and pluralism. According to the legend which is alive in the memory of Punjabis, the Nawab of Malerkotla Sher Muhammad Khan wrote letter protesting against the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's order to execute two sons of Guru Gobind Singh this incident made the Suhrawradi Saint Haider Sheikh whose follower was the Nawab extremely popular among Non-Muslim of Malerkotla and Malwa belt of the region. Interestingly no incident of Communal violence has ever happened in Malerkotlla not during partition riots and not even during insurgency and this could be attributed to the legend and the popularity of the Saint and Nawab in the memory of city dwellers of Malerkotla.

partition.[116] Makhan Lal in an interview taken by Yogesh Snehi said that he had visited Mata chintpurni temple in Himachal Pradesh recently only and organizes an event on every Thursday. The chaunki that he organizes has blending of rituals of different sort and is the norm where Hindu goddess and Pirs are venerated together. The *pirkhana* has memorials of various fakirs, pirs and goddesses. The diya or Chirag are lit every day in the shrine, the memorial grave of Sakhi Sarwar and Haider Sheikh is joined by idols of goddess Sitala or Durga, this sort of blending of rituals is quintessence of syncretism and shared culture of Punjab.

When asked about whether he sees any contradiction between his veneration of Pirs and his religion, he said that *fakirs* (Holy Man) do not recognize the barriers of religion. This statement tells a lot about the character of Punjabi religiosity, where even after the communal onslaught orchestrated by the State, such examples of composite culture is almost omnipresent. This example substantiates our proposition that this sort of Saint Veneration or Guru- Bhakti or Piri- Mureedi is organic to Punjab and part of the collective consciousness of Punjabi society. This sort of spirituality is the entangled spirituality which is not bounded by the modernist duality regarding religion that modern state promotes. This sort of spirituality cannot be exterminated by State and its logic of constructing sharp exclusive categories. Many of the followers of such shrines denote them as *Pirpanthis* or the followers of *Pirpanth,* a designation that draws on the Muslim honorific *Pir* and Indic term *panth,* meaning group or sect. Thus those in Pirpanth do not see their religious identity as Hindu, Muslim or Sikh but as particular to tradition of Saint Worship. This group can be called as the missing people in the statist discourse of Hindu-Sikh. The debate on communalism has also virtually ignored such large chunk on people in its discourse, whose religiosity does not conform to the state and it's given religious categories of Hindu-Sikh in Punjab.

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[116] Yogesh Snehi, Dreaming Baba, resituating memory: Popular Sufi Shrines and the historiography of contemporary East Punjab: *7,* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265915540.

The other example of such shared sacred site that symbolizes fluidity and fluid interaction and resists sharp oppositional identities is the site associated with Baba Farid Ganj-E –Shakar. Shrine of Baba Farid, the famous Sufi of Chisti order or lineage is located in the Bordering town of Faridkot. Baba Farid is also the famous Sufi whose writing has got a place in Adi Granth or Guru Granth Sahib; this is one of the reasons that he is highly respected among the Sikhs and Hindu population of the town. The shrine associated with Baba Farid is called Tilla Baba Farid, and it consists of three structures-a relic Shrine, a gurdwara and a mosque and it provides ritual space for all Baba Farid's devotees.These sites memorialize the Saint's encounter with a Hindu King who became his devotee but did not convert. This encounter sets a local precedent for non-Muslims who can participate in the worship of a Muslim holy man without renouncing their own religious identity or without thinking of religious identity at all.[117]

The Gurdwara that is part of the Shrine is not controlled by SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee), the centralized body that controls all gurdwaras. In fact because the shrine and the gurdwara are not controlled by SGPC that is why such shared site and interaction is possible. This is due to the fact that SGPC being an institutionalized religious body is averse to any sort of syncretic practice as explained in previous chapters and would not allow Sikh Rehat Maryada, the Sikh code of Conduct(developed and shaped with the help of colonial state)to be denounced in such shrines. Tilla Baba Farid the Shrine associated with Sufi Saint Baba Farid is managed by both Hindu and Sikh people. This example of a shrine associated with a Muslim Pir bringing people of all religious denomination together is also a manifestation of plural culture of Punjab that resists any attempt by the state and statist religious bodies like the SGPC to draw or construct rigid religious boundaries.

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[117] Anna Bigelow, "Post Partition Pluralism: Placing Islam in Indian Punjab", in *Punjab Reconsidered History, Culture and Practice* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 422.

The other example that represents such pluralism and shared practice is the shrine of Baba Haji Ratan. There are multiple narratives around the identity of Baba Ratan whose shrine at Bathinda in the Malwa Region of Punjab links him to both Nath and Sufi tradition. There are also many legends and anecdotes surrounding him that talks about his association with the tenth Sikh Guru Gobind Singh. According to the myth Baba Ratan was a companion of Gorakhnath as well as a companion of Prophet Muhammad. People of all religious denomination toady visits the shrine of Haji Ratan and pay obeisance to him. The inclusive nature of this tradition and this shrines association with Nath sect reminds us of the medieval Nath sect, when followers of Nath Sampradya where neither seen as Hindus nor as Muslims and were some also sometimes associated with Sufis. In fact, the boundaries between Sufis and Nath Jogis often overlapped.The origin of Sikhism could not also be understood independently of it Sufi and Nath contexts. The boundaries at that time were extremely fuzzy and fluid, British officer like Denzil Ibbeston faced enormous difficulty in classifying religious traditions in Punjab. That fluidity and fuzziness though under constant threat from the appendages of modern state survives in the lived lives of common Punjabis and these shrines and their popularity is a perfect manifestation of that survival.

These practices mentioned above have developed through centuries of organic intermingling of philosophical and religious ideas since medieval era and therefore has become part of collective consciousness of Punjabi society. These shared sacred practices that exemplifies fluidity of religious tradition in Punjab could not be suppressed, despite massive onslaught of the social and religious reformers following the logic of modern state. These sacred sites act as a bulwark against any sort of communal consciousness in Punjab and facilitate the process of bringing up the solution to the problems of social and political nature. In the context of everyday life of East Punjab these shrines are a powerful tool and instrument in reclaiming Hindu and Sikh veneration of Sufis and their Shrines. This practice of acculturation symbolizes the organic civilizational deliberation

that transcends any sort of modern religious binary and keeps modern communal consciousness at bay.

The other such center or dera that requires some attention here because of the syncretic appeal that it has and the tradition that it promotes that in a way transcends any sort of Hindu-Sik Binary in Punjab. Precisely because of it Syncretic nature that dera suffered huge loss at the hands of Sikh extremist. The dera or center we are talking about here is the Sachkhand Nanak Dham at Batala in Punjab. Sachkhand Nanak dham can also be called as a new religious movement; it has strong links with Punjabi Popular religiosity[118].The dera or movement of Sachkhand Nanak dham was founded by Maharaj Darshan Das in Batala in 1970s, (then established a centre in Loni in Uttar Pradesh and South Hall in London). This dera followed a culture which can be loosely called as syncretic, and it accommodated followers from all religious persuasion and followed the popular Sant tradition of Punjab.

This syncretism was precisely the reason the founder of this movement Maharaj Darshan Das was killed by the communal forces in Punjab. He wanted a peaceful solution to the problem of insurgency condemning the atrocities of both State and Sikh militants.This position of Maharaj Darshan Das promoting communal harmony in the midst of communal tension had made him the enemy of Sikh Militants or Khalistanis. This shrine or spiritual movement is also an example of how spaces of popular religiosity were facing a strong threat from the communalist and fundamentalists in Punjab during insurgency or militancy. The slaying of Darshan Das was by no means unique or unprecedented; the assassination of Baba Gurbachan Singh, the leader of Sant Nirankari Mission also demonstrates the hatred of Sikh fundamentalist and communalist towards syncretic and heterodox beliefs[119].

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[118] Louisa Cox and Catherine Robinson, "The Living Words of the Living Master: Sants, Sikhs, Sachkhand Nanak Dham and the Academy", *Journal of Contemporary religion*, 21, no. 3(2006): 373. https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.jnu.ac.in/doi/full/10.1080/13537900600926154

[119] Ibid.

Nirankari Sect/Dera or movement also started as religious movement or Dera that had strong syncretic foundation and that also transcended the Hindu- Sikh binary constructed and then sustained by modern state (both Colonial and Post-colonial) in Punjab. It can be argued that Sikhism or Guru Nanak's religious movement also started like Dera Nanak Sachkhand Dham, but later during 19th century became a modern codified religion by repudiating diversity and Plurality of Sikh tradition and by constructing exclusive and sharp boundaries[120]. Nanak Sachkhand Dham in a way promoted humanitarian ideals without any consideration for an exclusive identity.

The centre or Dera was open to all and did not promote any exclusive religious identity. Dera's founder Darshan Das used to argue that the biggest problem afflicting Punjabi society today is that we are divided on religious and sectarian line and fight on the isuue of separate 'quam' and separate or distinct 'scripture'i.e. we fight that Guru Granth Sahib is a Sikh scripture and Gita a Hindu Scripture and unnecessarily gets obsessed with bogus religious rituals.[121] The popular greeting of 'Nanak Naam Chardi Kala Tere Bhane Sarbat Da Bhalla'(which means by taking Nanak's naam we pray for all humanity's well being and happiness) taken from Sikh scripture is also the main salutation in Nanak Sachkhand Dham symbolizing the close relationship of this Dera with Sikh ideals and principles .These syncretic or plural shrines and movements in Punjab provided a space for deliberation between people belonging to different religious persuasion, because these spaces were open to all and no particular modern statist identity dominated these spaces.

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[120] Harjot Oberoi, *The construction of religious boundaries, culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (India: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[121] Maharj Darshan Das ji, "Purpose of my presence- Mahraz Darshan Das ji," YouTube Video, 5:05, June 29 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHYxE69kkKs.

In my view precisely because of their syncretic and unorthodox beliefs and their appeal for Hindu- Sikh unity such spaces faced severe attack from the Statist and modernist fundamental and communal forces or groups. Communlaist and fundamentalist of all religions have a tendency to attack the heterodox or unorthodox sect or group of their own religion, and this emanates from the modernist logic that is ingrained in their culture, in which any deliberation between religions and any sort of syncretism or mixing of religious and spiritual beliefs is seen with contempt and all efforts are done to purify their beliefs from heterodox syncretic traditions. I think this is because fundamnetalist and communalist does not follow the true principle or teaching of their religion but follows the logic of modern state and modern governmenatlity as explained in the Second chapter, in this way they are integral part of the project of modernity and modern state in India. In other words as argued by Ashis Nandy in the context of Savarakar and Jinnah that it is the 'religion as ideology' and not the 'religion as faith' that governs communalist and fundamentalists who in Ashis Nandy's view are also modernist[122].

The city of Malerkotla , Shrine of Baba Farid and Baba Haji Ratan in Faridkot and Bathinda and Dera or spiritual/religious movement like Sachkhand Nanak Dham is the perfect example of tolerance, pluralism and shared religious ethics working in the daily lives of Punjabis. The Communal scene in Punjab gets extremely complex with these shrines and deras, major debates on communalism in Punjab has almost ignored these shrines and major deras of Punjab and their role in resisting communal consciousness and territoriality of state from their analysis and has fallen into the trap of Hindu-Sikh binary developed and promoted by Modern State. The study of these shrines also helps in distinguishing the textual religion from the lived religion and perhaps in the case of Punjab lived religion, which is fluid by its very nature, forms the collective consciousness and therefore is impossible to exterminate.

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[122] Ashis Nandy,'The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance', In R. Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and Its Critics*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

The debate on religion and Communalism in Punjab in my view is incomplete without taking cognizance of such fluid shared practices and traditions. The shared and fluid religious and cultural practices of Punjab compel us to reconceptualize religion and communal debate in Punjab. In the Next section we will look at or explore the debate surrounding the question of Sikh Nationalism and the question of Sikh homeland or Khalistan. The interplay of nationalism and communalism in Punjab would be explored and the question of Sikh nationalism would be explored without falling into the trap of the discourse that treats territorialization as a necessary pre-condition for nation.

Rethinking Sikh Nationalism: Transcending the Shadow of Territoriality

The root of modern Sikh national consciousness lies in the Sikh communal consciousness[123]. In the case of Punjab communal question is inextricably linked with the national question. Therefore to properly comprehend the communal scene in Punjab, one has to explore the question of Sikh nationalism. In all the major theories of Nationalism State and territory is a perquisite or precondition for any sort of nation to emerge. In the discourse of Sikh nationalism also Sikh identity and Sikh nation is territorialized. There are territorial limits to the imagination of the nation. This limit makes sure that sovereignty lies in the state and hence is territorialized. This territorialized Sovereignty gives impetus to the movement for an independent Sikh homeland, Khalistan.

French revolution gave the idea and slogan that all sovereignty resides in the political community or the 'nation' and in the 'Westphalian' discourse nation and state is inextricably linked. This 'derivative discourse' of nationalism in the language of Partha

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[123] Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in India: The case of the Punjab,*(London: Routledge, 2000).

Chatterjee [124], makes *territorialization of identity* necessary for any discourse on nation to emerge. There can other ways of conceptualizing Sikh nationalism that can transcend the shadow of territoriality in which sovereignty of the Sikh nation is not dependent on the territory and hence Sikh nation can be conceptualized without necessarily articulating the demand for a Sikh homeland, Khalistan.

This can be done by conceptualizing Sikh Sovereignty in a different manner that is through exploring Sikh history and the history of Khalsa and reiterating its universal value which is not confined to a particular ethnic group or territory. In this sort of conceptualization Sovereignty is embodied not in the territory which fuels the demand for a separate Sikh nationhood, but lies or embodied in the five external symbols of the Sikh 'faith'. This *embodied* Sovereignty is more in tune with the globalizing times than the emphasis on *territorialized* Sovereignty which forces Sikh to demand for a separate homeland, Khalistan.[125] J.P.S Uberoi argues that the meaning of the five symbols of the Khalsa lies in the ritual conjunction of two opposed and different forces. The unshorn hair(kes) is related with the comb(kanga) which performs the function of constraining the hair and giving and orderly arrangement to it, In the same manner the bangle(kara) imparts the exact orderly command over the sword(Kirpan) .[126] Therefore in my view there were no territorial limits to the assertion of Khalsa, because Khalsa unlike modern Western idea of nationalism had universal underpinnings. Khalsa or the Sikh nation had the notion of embodied sovereignty which was universal and not particular or confined to any limits of territory.

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[124] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[125] Giorgio Shani, "Sikh Nationalism*", Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies,* ed. Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 279.

[126] J.P.S Uberoi, *Religion, Civil Society and the State: A Study of Sikhism,* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Therefore Sikh community should be conceptualized as a 'Post- Westphalian' community which is Universal in nature and transcends the limits that State and territory imposes on any community. This conceptualization of Sikh community or nation incorporates diversity and does not create an 'inimical' other which is the case in western notion of nationalism. This conceptualization also makes the demand for a separate homeland for Sikhs, the Khalistan redundant because Sikh community in the light of this conceptualization is sovereign and does not need a separate territory of its own, that binds them to the logic of Nation-state and its particularistic tendencies.

Many scholars working on Secessionism as a political idea have critiqued Secessionism as conservative political ideology or political idea. Political theorist Neera Chandhoke working on Kashmir has argued that Secessionism can only be justified when there is an institutional injustice against a certain group or where constitutionally a certain ethnic group has been denied equal rights.[127] Moreover she argues that any problem that is the result of the working of the nation -state or emanates from the inner logic of nation-State, the solution to that problem or crisis cannot be another nation-state. The Kashmir Problem according to her is the result of the way nation –state or democracy works or functions by excluding certain groups, the solution to that could not be another nation –state because these problems are not specific or endemic to one nation-state but is inherent in the very logic of the functioning of state.

This analysis by Neera Chandhoke could be applied to the situation in Punjab and the demand for secessionism could be repudiated by using the same logic. In fact the new conceptualization of Sikh nation evades or eschews the need for any territory because of the unique nature of its sovereignty and therefore the demand for secessionism in any case becomes redundant. This new conceptualization of Sikh nation also acts an antidote to communalism or communal consciousness in Punjab, because in this new

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[127] Neera Chandhoke, When is Secession Justified? The Context of Kashmir, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 Nov, 2010,.59-66.

conceptualization there is no need for a separate territory and concomitantly no need for the creation or construction of an 'inimical' other and this destroys the very basis of communalism.

Sikh nationalism in this new conceptualization also does not give space to the Sikh political elites to create nationalist discourse by framing an exclusive Sikh identity. The competition that exists between Indian State and the Sikh 'political system' represented by SGPC, Akal Takht and Akali Dal also becomes less intense with this sort of conceptualization of Sikh nationalism. Religion as an ideology that is used for political purpose for protecting or safe guarding non –religious economic interest as argued by Ashis Nandy[128] and that works through interpellation by the efforts of elites will also had no space to flourish in this new conceptualization of Sikh nationalism. This new notion or conceptualization of Sikh nation or community is inclusive in nature and allows for the fluidity of religion, which is integral to religion in Punjab to flourish. This conceptualization accommodates diversity because of its universal underpinning and because of the universal values of equality, liberty and justice that it embodies without any discrimination on the grounds of creed, caste, race, religion, sex and social position. In this way it can also keep communal consciousness in Punjab at bay by negating the communal discourse and space along with the process of 'otherization' that accompanies the communal discourse.

Conclusion

We can conclude this chapter by arguing that the communal scene in Punjab is extremely intricate and no single explanation will do justice to it. The debate on religion and communal question in Punjab cannot be understood without looking it in the proper historical context. The statist discourse of constructing rigid religious categories and

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[128] Ashis Nandy, 'The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance', In R. Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and Its Critics*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

binaries gets resisted and challenged in Punjab through its local tradition of Shrines. In the language of Indian state, Punjab is a Sikh majority state and Hindus are in a minority and there exists a sharp boundary between these two religions, but lived reality of Punjab presents a different picture. In the lived reality or lived lives of Punjabis this boundary is of no value and gets transgressed routinely in the form of local traditions.

These local traditions of shrines and deras are an enigma to the state and the followers of such tradition creates problem of classification in the logic of state. The spirituality that such centres or shrines promotes is the entangled spirituality, in which there is no duality between religious beliefs and people following such deras or shrines frequently transgress religious boundaries. The major debates on communalism in Punjab also had no tool to fathom such centers of local tradition, because the scholars who initiated such debates on communalism in Punjab also in away had internalized the logic of the modern state. This is the reason many scholars working on communalism in Punjab tacitly accepted state given categories of 'Hindu' and 'Sikh' and took almost no cognizance of those practice that transcends this binary on a daily basis.

The debate on Communalism in Punjab revolved around two axis or had two major vantage point to comprehend Punjab crisis, the first was the axis of Political economy and the other axis of Cultural determinism. Both the vantage point lacked the ability to look for spaces where communal binary, which is in my view a construct of modern state, gets transgressed. There was no effort being done to revisit communal debate in the light of popularity of such shrines. These that are mentioned in this chapter exemplify unique nature of religion in Punjab. Religion in Punjab cannot be looked in isolation from such traditions. The tradition of such shrines or centers represents the continuity of syncretic belief and shared culture that has its roots in the medieval Punjab, where Nath, Sufi and Sikh tradition evolved in a milieu of interaction and mutual learning. Sikhism in its modern manifestation cannot be understood without acknowledging the role that Nath and Sufi tradition have had on it. Such milieu of

complex social interaction was not completely lost with modernity but became latent due to the technologies of modern state. These traditions of Punjab can never be completely destroyed in my view because they exemplify the collective consciousness of Punjabi society.

Communal consciousness in Punjab took route through modern social reform movements like Arya Samaj , Singh Sabha Sabha Movement and these tradition were the prime target of such modernist movements, but because such syncretic tradition are part of collective psyche of Punjab, the modernist movements couldn't gain much success and this gets manifested in the popularity of such shared traditions. The prominence of such traditions could be viewed from the examples given previously, whether it is the city of Malerkotla or the shrine of Baba Farid or Baba Haji Ratan or the movements like Sachkhand Nanak Dham, all these places are centers of common shared cultural and religious practices and lived religion which is also the religion as 'faith' to use the words of Ashis Nandy. These practices and shrines of popular veneration in my view acts as a bulwark against communalism and keeps communal consciousness at bay by promoting a shared and plural view of life.

The question of Sikh nationalism which is also inextricably linked with the debate on communalism in Punjab is also been dealt with a new approach. The common minimum idea of both communalism and modern western nationalism is the construction of an 'inimical' other. The origin of modern Sikh national consciousness lies in the historical roots of Sikh communal consciousness. In this chapter I have tried to separate the nationalism from communalism by reconceptualizing Sikh nationalism that transcends any notion of territoriality.

The idea of territoriality binds any community with the logic of state. This statist logic could be transcended by conceptualizing community or nation not through the idea of state and territory that promotes secessionism, but through the ideals of universalism,

which in my view was the case with Khalsa community. Khalsa or Sikh community was conceptualized with the notion of embodied sovereignty which got supplanted by territorial sovereignty. The need of the hour in my view is to reclaim that lost embodied sovereignty, which by its very nature is universal and has principles of equality, fraternity, liberty and justice embedded in it. In this chapter I have endeavored to relook or revisit these same questions of communalism, nationalism and shared cultural tradition through a new or an avant-garde approach.

CONCLUSION

The work started with a quest to look or explore spiritual traditions of Punjab in the light of modernity. It has largely looked at religion and modernity in Punjab with a new framework that transcends the framework developed in Newtonian paradigm in which both modern state and modern religion are entangled. The interplay between modernity and religion has many facets in Punjab, the aspect that I have tried to explore in my work deals with modernity's interface with the spiritual traditions of Punjab.

The main motif in my work has dealt with the comparative analysis of two Spiritual traditions of Punjab, namely the Khalsa Sikh tradition and the Dera tradition. The contention that I have made in my work is that Khalsa Sikh tradition is a modernist tradition, because it entails all the traits of a modern institutionalized religion. Sikh tradition because of its modernist disposition has a propensity of dealing with entities in terms of binaries or binary opposites. Sikh tradition or Khalsa tradition therefore follows a certain logic which has it genesis in modern Newtonian framework and science in which duality i.e. perception of the world by constructing binaries is inherent. Modernity and especially colonial modernity which is highly indebted to or inextricably linked with Newtonian world view has profound influence in shaping Sikh tradition through the instrument of colonial state; in fact it can be argued that the contours of Sikh tradition was developed and shaped by colonial modernity and its technologies and enumerative techniques like census operation.

The idiosyncratic ideas from the domain of philosophy and quantum physics have been used to understand the role that consciousness plays in the interplay between religion and modernity. The notion of quantum spiritual tradition which has been attributed to the dera traditions of Punjab has been framed through the idea of collective consciousness of a region. The idea of collective consciousness has been framed through employing ideas from the domain of quantum physics and philosophy of mind. Scholars like Alexander Wendt's and his idea of Quantum Mind has been used in the context of

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debate regarding religion in Punjab. A framework has been developed in this work which transcends the shadow of Newtonian framework to understand phenomenon of religious or spiritual nature. Comparative study of Sikh and Dera tradition has been done by transcending the common paradigm developed in the domain of political economy and social anthropology. Sikh tradition and Dera tradition the two prominent tradition of Punjab have been explored in this work in the light of concepts like governmentality or modern state.

In the debate regarding religion in Punjab some scholars like Arvind Pal Singh Mandair have argued that the very term of 'religion' should be abolished for the proper explanation of Punjabi spiritual tradition, because religion according to them is mainly a western category and has strong emphasis on theology (emphasis on the idea of God mainly) which was not the case with Indian spiritual tradition generally and Punjabi tradition specifically[129]. The argument that I have tried making in my work accepts the category of 'religion' as a legitimate category to understand Punjabi spiritual tradition but simultaneously rejects any essentialized reading of the category of religion. Therefore I critically consider and accept the category of 'religion' but concomitantly repudiate any static understanding and application of it to understand Punjabi spiritual tradition and for this reason I have used or treated Sikh tradition as a religious tradition and compared it with the fuzzy and fluid religious traditions of Deras.

The primary question of governmentality, syncretism and its relation with Sikh tradition has been dealt in the second chapter. Sikh tradition or khalsa tradition has been classified as the political society of spiritual domain in other word the Deras of Punjab has been shown to constitute or inherit the characteristics of political society, like political society the deras are also outside the domain of legality i.e. the followers of dera does not subscribe to any of the religious identity conferred by the state. The informal and the non-governmentalized spiritual space that Dera is make it the 'political society' of

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129 Arvind –Pal S.Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West, Sikhism, India, post coloniality and the politics of Translation (*New York: Columbia University press, 2009).

spiritual domain and the Sikh tradition the civil society or the legal spiritual domain. The analogy of political society for Dera has been used in the work to frame the subaltern spiritual question in a more popular and tangible category.

The aversion of Sikh tradition towards diversity and syncretism is attributed to its modernist nature in the work. Dera tradition on the other hand has been shown to characterize fluidity and plurality that incorporates diverging faiths and beliefs. The ubiquity or popularity of Deras in Punjab has been attributed to its loose syncretic beliefs and blending of different traditions, which was also a characteristic of pre-modern Sikh tradition, but with modern reform movements within Sikh tradition especially with the Singh Sabha Movement, that trait was lost and that also marked the end of Syncretism within the Sikh tradition.

In my work I have also explored the diversity that exists within deras and argued that some deras are identity driven deras or caste based dera and others are more fluid, fuzzy and open deras. Those deras that are identity driven (which means they are trying to formulate a separate identity or religion for their followers) are Statist in disposition and has much similarity with the centralized or institutionalized identity driven Sikhism and is also the domain of formal spirituality. On the other hand many deras or shrines and especially Sufi shrines are the domains of informal spirituality, because identity is not the central or prime focus of these deras. It is the notion of piety, saint veneration and shared practices of a composite religion that these deras epitomizes and this should be attributed as the main reason for the ubiquity of these small but popular deras.

The work has attempted to argue that these informal and non-institutionalized or non-centralized deras are not new to Punjab and the Guru- Bhakti or Piri-Mureedi tradition that these centers symbolizes are in fact part of the collective consciousness of Punjabi society since medieval era. It has been argued in this work that spaces like Deras and Sufi shrines symbolize entangled spirituality, (the idea of which is taken from Wendt's work on quantum physics and social sciences). People of all religious denomination visits these shrines and pay their obeisance without ever thinking about any

sort of identity. I have used the term political society of spiritual or religious traditions to denote and explain these domains of informal spirituality, because they shares many traits like informal negotiation, with the famous concept of political society originally given by partha chatterjee. These informal spiritual traditions often comes in conflict with the formal, institutionalized and centralized religious traditions like mainstream Sikhism or Hinduism.

The work also has attempted to revisit the communal and national question in Punjab. This question has been explored in the light of syncretic shrines and deras. I have tried arguing in the work that these specific deras or shrines that are the centres of informal spirituality also transcend the statist Hindu-Sikh binary. This is precisely the reason why I have argued in the work that the 60-40 ratio in terms of percentage of Sikhs and Hindus in Punjab is completely spurious and is a Statist agenda to operate or govern its population. The issue of religious classification in my view in Punjab is still a conundrum due to the fuzzy and fluid nature of religiosity in Punjab that gets illustrated by the popularity of these deras and shrines.

The debate on communalism in Punjab gets extremely intricate with these fluid traditions and practices and most of the work done on Communalism in Punjab has almost ignored the role that such practices has played in keeping communal consciousness at bay by acting as a bulwark against it. The shared practices of Saint Veneration that are followed in these centers/shrines or deras resist and transcends the statist discourse of Hindu-Sikh binary. The question of rethinking Sikh nationalism that transcends the shadow of territoriality has been done in the third chapter of the work.

The work also has been an attempt to formulate the argument that every society has a collective consciousness which gets substantiated in the recent debates in quantum physics and philosophy as argued by scholars like Alexander Wendt and certain traditions are part of that consciousness and many phenomenon could not be understood without exploring the collective psyche of that society, in my view in the society of Punjab, the tradition of Guru- Bhakti or Piri-Mureedi is part of their collective consciousness and

these deras exemplifies precisely that tradition. Sikh tradition also started in the same manner but in the process of unfolding in the late 19th and 20th century it got succumbed to the logic of colonial modernity and modern state. This surrendering has made Sikh tradition extremely Modern, Eurocentric and Semitic by getting rid of diversity within it. Sikh tradition in its present manifestation of Khalsa form could be best described as political religion working in the service of nationalism and state. Religion as faith has been supplanted by religion as ideology as far as Sikh tradition is concerned, which is not the case till now for many small and local dera traditions of Punjab.

Lastly, the work is followed by certain limitations, which I intend to overcome in the future course of work. Especially the question of liberation or socio–economic emancipation which has been dealt in the first chapter needs further exploration. The question of whether deras of Punjab or any other spiritual tradition which is influenced by Sufi or Bhakti philosophy of Punjab has the potential to transcend the domain of apolitical spirituality and transform itself into some sort of radical liberation theology or philosophy, which is political in the progressive sense of the word in which socio-economic liberation or emancipation and not the statist logic of division predominates needs further research and exploration.

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