IDENTITY POLITICS IN PUNJAB: A STUDY OF RAVIDASSIA COMMUNITY IN THE MALWA REGION

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DECLARATION

I, Kamna Sagar, hereby declare that the thesis entitled, "**Identity Politics in Punjab: A Study of the Ravidassia Community in the Malwa Region**", submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Doctor of philosophy** from Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for publication or research to any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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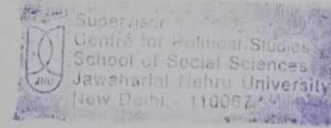
<u>Dedication</u>

Dedicated to my parents who have always supported and believed in me. Special thanks to my father for encouraging me to take up this journey, for guiding me throughout and for being a constant source of inspiration.

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GLOSSARY

ACHHUT	Untouchable.
AD-DHARMI	The Ad-Dharmi is a former- untouchable, Dalit Scheduled Caste community and now a Chamar Sub-caste found in the state of Punjab in India.
ADI GRAITH	Sacred scripture of the Sikhs, also called Guru Granth Sahib.
AKAL	Timeless, a term used to describe God.
AKALI	A member of the Sikh political party in the Punjab.
AKHAND -PATH	Continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib taking forty-eight hours.
AMRIT	Nectar, solution of water and sugar used at the Sikh initiation.
AMRITDHARI	An initiated Sikh.
ANAND-KARAJ	Sikh marriage ceremony.
ARDAS	Sikh prayer recited at the conclusion of a service.
ARYA SAMAJ	North Indian Hindu reform movement founded in the late nineteenth century by Dayanand Saraswati.
BABA	Literally grandfather - a term of respect applied to holy men.

BAISAKHI	First month of the Indian year. One of the important Sikh festivals.
BALMIKI	Belonged to Dalit sub-caste.
BANI	Speech - a tern collectively used for the compositions of the Gurus and the sants included in the Guru Granth Sahib.
BEGUMPURA	Guru Ravidas envisioned a society with people living in harmony without any sort of discrimination. He named this ideal society "Begampur" (a place with no pain).
BHAGAT	A devotee - a term used for the Hindu and Muslim saints whose compositions are included in the Guru Granth Sahib.
BHAKTI	Religious devotion or worship.
BHATRA	A Sikh caste groups.
BIRADARI	Brotherhood; refers both to brotherhood and the caste group; the term is used by Sikhs, Muslims and Punjabi Hindus.
CHAMAR	A leather worker - a term also used for the Chamar caste.
CHAMARDLI	Residential area reserved for the Chamars.
CHUHRA	Member of the sweeper caste belonged to Dalit community.
DERA	A camp or settlement of a particular religious sect; residence of a holy man.
DHARM	Social and religious obligations - Punjabi term for religion.

DHARMSHALA	Commonly a term for a building used for devotional singing and prayer - in the early Sikh period it was used to describe a place where Sikhs assembled for worship.
DOABA	The plain tract of central region of Punjab bounded by the Beas and Sutlej rivers.
GADDI	Seat or throne of a guru.
GOT/GOTRA	Exogamous caste grouping within the exogamous clan.
GRANTH/GRANTHI	Book, a collection. One who looks after the Granth Sahib - a reader of the Granth Sahib - may also be a custodian of gurdwara.
GURDWARA	Literally the house of the guru - a Sikh temple.
GURMUKHI	Script used for writing Punjabi.
GURPURB	Anniversary of the birth or death of Sikh Gurus.
GURU	Religious teacher or a preceptor - one who delivers a person from ignorance.
HARIJAN	Member of the 'untouchable' caste.
JAJMANI	The system of traditional relationship between the service performing manual workers and artisans, and the land-

	owning cultivators involving mutual obligations of work an remuneration.
JATT	A peasant caste dominant in the Punjab.
JAT/JATI	Caste.
JATHA/ JATHEDAR	Military detachment - also used for their local branches by the Sikhs; Leader of a Sikh formation known as Jatha.
KABIRPANTHI	A person who faith in Sant Kabir's ideology.
KHALSA	The Sikh order, brotherhood, instituted by the 10th guru in 1699; also, the pure ones who observes the dress code of five Ks.
KHALISTAN	Literally the land of the pure; the proposed Sikh state.
KHATRI	A mercantile caste, particularly important in the Punjab - also a male person belonging to khatri caste.
KUKA	Nickname given to Namdhari Sikhs.
KARAH PARSHAD	Sacramental food shared at the end of Sikh services.
LANGAR	kitchen attached to every gurdwara from which food is served to all regardless of caste - also used for food prepared and served at gurdwaras.
MAZHABI	Literally, caste-religious; term given to members of the sweeper caste who become Sikhs.
MANDAL	Literally, circle; a group or an organization.

MIRI-PIRI	The religious and temporal spheres.
MISL	A Sikh Military formation under the command of a Sardar.
NAMDHARI	A Sikh movement following Baba. Ram Singh - namdharis believe in a living guru.
NANAK PANTH	The community of Nanak's followers.
NAM SIMRAN	Meditation on God's name.
NIRANKARI	A Sikh heterodox sect; particularly popular among the subaltern classes; Worshipper of the formless - also a member of Sant Nirankari Sects - nirankaris believe in a living guru.
NISHAN SAHIB	Sikh flag.
PATTI	A part or portion of a village.
PANCHAYAT	Council of caste elders.
PANJ PYAREY	The original Khalsa members - literally five beloved ones.
PANTH	A term used for Sikh society; those who joined the Sikh community, or Panth ("Path"), were people who sought spiritual guidance.
QAUM	A clan or caste; community.

RAHTIA	One who conforms to rahit; used for a category of low caste.
RAMDASIA	A Sikh belonging to the julaha Caste.
RAMGARHIA	A Sikh artisan caste comprising of carpenters and blacksmiths; a name given to people of Tarkhan caste who become Sikhs.
RAVIDASSIA	The followers of Guru Ravidass are popularly known as Ravidassia Dalits or Ravidassi Adharmis.
RADHASOAMI	Spiritual tradition founded by Shiv Dayal Singh in 1861 on Basant Panchami Day in Agra, India; A Sikh-Hindu heterodox sect.
REHAT MARYADA	Guide to the Sikh way of life, code of conduct formally approved by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak committee in 1945.
SABHA	Association or an organisation.
SHAMLAT LAND	Village common-Land.
SACHKHAND	Realm of truth; term used by Guru Nanak to describe the highest realm.
SADHARAN/SAHEJ PATH	A non-continuous reading of the Granth Sahib.
SAHEJDHARI	A non-Khalsa Sikh who does not observe the dress code; often Hindu followers of the Sikh Gurus are referred to as Sahajdhari Sikhs.

SAMAJ	Society or Organization.
SANGAT	Religious congregation.
SANT	Literally, good or saints; one of a group of medieval religious poet saints; a title used for a holy man in the Punjab. In the context of Sikhism, a member of the north Indian tradition to which Kabir, Ravi Das and Nanak belonged.
SANT TRADITION	A devotional tradition of North India which stressed the need for interior religion as opposed to external observance.
SHIROMANI GURDWARA PRABHANDHIK COMMITTEE	Since 1925, the main elected body of the Sikhs that manages all the Sikh shrines and temples of the states of the Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh from its headquarters in the Golden Temple, Amritsar.
SINGH SABHA	The Sikh reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.
SHUDHI	purification; an Arya Samaj rite affirming (reaffirming) a person's Hindu purity.
SHUDRA	The fourth and the lowest in the varna order, generally called 'caste'.
SUFI	A Muslim mystic; so, called because of the woollen garments worn by ascetics.
TARKHAN	A carpenter - also used for the carpenter caste.

UDASI	Literally, a renunciant; viewed traditionally as a follower of Guru Nanak through his son Sri Chand who founded an ascetical order of the Sikhs.
VARNASHRAMA-DHARMA	Hindu code of conduct laid down in the shastras.
ZAT	Urdu version of the term at - an endogamous caste grouping.
ZAT-PAT	Indian term used for the caste system.
ZAMINDARS	Literally, possessor of the land; a peasant proprietor also, the holders of a right over a certain share in the produce from land, and as such, also called Landlords.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAP	Aam Aadmi Party
AIDCA	All India Depressed Classes Association
BC	Backward Classes
BJP	Bhartiya Janata Party
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
DLM	Dalit Liberation Movement
DS-4	Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti
DSSDB	Dera Sant Sarwan Dass, Ballan
INC	Indian National Congress
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment
NGO	Non-Government Organization

NSS	National Sample Survey
OBC	Other Backward Castes
PEPSU	Patiala and East Punjab State Union
PPP	People's Party of Punjab
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions
RPI	Republican Party of India
SAD	Shiromani Akali Dal
SAD(M)	Shiromani Akali Dal (Mann)
SCs	Scheduled Castes
SCF	Scheduled Caste Federation
SGPC	Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee
SGRCA-UK	Shri Guru Ravidass cultural Association, UK
SGRJAPACT	Shri Guru Ravidass Janam Asthan Public Charitable Trust
SSDCT-UK	Sant Sarwan Dass Charitable Trust, UK

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Understanding Identity

In recent years, scholars across a variety of social sciences and humanities disciplines have taken an active interest in identity issues. The concept of "identity" has often been at the center of lively debates within Political Science. In political theory, questions of "identity" mark numerous arguments on gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, and culture in relation to liberalism and its alternatives (see Young 1990; Connolly 1991; Kymlicka 1995; Miller 1995; Taylor 1989). While our understanding of "identity" is rooted in academia, the concept has now become widespread. Therefore, there is no single agreed definition for the word 'identity' due to its complexity and vagueness in terminology and phenomenon. Some identities are being created, and some are fixed. These can be negotiable and non-negotiable. In a sociocultural context, an individual's identity has a significant impact on a community (group of people) and vice versa.

The term "identity" has become more significant and broader in the political context. We can define Identity in two ways: Identity-based on sameness, which focuses on the Identity of 'self' and Identity-based on individual differences, which focuses on the Identity of 'others,' which is often referred to as 'otherness.' Identity is "people's concept of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others" (Hogg,1988: 2). This perception of identification helps to stratify society into separate groups with distinct and unique identities. Identity has its own relevance with enduring features (Bhargava 2002: 79). In general, culture is the most pertinent factor in constructing similarity and difference with others. However, identities may also be forced and imposed due to power inequalities. Politics, on the other hand, embraces the study of the behaviour of an individual within a group context.

Social scientists have used ethnicity and ethnic groups in different ways and defined them in different ways. It is widely accepted that ethnic identity has multiple dimensions. In Theodorson's definition, "an ethnic group is a sub-group of a larger society with a common culture, traditions, and identity". An ethnic group member may differ from other members of

society in terms of certain cultural characteristics. The cultural features of the ethnic group may change over time, but the sense of separateness and distinctive ethnicity often continues to persist. It emphasizes how ethnicity transforms, resulting in constructing a new identity rather than reasserting an old one. Paul Brass argues that Individuals and their group leaders play a significant role in the development and growth of ethnic identities. Ethnic groups establish themselves from the other communities in social, cultural, and religious matters as they become conscious of their distinct identities (Brass, 1991:39).

The concept of ethnicity describes a process that gives members of an ethnic group a sense of ethnic identity. Caste, language, and religion are mobilized to promote their economic and political interests. Rajni Kothari, an eminent social scientist (1988) has argued that the process of formation of ethnic identity gets momentum when domination of the majority over the minority becomes an evident fact. Often, the dominant majority tries to assimilate and integrate the minority into the so-called mainstream. Kothari has therefore linked the ethnic movements in India with the movements of marginalized people and of those seeking indigenous authenticity. Pathy (2000) argues that the Indian state has followed the western model of the nation-state and undermined tribal identities. It has also deprived them of much of their land, livelihood, language, religion, and culture. It turns out that the western idea of nation-state, as melting pot leading to a homogeneous national culture is not a myth. The tribal, non-tribal or Hindu-Muslim interactions in India did not result in the extinction of any culture in India. The massive presence and relevance of minority (and majority too) identity groups in India is a lesson for us.

 Oommen (1997) analyzes that the success of any ethnic identity movement also depends to a large extent on the way the state and union governments handle it. There is substantial evidence to suggest that demands have been conceded by the state only when the concerned movement demonstrates its political clout. For instance, the demand for a separate state or administrative unit in the whole of North East India, Punjab, Darjeeling, Uttarakhand, or Jharkhand was not conceded till those movements achieved political significance. But in doing so, the state has perpetuated conflicting situations indirectly and contributed to the proliferation of similar movements. Based on the historical context, they asserted a moral right to govern and demanded recognition for their status. Thus, ethnic groups had a distinct meaning, namely the idea of tribe, which referred to a sociopolitical unit whose members were related by kinship. In sociology, Connor claims that "ethnic groups are synonymous with minorities, and they are

even associated with all identity groups that are mobilized for political purposes. In his view, the indiscriminate application of ethnic grouping to several types of groups obscures vital distinctions between various forms of identity" (Connor 1994:101).

As Charles Taylor examines the implications of "social construction of identity," he argues that identities are constructed through dialogues and disagreements with others. Individuals recognize their identity in social terms. A broader variety of social spaces also result in a continuous reinforcement of the dialogical identity model, which is acknowledged and respected by society. The problem of identity arises only when the relevant features of identity are believed to be under threat. "If nothing had been lost, there would not have been the problem of identity dominating the political scene" (Taylor, 1994: 25). It implies that identity formation begins with a certain social and historical context. Within this context, constructing one's identity involves negotiating who one is through social interactions with significant others. These relational dynamics are complemented by intrapsychic processes, focused around satisfying core identity motives.

The processes of social comparison and self-categorization place the individual in specific identity position which can vary in response to different contexts and over time. These various dynamics and processes help to explain how identities can change and the reasons why they prefer to be permanent. Consciousness is a multi-dimensional structure categorized based on race, language, religion, and ethnicity (Hasan, 1989:5). The late 1980s and early 1990s saw historians, anthropologists, and most importantly humanities scholars relying more and more on "identity" as they examined the cultural politics of race, class, and other social categories under the influence of postmodernism and discourse about multiculturalism. Politics, power, rationality, democracy, and the state are examples. It could better understand this relationship with the help of the following diagram: Identity politics

$$\downarrow \qquad | \qquad \downarrow$$

Power   social domination

↘ Resource exploitation↙
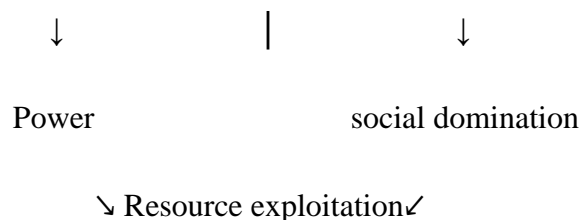
(Source: Erikson, E Dimension of New Identity, 1975:27)

There is a dialectical relationship between a social group's identity and its politics, which is rarely smooth. The question has often been raised about whether identity influences politics or vice versa. However, the answer is not as simple, since their relationship does not always follow the same pattern. In the context of perceived inequality or injustice, identity is used to establish political ideologies and influence political participation to assert group distinctiveness and gain power and recognition. Identity factors such as caste, ethnicity, religion, culture, and other identity-based factors impact the nature of a relationship and, therefore, the transformed and direction of its influence. Politics can influence identity and vice versa. As a result, this practice changes the political landscape and the results of politics (the ethnicization of politics/ politicization of ethnic groups) (Wieland, 2006:25). There can be a conflict environment in a country if it has a history of unequal development with regional inequalities and ethnic ties. It can give a group of people 'legitimate' grievances that over time can escalate into ethnic conflict.

Political identity has been strongly influenced by ethnicity. At times groups cease to be contained within the political system and begin to agitate for increased group rights or even independence. Whenever this happens, the group can be considered nationalistic. Joierman states that "ethnicity is no longer just a cultural or social identity, but a political one" (Joierman, 2007:11). Thus, this leads to ethnic conflicts as well as conflicts within the state or political system. In social science research, self-representation has become a significant issue. The mainstream development process tended to create spaces of inequality, which led to Dalit communities experiencing marginalization in all spheres of life. As a result, economic and political inequality has also increased, which negatively impacts marginalized groups. This is represented in various social movements, and group cultural communities that are committed to the practice of identity-based on political articulation and mobilization.

1.2 Identity Politics in India

Identity Politics has become a prominent subject in Indian politics in the past few years. The concept of identity politics has been used to examine ethnic or religious conflicts and mobilizations, immigration, democracy, elections, representation, and globalization. The study of identity politics can be divided into two categories - first, it is examined at the level of politics of dominance, where identity is a means of mobilization through the quest for power. Second, it is characterized as a politics of resistance, which is a politics of rights that uses identity as a cohesive force to achieve internal solidarity. Identity politics may be defined as a

phenomenon that arises out of shared experiences of injustice and marginalization of certain sections of society. It refers to a process of self-representation and self-reconstruction of groups like gender, race, culture, religion, and ethnicity in order to secure social recognition. Hence, conflicts of identity have often shaped political conflicts in modern society.

Multiculturalism, minority rights, cultural dimensions are all aspects of identity politics. Identity politics occurs when some social minorities or any group feel that their uniqueness and distinctiveness is relevant. As a result, these groups of ethnic minorities feel marginalized and oppressed. In order to preserve their distinct identity, collective mobilization takes place within the group. This is also identified as the politics of recognition and politics of difference. The politics of differences involves inherent contradictions and ambiguities. Politics of difference cannot operate without the conception of 'other' or the identity of the other. It is quite clear that the 'significant other' is the source of all kinds of identity formations. Multiculturalism provides a space for people to develop their own identities, and this ultimately allows minorities to assert themselves. These identities are to be recognized and should not be discarded based on integration or citizenship.

In fact, some groups are not only formed based on distinctness, but also due to a sense of alienation or inferiority. This prevents them from attaining equal status within the society or polity. Multiculturalism refers to political consciousness, mobilization, policies, and ways of accommodation that do not eliminate differences, but accept them to some extent. The nature of difference is addressed through both group assertiveness and mobilization. Biku Parek observes that "the concept of equality has to be applied to both individuals and groups" (Mohammad, 2015:9). In emphasizing the irreconcilable differences between the majority and minority cultures, multiculturalism locates incommensurable differences within the boundaries of the state. In other words, diversity is no longer pushed outside the boundaries of the nation-state. Further, as diverse communities coexist within the state, multiculturalism raises the issue of their equality. It asks whether the different entities, constituting the many, are granted an equal status within the polity (Mahajan, 1998: 221).

A basic aim of identity politics is to challenge the dominant ideas governing societies in any field of politics. It is also interpreted as a counter to the established norms of secular modernity and democracy. It is an attempt to question the framework of legitimate political expression, and tries to provide an alternative space for the subaltern voices that have been oppressed. In recognizing a group, for example, the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, the transformative influence

of politics is clear. Although it has been presented and characterized as a "sons of the soil" movement, the Shiv Sena is now well recognized as a "Hindu nationalist organization." The Shiv Sena is a group of organizations that are clearly defined in terms of Hindu nationalism/Hindutva, and the three most prominent organizations are the RSS, VHP, and BJP.

The RSS, a cultural/religious organization aiming to form the people and organize the Hindu movement, is perhaps the central organization in the Sangh Parivar (Hellman, 1993:16). Similarly, the Akali Dal, which started as a regional movement in Punjab, has transformed into a Sikh religious movement. Since the mid-1970s, several Dalit groups have attempted to become effective instruments for political articulation and mobilization and created a political consciousness among the Dalits, which can be termed identity politics. Generally, it is defined as a phenomenon in which a counter-movement to protest oppression and injustice spreads through various communities, based on their cultural, religious, racial, and ethnic identity.

1.3. Theoretical framework of the study: Identity politics in Punjab

The significance of identity politics started with the rise of low castes, linguistic groups, and religious conflicts in the state of Punjab. The collective identities have remained powerful and have claimed recognition, for example, the Dalits and the Sikh community. Many scholars believe that state institutions and its process are responsible for creating a distinct form of politics of identity or identity politics. Identity politics in Punjab is mainly based on language, religion, caste, class, and ethnic identity. Since Punjab is a homogeneous state, with class, caste, language, and religion, there is still confusion, overlap, and misunderstandings among the communities. Identity politics thus attempts to maintain recognition, empowerment, and mobilization of social groups in the state. This has made identity politics a prominent subject in Punjab politics in the past few years. For understanding the phenomenon of marginalization and the rise of identity politics among the Ravidassia community in the Malwa region the emerging new social movement (NSM) provides a suitable framework. First, we need to understand who is Ravidassia?

1.3.1 Who is Ravidassia?

The Ravidassia community of Punjab belongs to the Scheduled Castes. The followers of Guru Ravidass are popularly known as Ravidassia Dalits.   Although the Ad-Dharmi are followers of Guru Ravidas (now Ravidassia).   The members of the Ravidassia community are mostly from two major castes, namely, Chamars and Ad-Dharmis (Jodhka: 2009). According to the

Census of India (2013), Chamars, Jatia Chamar, Rehgar, Raigar, Ramdasi, Ravidassia, Ram Dasia, Ram Dasia Sikh, Ravidassia Sikh, and Ravidassia Sikh are all included in the population data. It seems there is no ambiguity when one realizes the Ad-Dharmis are mostly Chamar converts to Ravidassia and declared their own Ravidassia Dharm in 2010. This was in response to the killing of a saint of the sect in Vienna[1]. The Chamars are a powerful sub-caste group in Punjab. According to the census, both the Chamars and the Ravidassia are Hindus. In sociological terms, they are a separate group and are distinct from both the caste Hindus and Sikhs. Over the last few decades, the Ravidassia, the most affluent Dalit community, have started asserting their separate identity and have established their own Ravidassia Sabhas and Gurdwaras. These are different from the mainstream Sikh organizations and Gurdwaras across the world.

One of the well-known untouchable saint poets of the 15th and 16th centuries, Guru Ravidass, who continues to remain highly respected among the Scheduled Castes (SC), particularly the Chamars/Chambhars/Charmakars of northwest and central India. According to Schaller, the ex-untouchable Chamars and other low caste people who worship Guru Ravidass "do not passively accept their inferior condition." Schaller continues, "Their worship of Ravidass is the manifestation of a dissident socio-religious ideology" (Schaller, 1996:94). They show self-assurance and respect only by mentioning Sant Ravidass, as seen by the fact that most of them prefer to be called "Ravidassia" rather than by their traditional and hereditary caste identities, which are sometimes associated with negative connotations (Hawley, 1988:272). Ravidassia often assert their distinct identity and are extremely particular about their distinct religion, which is based on the teachings and Bani of Guru Ravidass, whom they respect as their Guru. While the Deras recognise him as a living Guru, mainstream Sikhism is profoundly opposed to this. The Ravidassia movement, which emerged as an independent religion and identity, is inextricably linked with the mainstream Sikh faith.

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[1] The announcement was made in response to the assault on the topmost sants /gaddinasheens (holy persons/head of deras) of Dera Sachkhand Ballan, who were on their sermon tour in Austria. This unfortunate assault happened during a religious ceremony at a Ravidass Temple in Vienna on 24 May 2009. The attack left one dead and several injured, including Sant Niranjan Dass, the current gaddinasheen of Dera Ballan. The one who was killed was none other than the deputy chief of Dera Ballan, Sant Ramanand, popularly known as the soul of the Ravidass mission (Ram 2017: 53).

1.3.2 Caste

The caste system is one of the oldest systems in India and is one of the active institutions. It is the predominant feature of identity politics. It is difficult to define caste in simple terms, and it has a complex meaning. Caste was not simply an ideological reality. According to Cohn, *"there is no widely recognized singular description of the caste system, although there is widespread agreement on its characteristics."* (Cohn, 1971:124). In certain respects, Punjab is no different from the rest of India, but it also has certain distinctive features from other regions. Sikhism, an egalitarian religion with deep caste roots, is practiced by the majority of the population, who are not Hindus. Hindu structure of society is apparent in the Sikh community because of the presence of "castes."

Caste has remained a factor in Punjab despite the cultural influences of Islam and Sikhism. It has served as a disabling institution for those who are on the periphery of Punjabi society, the Dalits. However, there have been some significant shifts in caste relations over the years. Aside from the fact that caste no longer has much of an ideological influence, Dalits have also migrated away from traditionally established caste occupations. In some places, it even comes from the local agrarian economy. Their desire for cultural and religious liberty is a manifestation of their increased economic autonomy. Sikhism opposes caste-based divides and denies itself as a religious system, but its social and religious organizations have grown to be dominated by the historically and economically affluent dominant groups. While caste is certainly an influential source of social dissension in Punjab and a reason for the Ravidasis/Ravidassia to evolve an autonomous religious identity, they do not see their faith as being in an antagonistic relationship with contemporary Sikhism.

The religious demographic of Punjab has always been very different from the rest of the country. The majority of the population (nearly 60%) adheres to Sikhism, a religion which theologically condemns caste. Prior to the Partition of the subcontinent in 1947, more than half of the Punjab identified with Islam, which similarly decries caste. However, caste-based divisions and differences have been quite prominent in the region. Historically, more than one-fourth of its population has been viewed as an "outcaste" by the dominant sections of Punjabi society (McLeod 1996: 87). There is caste stratification among Dalits and Sikhs in Punjab. The caste issue has been both muted and loud in the Sikh community, a clear paradox caused by the disjunction between claim and reality. In this society, the land-owning Jat Sikhs are at the top of the caste hierarchy. In many villages, they are the most significant economic players

since they control the land. Most Punjabi villages are populated by Jat Sikhs because of census data, political power, and economic power. There is a feeling of superiority about them. As a result of their dominant position, they have a Jat consciousness. Being a landowner has been a symbol of authority in village society, and residential segregation of the lower castes in chamardli[2] (colonies) is a marker of their inferior caste status (Kalsi, 1989:90).

1.3.3 Religion and Rise of Identity Assertions

Religion is another complex issue in the state of Punjab. Religion is the bond, which constructed social identity irrespective of language, caste, and class and so on. The Hindu revivalist movement in the 19th century brought religion into the spotlight as one of the identity movements. It is divided into two basic religions, Hinduism, and Sikhism. During colonial times, Sikhs and Dalits began to form identities or become conscious of their identities. The political parties in their interaction with the socio-political and economic dynamics have either stunted or boosted the expression of identities – secular, communal and exclusive religious identities. The manifestation of competing identities shows that these are shaped by the political-economic context and the dynamism of the social spectrum. Communal identities along with the religious group identities and class-based articulations have coexisted. Separate religious identities acquired expression through various movements like "Shuddhi" by Arya Samaj, "Amrit Parchar" by Singh Sabha, and so on. In the process of their evolution, they had turned out to be one of the most resurgent, volatile, and assertive communities in the Indian sub-continent. From the fifteenth century, Sikhism spread throughout northern India. Since the evolution of the community, Sikhs have played an important role in the social, economic, and political aspects of India. It had even confronted the Indian state, for asserting its separate identity, and socio-economic and political rights.

These social movements served to emancipate Dalits and improve their position to some extent. It caused a transformation in the communities, which gradually helped to overcome the social patterns of the Arya Samaj's "purity-pollution" ideology. Dalits eventually developed their own identity. The division between Hindus and Sikhs that had already occurred as a result of 'Arya Samaj' and 'Singh Sabha' assertions was reinforced. The Sikh community's efforts to get privileges from colonial authorities formed the basis of its unique identity assertions, which were opposed by Hindus. Through the purification of practices and beliefs as well as the

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[2] residential area reserved for the Chamars.

critique of those of others, religious group identities were consolidated. However, these religious or caste contestations have co-existed with struggles on secular issues. Simultaneously, regional and linguistic demands, secular in themselves, were filtered through the religious prism from 1960s to 1980s. Particularistic aspects were used for inter-religious mobilization by politics while universalistic cultural patterns were underplayed. The most obvious examples were, on the one hand, the secular demand for Punjabi Suba and, on the other, sectarian mobilizations such as the Hindi agitation and the Khalistan movement.

1.3.4 The issue of Language

Language is also described as a collective effort of its people, regardless of class, race, or group. When the government attempted to recognize states based on their languages in the early 1950s, language became a movement for identity politics in India. Hindi was also to be imposed as a regional language of India. For the Sikhs, to redefine their identity in India after independence, the only hope lay in having a province. This was because they could insist on the teaching of the Punjabi language, Sikh scriptures and history. The first phase between 1947 and 1966 shaped the state formation on a linguistic basis. The SAD launched a decade-long struggle for 'language-based Punjabi Suba, but at the popular level they tended to mix religion with language' (Singh 2014:59)'. The Government of India appointed the State Reorganization Commission in 1953 which maintained that 'Punjabi was not sufficiently distinct from Hindi and the demand for a Punjabi-speaking state was a disguise for a religious-based Sikh state' (Govt. of India 1955:141).

The Hindi agitation was launched in support of "Maha" Punjab. It was clear there were communal overtones, but there were no tensions between the two groups. Finally, in the 1966 reorganization, Punjab was reconstituted as a Punjabi speaking state where the Sikhs became a majority community. The geographical and linguistic reorganization, however, could not address the political issues of genuine federation, resolution of the water dispute and transfer of remaining Punjabi speaking areas. This provided a basis for the initiation of coalition politics in Punjab. As the state and its interaction with structural conditions overshadowed the assertion of a secular Punjabi identity, and the articulations of local communities. All these identities co-existed. To illustrate, linguistic and regional issues were articulated within the communal frame. The most obvious examples of this were the Hindi agitation, the Punjabi Suba movement in the pre-reorganization phase and Khalistan assertions in the mid-eighties.

At the same time, a secular Punjabi identity also coexisted. According to the 1971 census, "47 percent of the Punjabi Hindus mentioned Punjabi as their mother tongue. However, the language question had already been communalized and in 1991 it increased to 84 per cent. The adoption of the Moga Declaration by the SAD and the BJP emphasizing Punjab, Punjabi and Punjabiyat is a testimony to this fact". The pragmatic politics of forming post-election coalitions cautioned the political parties against communally-divisive slogans and mixing of religion with language. In the wake of the Green Revolution, economic issues like efficient delivery of agricultural inputs, ensuring a minimum support price and augmentation of income of farmers and landless labourers acquired political space. These coalitions were artificial constructs of ideologically divergent and competing political parties.

1.3.5 Majority and Minority issue

The categories of majority-minority are enormously complex. Majority-minority is a significant dimension within the population composition. However, it is important to remember that this divide is more a manifestation of perceptions of communities than factual. Firstly, Sikhs, who make up 1.7% of the total Indian population, are a majority (57.7% according to the 2011 Census) in Punjab. On the other hand, Hindus who are a majority in most parts of the country are a minority in the state (38.5%) (Trehan, 2018:66). The religious configuration has also impacted political parties in the state. Brass points out this majority-minority conundrum in terms of electoral politics in Punjab. Of the three religious' communities, the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs, according to 1931 census, the Sikhs were in a minority. There is no question that Hindus constituted 28 percent of the population, while Muslims constituted 56 percent and Sikhs only 13 percent. As a result of this configuration, coalition politics flourished in the state as all religious groups considered themselves to be in the minority. The Hindus struggled with a majority-minority complex, perceiving themselves to be a majority in India and a minority in the reorganised Punjab. The Sikhs alternated between being a majority in Punjab and a minority in India' (Kumar 1982:27).

H. Singh conceptualised the "dialectic of the minority-majority dimension of Punjab politics as the duality of minority persecution complex and majority arrogance complex" (Singh, 1982: 46). At the time of partition, the migration of population made a significant impact on the development of political, economic, and social events. The Sikh population increased from "13 per cent to 33 per cent and the Hindu population from 28 per cent to 64 per cent as per the 1961 census". During this period Punjab was divided between Punjabi speaking and Hindi speaking.

In "eight of the 12 Punjabi-speaking districts, the Sikhs were in a majority. Further with the reorganization of the state in the mid-sixties, the Sikhs constituted a majority with 60 per cent and the Hindus 37 per cent". This meant that both the Hindus and the Sikhs continued to suffer from the minority persecution complex but with a difference. Interestingly, the Hindus suffered from a majority-minority complex as they perceived themselves as the majority in India and a minority in the reorganized Punjab. Similarly, the Sikhs perceived to have a minority-majority complex as they were majority in Punjab and minority in India (Kumar, 2010:43-47).

1.3.6 Dimensions of Party Dynamics in Punjab

These characteristic features have shaped the politics of the state, whereby caste has yet to become an idiom of politics. There is so much interplay between religious, linguistic and regional identities that none of these parameters exists as a sole determinant of electoral mobilization. A perusal of the background of elected representatives and core support base shows that the major political parties represent diversity despite changing political context since the mid-sixties. For example, the Sikh majority was clearly reflected as nearly "70 per cent of Legislators belonged to this religion. However, the number of Sikh Legislators was higher than the average in 1969 (76 per cent), 1977 (74 per cent) and 1997 (74 per cent). In these elections the Akali Dal emerged as a majority party and formed the government. In contrast in 1992, the Akali Dal boycotted the elections and the number of Sikh Legislators decreased to its lowest of 58 per cent. Of the total legislatures elected on the Akali Dal ticket, 97 per cent belonged to the Sikh religion". The BJP averages 88 percent in all elections from the Hindu community.

The stunted dimension of caste politics in Punjab can be gauged from the fact that the BSP has almost equal numbers of its legislators from both the Hindus and the Sikhs. The religious, caste and class dimensions are intermeshed, but the dominant formations are located in exclusive demographic spaces. For example, the Sikh-Jat-Peasant identity is predominantly rural and the Hindu-Khatri-Trader identity is urban. The Akali Dal is dominated by the Sikh-Jat-Peasants and the BJP by the Hindu-Khatri-Traders. However, the Congress party represents both of these identities. To illustrate, out of the total legislators "31 per cent were Sikh-Jat-Peasants. However, the number of Jats elected was 44 per cent between 1967 and 2007". It is clear that Sikh-Jat-peasants dominate Punjab politics.

Caste-based groups gained more social and political bargaining space. They found representation across political parties rather than merely in a caste-based political party such as Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). The long-term implications of SCs finding accommodation in the mainstream Punjab parties have been that the BSP's vote share has been continuously declining. It has come down from 7.48 per cent in 1997 to 1.50 per cent in the 2017 assembly elections. Further, the adoption of local religio-cultural rituals and practices by the low castes provided leverage to political parties to co-opt otherwise discriminated castes. In the lower rung of caste hierarchy, the Scheduled Castes do not constitute a captive vote bank of any political party. In other words, it is the religio-caste and class axis which has become a significant factor in Punjab identity politics.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Malwa region is a "Backward" region known for its diverse socio-economic and political identities. The region is heavily dominated by the Sikh religion when compared to Doaba and Majha.   Ravidassia community is less numerous in the Malwa region compared to the Doaba region. Identity plays a significant role in the legitimate socioeconomic and political empowerment of individuals and communities. In the context of identity politics, the Malwa region offers an appropriate area to study the nature of various aspects such as caste, culture, community, and religion issues. One of the reasons for such concern is the growing assertion of various ethnic groups and its impact on the politics of the region. Malwa is the largest political region of Punjab. Ludhiana, Bathinda, Patiala and Moga are some of the key districts in the region. Win Malwa, win Punjab is an oft-repeated adage in Punjab politics. For example, in 2017, the region dominated the majority of legislative Assembly seats - 69 out of 117. The extent to which Malwa has dominated Punjab's politics can be gauged from the fact that all but two Chief Ministers of the state since 1966 have been from the Malwa region. The Malwa belt, mostly agrarian in nature, is also known as Punjab's *Zamindari* belt. It is also famous for the cultivation of cotton in Malwa. It is infamous for the glaring inequalities in landholding.

The Malwa belt, which has had a history of protests and social-political movements, was more recently the epicentre of the protests the three farm laws passed by the Union government. It has two significant facts regarding identity politics: The first is the socio-cultural assertion among Dalits, and the second is the political marginalization of Dalits. In this context the study is intended to know how Ravidassia identity is being constructed in Malwa region in the wake of major changes that have occurred in the socio-economic and political realm. This study will

assess the formation of Ravidassia identity and its larger implications on society economy and politics in response to various developments witnessed in the past decades. There has been a notable shift in the way religion and religious communities are being mobilized into political and public discourse. Over a period, it has become quite important to examine the dynamics of politics, and the development of identity politics in a state and a region. The Green Revolution brought multi-dimensional changes to the rural society of the Malwa region of Punjab. It changed not only the income pattern, level of employment and social relationship of farmers and agricultural labourers but also the nature of identity politics at the state and regional level. Other dominant caste and upper caste groups also resort to identity politics. Political parties are adept at utilizing identity politics to mobilize support and enhance their electoral strength.

In the Malwa region identity politics has changed. A significant feature of the agrarian society in Punjab is the numerical preponderance of Jat Sikhs in rural areas, especially in the Malwa region. Scheduled castes (Ravidassia, Ad-dharmis, chamars, Balmiki-Mazhabis) form what is called the agricultural proletariat or labour force in the region. There was a gradual shift of power from the urban elite to the rural elite. The Jat Sikhs became the dominant political group and as a result, development of agriculture became the top priority of every successive government. The importance of Deras in Punjab and their resistance to the monopolistic authority of the Sikhs has acquired significant importance in the current political history of Punjab. In the Malwa region, the dera factor played a crucial role especially during election times. Dera Sacha Sauda is highly influential in the region. Among the key districts where the dera enjoys a strong base are Bathinda, Ferozepur, Fazilka, Sangrur, Muktsar, and Mansa. The rapid growth of Deras in Indian Punjab and the importance of some of these Deras in influencing the identity politics and political choices of their followers, the majority of whom are from socially and economically marginalized groups, is being recognized and seemingly supported by political parties. As a result, politicians and candidates from all parties flocked to Deras in the recent 2007 and 2017 elections. This tendency may be traced mainly to the fact that the socio-economic basis of the state's political power has remained unchanged in favour of the higher castes/communities. Although identity politics based on ethno-regional communal division faded into the background in the post-militancy of Punjab, it is now the turn of caste-based identity politics through the 'dera route.'

1.5 Approaches to identity formation and identity politics

This section presents an overview of identity politics research. To begin, this study distinguishes between various approaches to defining identity politics and the challenges which each approach presents. In the process, the study found that these approaches represent different theoretical understandings of the relationship between experience, culture, identity, politics, and power in Punjab. These debates raise theoretical issues that are addressed in the second section, including (a) In what ways does personal experience affect political stance? (b) What is the role of socio- cultural construction in interpreting and representing social identities? It is also important to explain how identity politics targets cultural and political goals through the connection between collective action and power. Similarly, external classification processes may occur when different movement identities are used. It is relevant for understanding how politics and identity are related.

According to Bernstein, "identity groups as advocating for recognition and respect for their cultural differences, which derive from their distinct group identities. They assume that activists organized around status identities understand these identities with their associated cultures in essentialist rather than socially constructed terms" (Bernstein,2005:3). For example, Brown (1995) argues that marginalization is the basis of identity group culture. She believes that fighting for rights based on disadvantaged cultural identities will only lead to more powerful dominant groups who dominate the state (Brown, 1995: 66)

 Taylor(1989), Young (1990), and Kymlicka (1995) show that the socially constructed nature of group differences does not prevent organizing around the identities that mark those groups. They recognized that cultural differences among groups are socially constructed, resulting from a shared history of oppression. Nonetheless, they contend that these differences create distinct social groups, which justifies demands for group-differentiated citizenship rights and challenges negative representations. Because these identity groups share a history of oppression, granting them official recognition does not entail giving such recognition to groups. In sociological and anthropological literature, the primordial theory is the oldest theory of ethnic identity. On the basis of this approach, these are two reasons. First, ethnic identity is fixed and unchangeable. Second, similar origins and histories lay the groundwork for forming ethnic identities. As a result, historical and cultural roots connect individuals ethnically (Bernstein, 2005: 50).

In cultural terms, identity politics is defined as "the concept of identity itself its formation, manifestation, or assertion. It should be a fundamental issue of political identity,". Hence, culture is related to institutions, structures, and efforts toward self-transformation (Kauffman, 1990: 67). Others who consider class disparity as the primary cause of exploitation and oppression see no distinction between various forms of cultural mobilization. All arguments about social identities are classified as "culture politics," which are merged with and rejected as "identity politics" (Gitlin, 1995). According to Wrong (2003) and Bell (2001), an economic collapse could encourage a renewed emphasis on class-based politics, implying that identity politics would disappear in the presence of "actual" political economy difficulties. Once again, claims about the connection between identity politics and social class identities are asserted.

But, according to this viewpoint, identity politics has ignored issues such as exploitation, class, poverty, and globalization, all of which increase economic inequality. Therefore, it contends that identity politics' symbolic concerns regarding language and political mobilization or representation, as well as policies to increase ethnic/racial identity groups, undermine the welfare state's capacity to provide for their communities. In contrast to the logic of the Marxist and neo-Marxist theory, social movements that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the civil rights and women's movements, seemed to be more concerned with culture and identity than with challenging the class structure. Neo-Marxist approaches to identity politics can also be criticized for challenging the separation of culture from class and the political economy. For example, class signifiers have an interactional reality that may just as constructed as status identities, and that class manifests in cultural expression (Bourdieu 1984, Calhoun 1993b, Aronowitz 1992). Similarly, caste, race, and other status identities have cultural dimensions and meanings linked to concrete socio-economic and structural contexts.

Hence, it maintains the division between a cultural politics of recognition and a social politics of justice and equality, on which discussions of identity politics take place. It ignores the interrelatedness of socio-economic injustice rooted in society's political-economic structure and cultural or symbolic injustice rooted in social patterns of representation. In this context, castes constitute "bivalent" collectivise—that is, Dalit or lower groups affected by the political economy and the socio-cultural structure of society. For example, caste structures the division of labour between low-paid menial labour and domestic work. Thus, capitalist exploitation takes place in specific ways in Punjab. Thus, redistributive remedies generally necessitate some

recognition of groups whom the redistribution will affect and that maintaining non-exclusionary identities would require shifts in the political economy (Bernstein, 2005: 54).

New social movement (NSM) theory moves beyond the parameters of Marxist frameworks to understand the variety of social movements that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s that did not ostensibly organize around social class. Although NSM theory does not employ the language of identity politics [even if some NSM theorists refer to it as an "identity-oriented" paradigm (e.g., Touraine 1981)], it represents the first concerted theoretical effort to understand the role of identity in social movements. It ultimately provoked the more rationalist strands of social movement theory, resource mobilization, and political process theory to examine issues of identity and culture. More generally, like social movement theory, NSM theory attempted to explain mobilization—why and when people act. By taking this approach, NSM theory displaced the assumption that activism based on anything other than the class was epiphenomena or psychologically rooted. This raised the possibility of alternative causal explanations for identity politics. NSM theory both challenges and affirms the idea that identity politics is a distinct political practice.

According to Melucci, NSMs challenge dominant normative and cultural codes, and identity politics evokes the question of how difference is dealt with in each society. Thus, NSM theory identifies a broader purpose for identity politics and does not dismiss it for being "merely" cultural or symbolic. However, NSM theory continues to separate identity and culture from the political economy (Melucci, 1996: 21). In contrast, Punjab does consider conservative social movements as identity politics because they respond to economic globalization and the decline of Sikh culture by forming movements based on ethnicity, religion, or nationalism. for example, Sikh ethnonationalism and Dalit political assertion. Thus, identity politics involves movements with exclusive tendencies rather than movements organized around various status identities that may alternate between exclusivity and inclusivity. This way, it does not account for why some status-based movements are exclusive and others inclusive and how these orientations may change over time. Instead, it redefines identity politics within a normative political arena.

The most critical questions regarding identity politics are not addressed by NSM theory: "Why has culture become a major focus of movement concern since the 1960s? What is the relationship between culture and politics in the emergence of new movements?" Furthermore, NSM theory does not adequately address other critical questions raised in the literature on

identity politics regarding the relationship between identity, culture, and the political economy. Whether and why status identities are understood in different ways; and what is the causal relationship between organizing based on status identities and a variety of movement consequences. Sociologists have drawn on social constructionism and postmodernism to answer these questions.

Postmodernist analyses of identity politics conceptualize power in terms that are starkly different from neo-Marxist and NSM perspectives. In these views, status categories constitute a form of regulation. Therefore, any activism in the name of those categories will not alleviate inequality but will reify those categories. This will increase the use of those categories to regulate and dominate subordinate status groups. Thus, identity politics hardens rather than redefines differences in status identities that are the basis for inequality. According to these approaches, organizing on the basis of identity is ultimately essentialist[3]. Instead of viewing power in terms of economic inequality, which renders organizing based on status identities as primarily symbolic and cultural activism, understood through postmodern views of power, identity politics appear to be narrow, state-centred activism that fails to address the social and political bases of power adequately. Rather than being too cultural, identity politics is not cultural enough (Vaid 1995). This interpretation of identity politics results from postmodernist ideas and the emergence of "Dalit politics" in the 1980s.

The major works on identity politics in Punjab or the politics of identity in terms of caste identity politics (Kothari 1970; Teltumbde 2012; Hasan 2009; Jodhka 2010a, 2010b; Deshpande 2011; Sharma Mehra 2011), religion (Ram 2004; Bose 2009; Saxena 2013; Rudolph and Rudolph 2010), tribes (Suan 2011), language (Abbi 2013; Pradhan 2012; Kaviraj 2010), region (Jana 2011; Rao Bonagani 2011; Mukherjee 2011; Prakash 2001) and ethnicity (Brass 1991; Gupta 1996; Samson 2013; Chandra 2000). Analysts associate several problems with identity politics. They contend that the essentialism of identity politics prevented articulating a universal vision for social reform for example, the Dalit movement had done. Instead of making particularistic claims for group-based benefits, which lead to the decline. They claim that because identity groups tend to be divided into narrow categories, they cannot agree on or sustain anything but opposition to a common enemy. For example, by targeting the Dalit community, identity politics leave them no space to participate politically, which results

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[3] Essentialism is the view that objects have a set of attributes that are necessary to their identity. In early Western thought, Plato's idealism held that all things have such an "essence"—an "idea" or "form."

in unproductive defensiveness. Such politics leads to an inability to form coalitions that can agitate for progressive or revolutionary social change. Furthermore, these studies often generalize from a specific case to make claims about all instances of identity politics.

However, the research focuses on identity politics in some form or another. Identity groups that challenge the cohesiveness and plurality of the concept of identity, ethnicity, and politics are not well studied. These studies evaluate the consequences of identity politics based on their own theoretical assumptions about how identity politics at the state and national levels functions. They tend toward making normative political evaluations about identity politics because they do not explicitly identify the causal mechanisms that link identity politics to these purported outcomes. In addition, they ignore the possibility that claims of essentialism may be strategic, and overlook the difficulties in eliminating social categories and a political strategy. This study will use these approaches to examine this topic. Identity politics also emerges on the political stage with demands by homogenous groups for political sovereignty (Bernstein, 2005:62).

1.6 Review of Literature

Identity politics has been the most dominant issue in the politics of our country in recent times. In Punjab, identity movements started along with the attainment of freedom and the establishment of the nation-state. A lot of work has been done on identity and political assertions. The problem has been analyzed in various ways. However, when considering Sikh and Dalit identity assertions, there are few studies that examine how the State's actions and responses were responsible, infuriating, and contributing to further identity assertions among the two communities. In the following study, an effort has been made to analyze the Ravidassia assertions and the later responses by the State and vice versa. The works of literature which contribute to providing the basis of the study are as follows:

1.6.1 Studies on Caste and Religion in Punjab

Denzil Ibbetson (1916), "Punjab Castes" explains the genesis of caste on the basis of occupation. Castes were created when new occupations emerged or traditional occupations changed. According to Ibbeston, castes are nothing more than groups of people with specific occupations, and these occupations are arranged in a pollution-purity continuum and their ranking has a bearing on their social relationships. In addition, he argues that certain religious principles maintain these occupations. The Ibbetson stated that "castes are only gatherings of

individuals with an explicit occupation and have been ordered in terms of pollution and purity." He contended that caste is a social institution more than a religious one, that it has nothing to do with Hinduism. There is no direct relationship between caste and conversion from Hinduism to Islam. Nothing is more ambiguous and difficult to define caste, and the mere fact that a generation has ancestors who belong to a particular caste only raises the weak assumption that it also belongs to that caste—a presumption that may be disproved in an unlimited number of ways. The communities in India where the Hindu religion has flourished are not an exception to this rule; however, in their case, unique circumstances have combined to preserve the hereditary nature of occupation in its integrity and to perpetuate it under a more developed state of society than elsewhere.

Paul. R. Brass (1974), "Religion, Ethnicity, and Language in Northern India," this book, is concerned with the ways in which two powerful symbols of group identity, i.e. language and religion, have been manipulated by political elites to promote communal and national movements and with the consequences of such movements for the political cohesion of India. It focuses specifically on the significant issues of religious cleavage and language change in north India during the 19th and 20th centuries, which witnessed the simultaneous development of political conflict among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs and between the Hindi movement and movements on behalf of other languages and dialects in the north. In analyzing language and religious movements in north India, Indian census data have been used in creative and pioneering ways. Although the illustrative cases and data are drawn from North India, the arguments are of broad theoretical relevance. Three general themes are stressed. The first is that the so-called "givens" of group identity do not predetermine the outcomes of communal movements, but may them alter them. The second is that, in the formation of group identities, political elites tend to emphasize one symbol or line of cleavage above others. They then strive to bring other symbols into congruence with the primary symbol. Third, political parties do not merely reflect or transmit communal demands but they shape group consciousness by manipulating symbols of group identity to achieve power for their group.

W. H. Mcleod (1975), "The Evolution of the Sikh Community," his analysis maintained a double focus along the line of history and across the arc of traditional Sikh understanding. As a modern historian, he frequently addressed the issues of history verses tradition, the nature of authority in the Sikh Panth (community), and the ever-evolving nature of Sikh identity. For him, Sikh history offered "an unusually coherent example of how a cultural group develops in

direct response to the pressure of historical circumstances". McLeod thus intended to closely examine a widerange of historical and sociological phenomena to offer his 'radical concept of development' of the Sikh Panth. His hypothesis proposed that the progress of the Panth was not explained by the purposeful intentions of the Gurus. Instead, it explained the influence of the social, economic and cultural environment. W.H. McLeod, in his theory, does not deny the role of ideas. However, in practice, he concentrates on the social environment in his exposition of institutionalization, militarization, the Khalsa rahit and the doctrines of Guruship. According to McLeod, the question of Khalsa rahit was not finally settled until well into the eighteenth century. But the early Rahitnamas contain all the significant of rahit, including all the 5 Ks, though not as a formulation of panj-kakar. He finds in Sikh history 'a theory of religious unity contending with diversity of social elements', raising problems of cohesion for the Panth. Religious issues must be defended in the political arena and political activity must be conducted in accordance with traditional religious norms.

Marenco (1976), "The transformation of Sikh Society," explains how lower caste Sikhs rise into the higher caste based on group-based mobility. He examined the social stratification of Sikhs in terms of caste and class coexistence. Most other castes did not experience corporate mobility, unlike the Jat Sikhs. In rural areas, other Sikh castes experienced individual mobility, but the Jats benefited most from colonial political economy. British policy towards Sikhs remained appeasement, for rehabilitating the Sikh soldiers was a mammoth task to prevent future revolt/mutiny. Furthermore, the British recruited Sikhs of the same caste that served in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's and his successors' Khalsa army. Peasant proprietors in general and the Jat Sikhs in particular gained power through two British measures. He was the first to identify the difference in hierarchies according to religion in Punjab. However, she worked out her argument by arguing that the colonial intervention led to the emergence of classes which were comprised of heterogeneous castes. The Sikhs afford an example of the perpetuation of a caste system, with a rearrangement of the caste hierarchy". There are variations in the features of the caste systems of Hindus and Sikhs. For instance, among the Hindus endogamy is the rule, whereas among the Sikhs, though endogamy is practiced, yet there are instances of intercaste marriages. There is an intriguing point made by Marenco, that even though castes and occupations overlap, and some changes occur, in the case of Sikhs, certain occupational changes are corporate. There has been a tremendous decline in both communal and ritual taboos.

Kenneth W. Jones (1976), "Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th Century Punjab", is one of the most significant works, which deals with the beginning of vital socio-religious changes among Punjabi Hindus from the second half of the 19th century. In his work, "Arya Dharm" which focuses on the processes of 'identity reformulation and acculturation' among Punjabi Hindus with special reference to the Arya Samaj, Jones examines the growth of new ideologies, the conception of group consciousness, the pattern of communal conflict and the dynamics of the British Raj that contributed to the conflict among Hindus, Muslims, and the Sikhs. In this context, he refers to their interactions with the Sanatanists.

Hadinder Singh's (1976) "Authority and Influence in Two Sikh Villages" which examines, the social and economic structure of Punjabi villages. Jat Sikhs, for example, are key landowners in certain regions. He also provides useful information about the jaimani system and residential segregation of low caste among Sikhs. By observing the caste system in the village of Rupalon, he says that *"even the villages are Sikhs by religion. Being vital landowners, the Jats appreciate the extremely high social position (izzat) in the village community. Mazhbi Sikhs are Chuhra (sweepers) who convert to Sikhism. Mazhbi Sikhs worship Balmik from one perspective and every single Sikh Guru from the other. Being SC and landless they have the lowest social position in the village."* It is quite clear from the above description of the empirical facts that the Jat Sikhs dominate in everyday life in Punjab. Thus, anything that happens in Punjab villages has a Jat stamp on it. Conflicts arise between dalits and upper castes because of dominance in the villages. He also suggests that changes are occurring in the caste system of rural Punjab, which might influence the Jat Sikhs.

Satish Saberwal (1974) "Modelpur: Status and Mobility in Urban Punjab", is based on the quantitative data refer to semi-structured interviews with 58 socially mobile men, drawn about evenly from three castes: the Balmikis (traditionally scavengers); the Ad Dharmis (traditionally weavers or leatherworkers); and the Ramgarhias (traditionally carpenters or blacksmiths) . The carpenters and blacksmiths emerged from their lowly status in the village communities late in the 19th century and, building on their traditional skills and—outside the Punjab—on a seemingly casteless identity, made good in entrepreneurial roles in the engineering industry over a wide front. They also acquired a new name for themselves, Ramgarhias, and at least their leading families were fully accepted into the ranks of the town's high castes. But of course, this is a small, if salient minority among Balmikis and Ad Dharmis should not overestimate their number or their significance. For most Harijans, the social world

has much harsher contours. The high castes may actually avoid contact with them, as we have seen; and many among them know the growing weight of the new, secular inequalities: rooted in property ownership representing wealth and giving current income, in educational achievement which may bring income and lead to wealth, in social networks, and in styles of life. Among the Balmikis and the Ad Dharmis there is a substantial measure of active caste consciousness; but this very consciousness also divides the poor and the propertyless into caste-groups alienated from each other.

Indra Pal Singh (1977) "Caste in a Sikh Village," in Harjinder Singh (Ed.), In India, examines that there is a caste system among non-Hindus. Caste that substantially validates a part of the opinion relating to the Scheduled Castes' current position and living situations in the Sikh community. The Jats say they have the most prominent position among the Sikh castes and they are the most significant part of the Sikh qualities. Ownership of land was the central rule for deciding the status of different individuals in Indian villages. As most of its followers are farmers, it becomes increasingly prevalent in Sikh villages. It gets reflected at the village level in different ways. He studied the social and economic structure of the village, which was arranged in separate districts of Punjab. Sikhism does not prompt the formation of an egalitarian community or the abolition of the caste hierarchy and bias. In an extensive study of a Sikh village in the district of Amritsar, found a clear social hierarchy with Jats at the top. However, this was not supported by Scripture. More importantly, his study also showed how the Sikh religious values held by villagers were conducive to social change. He cited how "the village sarpanch (headman) can find no reason to exclude dalits in formal associations of the village", as this has no moral or religious sanction.

Joyce Pettigrew's (1978) "Robber Noblemen: A Study of the Political System of the Sikh Jats" has exhaustively dealt with the prevalence of factions among the Jat Sikhs. These factions are vertically linked at two levels. First, at the village level, there is vertical unity; where there are different classes of Jats who are linked to the big landowners of the village. The low-caste members of these groups are mainly servants of landowners. At the second level, village groups are connected to the state's political processes. As in the case of the Kairon-Rarewala rivalry, the two political parties can potentially interact in terms of the representation of their respective factions. The two political parties, which came to power alternatively, have been completely controlled by the Jat Sikhs. Pettigrew oversimplified "Jat politics, but the fact remains that the existence of factions within and between political parties is an empirical reality"

Damle, Y.B.'s (1982) "Caste, Religion and Politics in India" emphasizes that Indian society has deliberately changed the social structure to realize the goals enshrined in the constitution like equality, social justice, rationality, prosperity, and secularism, etc. He says the legitimacy of caste has changed with the erosion of its ideological basis. The entry of power – secular, economic, and political – has undoubtedly produced a difference in caste structure. Even the caste ethos has shifted in terms of exposure to various ideologies. There is the interplay between politics and caste, politics and religion, and the continuing relationship and intertwining of tradition and modernity forces. The politicization of various groups and communities like the Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs, and the Christians has been partly responsible for perpetuating the differences between these groups. It has also brought them together through political processes.

Richard G. Fox (1985), "Lions of Punjab: Culture in the Making" examines the religious reform movements in Punjab in the nineteenth century within the context of long-term socio-economic transformation. His book consists of two historical questions: why did followers of Sikhism specifically those called Singh or "lions", engage in a mass rural protest against British rule in the early 20th century? Second, where did the Singh identity that provided the cultural meaning for this social movement come from? The aim of the book is to provide a better understanding of anti-colonial protest in Punjab and a better conception of culture making in this volume. He explores the processes that fostered the expansion of a particular social class under the aegis of British colonialism. A collective of Punjabi money lenders and merchants received their share of the colonial appropriation of rural surplus and combined to form the growing urban lower-middle class. Fox's work challenged the tendency to treat the Sikh community as self-contained, underlining the transformative power of colonialism and highlighting British rule as the major rupture in Punjabi history.

Mark Juergensmeyer (1988) "Religious Rebels in Punjab; The Social Vision of Untouchables," argued that religious language proved to be an essential and powerful tool in expressing the untouchables' social grievances, and religious institutions became formidable conduits of social change. His book discusses the nonviolent social reform movements in which lower caste activists have been active throughout the century. Aside from the Ad-Dharm movement, the author investigates numerous alternative routes of expression open to socially conscious untouchables — "the Arya Samaj, the Valmiki Sabha, the Ambedkar, and Dalit Panther Movements, Christianity, Marxism, the Congress party, the Radhasaomi Satsang." The

radical religion of the untouchables was successful in helping in the cultural, economic, and political dimensions of their oppression, and this radical faith helped the untouchables see what a new society may be. The Ad Dharm Mandal began to see itself as a social and religious organization and in 1946 decided to change its name to Ravidas Mandal, "entrusting the political work to the All India Scheduled Castes Federation in conformity with the rest of India". Although the Ad Dharm movement played an effective role in mobilising Dalits on these vital issues, the shift in the political arena caused by the electoral system forced the movement to adjust to the changed political scenario.

Harjot Oberoi's (1995) classic work "The Construction of religious boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition" outlines a thesis about the constructed character of the Sikh community and identity on the basis of an impressive body of primary and secondary sources, with laudable clarity of argument. It has never been a given or unproblematic identity, unflooding in a linear path. This is linked to his conception of religion and culture generally, embedded in the everyday life of the people. He points out that the teachings of the early Sikh gurus produced a following, focused on reverence for the guru and later, the holy book. Beyond these fundamentals, there was much variability and flexibility about what one could believe and do. The notion of a bounded community was absent. Although different symbols and markers kept accumulating, the situation was basically the same at that dramatic moment in the sikh history in 1699. This is when guru Gobind bought the khalsa into existence. Far from there being a 'single' Sikh identity, most Sikhs moved in and out of multiple identities, defining themselves at one moment as residents of this village, at another as members of that cult, at one moment as part of this lineage, at another as part of that caste, and at yet another moment as belonging to a 'sect'. The boundaries between what could be seen as the centre of the Sikh tradition and its periphery were highly blurred. In addition, several competing definitions of what constituted a 'Sikh' were possible. By the closing decades of the nineteenth century, successive waves of Sikh reform movements like the Singh Sabha, its inheritor the Chief Khalsa Diwan, and the Akali combatants in the 1920s, had succeeded in purging the house of Sikhism of most of the older conventions and practices.

Harish K. Puri and Paramjit S. Judge (2000), in their edited work "Social and Political Movements," enable us to understand the dynamics of the way a society produces its cultural and political orientations, structures of dominance, and patterns of resistance. Regional movements are confined to a definite area and emerge due to local conditions. Such movements are diverse and have conditions rooted in the local history and culture. In India, where socio-

cultural diversity has been marked by caste and religion, the region acquires a significant place in any social and political process analysis. Social and political movements in Punjab have distinct features and traditions. At the time of annexation, Punjab's population included Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. The British period saw the arrival of Christian missionaries in Punjab. Conversion to Christianity helped to revitalize the three communities: the Singh Sabha movement, the Ahmadiyya movement, the Kuka movement, etc. During the 1920s, religion, caste, and sect merged on fundamental identity issues and shared political power.

Surinder S. Jodhka (2001) "Caste in the Periphery in Punjab, examines areas where the majority population is non-Hindu, but is still seen as less relevant to the study of "caste and its politics". 26 The "anthropologists and sociologists working on India would, for various reasons, have viewed these regions as being 'different' from the mainstream Indian/Hindu civilization. Though one can find the presence of some elements of caste everywhere in South Asia, its discriminatory practice was, after all, ideologically supported only by the Hindu religion. The recent debate on caste and race provides a clear example of this prolepsis. For those involved with Dalit politics, equating caste with race was only a step forward in exposing the oppressive side of caste. Caste discourses from the past remained marginal to their concerns. Viewed from this perspective, it may be useful to look at caste and caste politics from the perspective of a peripheral region. This is because, though Hindu ideology has not been as strong, caste is still practiced. Contemporary Indian Punjab is an interesting subject for such an exercise. A view of caste from the 'periphery' can also be a relevant point of a comparison with, what can be called, the 'brahmin centric' notion of caste, emanating from India.

Surinder S. Jodhka (2002), in "Caste and Untouchability in Rural Punjab", he argues that despite having the largest proportion of scheduled caste population in India, Punjab has rarely been seen as a relevant case for conceptualization of the caste system. In particular, the changes taking place therein. Though some aspects of caste in Punjab have been studied, there has virtually been no detailed empirical documentation of the practice of untouchability in rural Punjab. Based on an extensive field-study, this paper provides a broad mapping of the prevailing caste relations and the practice of untouchability in rural Punjab. The study focuses specifically on the process of change, particularly in the context of agrarian transformations that the Punjab countryside has experienced. This is in the wake of the success of green revolution technology. The paper also argues that the processes of change could be meaningfully captured through the categories of 'dissociation', 'distancing' and 'autonomy'.

Anshu Malhotra (2002), "Gender, Caste, and Religious Identity-Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab," examines the notion of being high caste and how it evolved and changed over the colonial era. He also investigates the process by which Hindus and Sikhs become middle class. Many reformist Sikhs and Hindus here either repudiated or recreated the concept of caste. He worked on building new identities, changing gender relations, and improving women's status. It primarily addresses the issue of Dalits' connection to the concepts of caste and religion. His major focus is the role of caste, religion, and gender in the formation of a middle class, particularly in India. In such places, SCs are still facing problems, and they live in separate areas in villages. Untouchability is not very widespread, but there is discrimination against the lower caste. The upper- and lower-class groups sit together, but continue to have differences. SCs may not freely enter religious places; they have their own Holy places.

H. K. Puri (2003), "Scheduled castes in the Sikh community: A historical perspective" examines the many types of 'caste hierarchy in Sikhism,' which evolved into a new pattern of hierarchies compared to the Hindus. The dynamics of political power and economic ties are studied at both the local and regional levels. He argues that understanding of the distinctive pattern of caste hierarchy in Sikhism which points to a new pattern of competing hierarchies, parallel to that of the Hindus, calls for deeper insight into the dynamics of political power and economic relations both at the local and regional levels. Not looking closely at the ground level social reality may leave the impression that overall, the Sikh community represents a homogeneity of castes rather than division. Conversely, within the ideological or cultural rationales, the survival of casteism ("it is very clear and open truth that Sikh society is as casteist and racist as Hindu society"), is often viewed as a consequence of incomplete liberation of Sikhism from the stranglehold of Brahminism, emphasizing increased distance between Sikhs and Hindus. Interactions with the Dalits in Punjab, however, reveal a pervasive tendency to view the interests of economic and political domination as the force behind caste-based humiliation, rather than ideology as the primary reality. There is need to further examine caste in varied settings of religion and region. The lack of direct connection between social realities shows that the Sikh community symbolizes caste homogeneity rather than division. It explains casteism, culture, and ideology. Despite the separation of Sikhs from Hindus, it has been viewed as an insufficient way to free Sikhism from Brahmanism's powerful hold. This article is based on the basic features of the caste system in Punjab, the Dalits' socio-economic standing in Punjab, the impact of economic transformations, and Dalit assertion.

Meeta and Rajivlochan (2007)"Caste and Religion in Punjab" found in their research that the establishment of many Deras in Punjab state influenced caste divides and identity building within the population. The recent violence in Punjab between Akali groups and the Dera Sacha Sauda highlights the existence of several Dera's around the state. These are just manifestations of prevailing caste divisions and tensions. Dalits and other underprivileged groups adhere to such Deras because it provides them with an alternative to mainstream, and in many ways, restrictive Sikhism. Deras, on the other hand, has obtained critical political proposals, notably in recent decades. Furthermore, the awareness of caste prejudices against Dalit Sikhs compelled them to seek alternative social spaces in many Deras, factions, and dargahs of Muslim Pirs and other holy persons. The prevailing perception was that Dalits were an extraordinarily large and prominent part of Punjab's several Deras, granting them a unique identity and equality.

Ronki Ram (2008), "Ravidassia Deras and Social Protest: Making Sense of Dalit Consciousness in Punjab (India)," he argues that Dalit consciousness in Punjab emerged against the backdrop of the teachings of Ravidass, an untouchable saint-poet of the North Indian Bhakti movement who presented a middle path between assimilation and radical separatism for the construction of a separate Dalit identity. Dera Sach Khand Ballan, one of the most popular Ravidass Deras in Punjab, played an influential role in concretizing this path by chiseling the markers of a separate Dalit identity in the state. The author assesses the long-term implications of the newly emerged Dalit consciousness in Punjab for the deepening of democracy in India.

Gurpreet Bal and Paramjit S. Judge (2009), in their joint work "Mapping Dalits: Contemporary Reality and Future Prospects in Punjab," explores patterns of social mobility of Dalits based on empirical investigations, evaluate and interrogate the changing status of the Dalits in Punjab by considering four variables education and occupation, empowerment, entrepreneurship, and emigration. Among Dalits in Punjab, only the Ad-dharmis have been able to transform their social and economic conditions. There are caste divisions among the Scheduled Castes, and the emergence of economic inequality within castes has come out sharply. There is a change in the educational levels of Dalits across generations. It is interesting to note that occupational diversity is not a direct result of academic mobility; instead, the changes in Punjabi society have given rise to occupational diversification. It highlights that the living standard of the Urban Dalits is much better than the rural Dalits, and international migration is the unique

feature of the Dalits of Punjab. No other state has as many Dalits in the Indian Diaspora as Punjab. It is set amid changes in Punjab's society and economy. By becoming politically empowered at the local level, urban Dalits have also transformed their conditions. They still largely favour caste endogamy.

Kathryn Lum (2010) 'the Ravidassia community and identity (ies) in Catalonia, Spain" researched Ravidassia in Spain and discovered the Ravidassia community demanding self-identity and self-respect through the establishment of independent Gurudwaras. Ravidassia perceived caste inequalities as intense as they were in their ancestral land. In her fieldwork, she emphasized that, although claiming their identity, most Ravidassia declare that they do not belong to Hinduism or Sikhism. More significantly, she observed the Ravidassia community becoming socially and politically mobilized to assert their self-identity and self-respect.

Satinder Kaur (2011) "Punjabi Lok Dharam Ate Majhe De Santana De Dere (Punjabi)" has explained the Deras. She writes about the Sikh religion, in which Deras accept Guru Granth Sahib as a guru. In addition, she discusses another form of Dera, in which faith is based on Sikh principles but the dera head is presented as a guru. In terms of the Hindu faith, Vaishnav and Ramanand Deras may be found in Punjab. Only marginal individuals visit the Balmiki Deras. Aside from the Deras mentioned above, there is another mention of Nihang Singh Akharas and Deras. The author also argues that Deras has increasing power over the general public's emotions because many people turn to Deras in times of stress. Deras compete with each other to increase their followers. The dera heads live a luxurious lifestyle due to the donations made by the Dera followers.

Sharma and Sidhu's (2012) "Dalit assertion through grass-root leadership in the Doaba region of Punjab" found no clear instances of conflict between Dalits and higher castes in their study in Punjab state. In many cases, both communities were pleased with their working relationships. In the examination zone, all the panchayats they picked followed the rule of 33 per cent reservation of seats for women and proportional members of Dalits. According to the findings, Dalits are becoming more aware, active, and aggressive about their rights and responsibilities. They found no caste-based differentiation when it came to dealing with various challenges. There were few examples of upper caste dominance over Dalits. They were, however, in an inactive area. Dalits had reached a level of consciousness that allowed them to say a vital "no" to their oppressors and compelled them to seek an equal offer within the power structure.

Dhaliwal (2015) examines in his article "A new Dalit assertion is round the corner" examines how Dalits have asserted themselves in Punjab. A movement has begun to take shape in the countryside, where rural communities have been living on the margins. It spread the movement in Malwa region in a Balad Kalan village in Sangrur area, where Dalits strived hard for about a year to win their lawful ideal to till panchayat land. First time, Malwa saw such an improvement among Dalits. It is difficult to gauge what momentum it will gain in the days to come but Sangrur's example certainly has the potential to take roots. Reason: It has not only produced an amazing success story but opened up opportunities for a new experiment in Punjab's predominantly agricultural-based rural economy. For how long the community would continue to suffer was the question bothering the young Dalit brigade for quite some time. The Dalits have been oppressed for decades, but their exclusion at the social level, especially in rural areas, is quite evident.

R. Jolly's (2015) "Collective Crusade: Dalits in Punjab" examines communal farming in the Punjab villages of Balad Kalan and Benra in the Sangrur district. The Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee (ZPSC), through which Dalits campaigned for the rent of Shamlat (traditional land), was a chaotic and difficult path for the Dalit population, from land acquisition through farming and procurement. For a long time, upper-caste (Jat), local sarpanches, and income authorities denied Dalit families access to communal property. In Benra, Dalits produced feed crops, and in Balad Kalan, they invented a grub-wheat combination. Dalit cooperatives showed that farming can be a mutually beneficial experience, leading to improved living circumstances and the feeling of empowerment that land brings to underprivileged people.

Ronki Ram (2017) "The genealogy of a Dalit faith: The Ravidassia Dharam and caste conflicts in contemporary Punjab" aims to explore the rise of the Ravidassia Dharam and the emerging contours of caste conflicts between some sections of Dalits and the followers of the Sikh religion in contemporary Punjab. It is based on the premise that the Ravidassia Dharam is a Dalit response to social exclusion emanating from oppressive social structures coupled with the persistence of acute landlessness among Dalits. It is further argued that the Ravidassia Dharam became objectified through the cultural appropriation of an all-pervasive iconography and religious symbols of the Sikh religion. It has grown out of the complex power politics of claims and counterclaims around sacred texts, Rehat Maryada, emblems, rituals and narratives that remain central to the critical processes of conflict formation between some sections of the Ravidassia community and followers of the Sikh faith. A critical examination of factors and

forces that led to the formation of the Ravidassia Dharam and its eventual confrontation with the followers of the Sikh religion is long due.

1.6.2 Studies on the emergence of state politics, identity politics and community Assertion in regional context

Rajani Kothari, in his pioneer work "Caste in Indian politics" (1954) examines the role of caste in Indian politics. According to him, "the caste-politics problem in India is not a problem of definition hut clearly one of empirical understanding of a competitive and mo- bile system which could give us a rea- sonable model of social dynamics". There are three different levels at which, according to him, caste-politics assumes significance. There are, first, 'secular aspects' which consist of both 'governmental' and 'political' elements in the relationships within and between castes in their power matrices. On the other hand, caste has an 'integration aspect' in which it tends to be relevant to politics through differentiation and agglomeration. Finally, caste enters politics through the 'consciousness aspect' highlighted by its symbolism and value structure. This is where symbolic gestures for cultural mobility such as 'Sanskritization', 'westernization' and 'secularization' assume or disguise politically charged overtones in their manifestation. These three aspects work together, and the interaction of caste with politics evolves in a rough sequential order. He emphasizes that the political mobilization of various sections of Indian society has given salience to caste in Indian politics. He pointed out that the mobilization of different caste groups has been a major technique used by various political parties for expanding their support base.

Baldev Raj Nayyar (1966) "Minority Politics in Punjab," examines the main political challenge faced by every newly independent country is how to establish a stable political system in the face of internal turmoil. He also examines how "religious and sectional minorities in Punjab are not small and inconsequential", but rather considerable. He also argues that if society were simply split into "two unequal groups, the minority would be ruled by the majority". In a more diverse society, however, a minority may band together with other groups to constrain the aspirations of any group aiming for dominance. Nayyar explores Sikh politics as a minority in pre-1966 Punjab. The author concentrates on three types of techniques to get concessions from the central government: constitutional, agitation, and Akali's infiltration. Nayyar's work is among the finest on Sikh politics as a minority population.

Saberwal (1972) conducted a study of "three reserved assembly constituencies in Punjab" found that leaders from Scheduled Castes enjoy relatively low levels of resources and poor socialization compared to other communities. Consequently, elected leaders lack the ability to adopt a steady political stance and rely on patronage given by upper castes and the constitution. In his analysis, he concludes that the Scheduled Castes' participation in the electoral arena will decline without political reservations. This would increase social inequalities. The same conclusion is drawn from his analysis of "reserved constituencies in Punjab": "A state-level constituency would have a large majority of high-caste voters, so candidates would become less dependent on, and therefore less responsive to, the Harijan vote." Therefore, one might argue that high caste support is crucial for success at this level, as well as at the level of parliamentary constituencies". At the same time, the provision for reserved constituencies is indispensable for better electoral participation of the Scheduled Castes.

M. S. Dhami (1975) "Minority Leaders' Image of the Indian Political System" aims to re-examine some of Punjab politics' basic concerns. He tries to analyze the Akali leaders' sentiments in terms of the socio-cultural and political reality of the Punjab state. The research highlights some of the key flaws in the functioning of the Indian political system, particularly in dealing with the minority issue. Multi-party coalition governments have become more stable in terms of their politics and functioning. The coalition is not just the fusion of political parties for the purpose of capturing power; it is also a reflection of a fragmentation of social interests at the grassroots level.

Dalip Singh's (1981), "Dynamics of Punjab Politics", examine the study of the reorganization of Punjab in 1966 and the nature and basis of Punjab Politics. It also provides a review of different movements and developments in Punjab politics. It has described the politics of defections and coalitions. The 'Lok Sabha and Assembly Elections' held in Punjab and other aspects of Punjab politics until 1980 have been analyzed. From (1997-1999) seeks to assess the two-year rule of the Shiromani Akali Dal. The political strategies of SAD, particularly the rationale of its alliance with the BJP and factionalism in the SAD and the relationship between religion and politics. The economic agendas of SAD and its electoral strategies are discussed in this study. Through the analysis of the comparative electoral performance of Congress (I) and the Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal), the author adds that in these Assembly elections, the division of voters between the 'Congress and Akali Dal (Badal) was so strong that other parties

and organizations, even the two's allies, were unable to make their presence. This publication also gives useful information concerning Punjab's political activity.

Shourie, Arun's (1987) 'Religion in Politics" analyzes how religion-based politics and mass mobilization have challenged secular forces in Indian society throughout history. A religion-based political agenda threatens the secular character of the state. Religion-based hostility and opposition reflect a different side of Indian reality. As a result, there is a conflict between secularism and communalism in India. Politics is for religion and vice versa. This is the dominant feature of Indian politics. The author raises many questions like how do people become Swami / Bhagwan / Baba or Sant among different religions? How do they deliver block votes? What is the mark of a man of God, the office he occupies or the service he renders? Politics play a vital role in all spheres of life.

Jatinder Kaur's (1989) "Punjab crisis: The Political Perceptions of Rural voters" examines the Punjab problem at the grassroots level and the political outlook of the rural people of Punjab and how this has strengthened the democratic structure in the electoral process. It also examines people's political knowledge and degree of involvement in the voting process. It shows another stage in the constituent history of this state, which was previously controlled to a larger extent by successive electoral coalitions led by the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) under Jat Sikh power. It is said that there are a few genuine reasons why historical SAD rule and strong authority are being challenged by a diverse range of competing political players.

Paramjit Singh Judge and Satish K. Sharma (ed.) (1997) "Green Revolution and the Bahujan Samaj Party in Punjab" is devoted to casteism, profession, the impact of the green revolution, and the Bahujan Samaj Party in Punjab. This is a survey-based study. The rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party is linked with an improvement in the economic conditions of the Scheduled Castes, particularly the Chamar/Ad-dharmi caste. At the local level, economic dependence plays a vital role in creating political subservience. In Punjab, the Bahujan Samaj Party seems to be providing the platform for articulating the aspirations of the emerging elites in the chamar caste.

Veena Dua (1999) "The Arya Samaj in Punjab Politics" reviews the mobility of the untouchables through the Arya Samaj movement and its connection with the political situation in Punjab. From the perspective of a field study undertaken by the author in an SCs neighbourhood in Jalandhar. It examines the Arya Samaj philosophy. The book gives a detailed overview of Arya Samaj's social structure and political function in Punjab. The Arya Samaj

began as an urban social movement appealing primarily to the urban intelligentsia, first in western India and later in North India. In its process of "proselytization," it recruited members from the lower classes, including the untouchables in the urban areas. The local Arya centres in Jalandhar city have members mainly belonging to the untouchable's castes such as Megh. The local Arya centres in Jalandhar city have members mainly belonging to the untouchable's castes such as Megh. Thus, her study provides an in-depth analysis of the Arya Samaj and its relation to Punjabi politics, albeit primarily in an urban context.

Kanchan Chandra's (2000) "The Transformation of Ethnic Politics in India: The Decline of Congress and the Rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party in Hoshiarpur" analysis of the politics of "ethnicity—caste, religion, and language"—has been fundamental to politics in twentieth-century India. The rising fortunes of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in North India from its inception in the early 1980s to its successes in the 1990s by charting its growing support among the Scheduled Castes. Critical to this development was the constituency that the BSP gained among middle-class members of the Scheduled Castes who had previously sided with the Congress Party. Her ethnographic study of BSP mobilization in Hoshiarpur district in Punjab and elsewhere explores and explains that party's electoral successes (and shortcomings) in terms of its selective appeal to groups within the OBC category. However, as the dominant Indian National Congress declines in favor of a number of smaller parties, the manner in which ethnic identities are being invoked in the political arena is being transformed. The key aspect of this transformation is not, as it is usually understood, the replacement of a single multiethnic party with a collection of monoethnic parties.   Although smaller parties are themselves multiethnic, the coalitions that they seek to build are usually narrower than those built by Congress. There has been a significant change in the type of ethnic politics that dominates politics. The support of these ethnic coalitions comes from the distribution of patronage but never through the rhetoric of identity.

Surinder S. Jodhka's (2004) "Return of the Region: Identities and Electoral Politics in Punjab" article looks at the issue in the broader context of changing political alignments in the state's politics. The dimension of politics in Punjab has been the region. In contrast to religious communities or caste-based interests, the region has been somewhat ambiguous. Historically speaking, Punjab has been one of the more self-conscious regions of India. However, politics in the state has always been intertwined with these religious communities. While political formations representing the Sikhs of Punjab have used the discourse of regionalism, organisations representing upper caste urban Hindus of Punjab have traditionally been opposed

to the invocation of any kind of regionalist identity or sentiment. They openly opposed the Akali demand during the 1950s and 1960s for a reorganisation of Punjab on a linguistic basis as was being done in other parts of the country. During the 1980s religion had virtually become the sole axis of politics in Punjab. Revival of 'normal politics' and the electoral process during the 1990s has brought the issues of regional identity and economic interests of different social classes back to the fore.

Vivek Kumar's (2004) "BSP and Dalit Aspirations" describes the Bahujan Samaj Party's emergence as the first Dalit political party. Bahujan Samaj Party created aspirations among Dalits at the grass-root level for capturing political power. According to the author, Dalits moved from the margins to the mainstream after establishing the Bahujan Samaj Party. The Bahujan Samaj Party spread slowly but in every corner of the country. After years of being consistently used as a 'vote bank' by mainstream political parties, Dalit aspirations to wield political power received its first fillip with the formation of the BSP. In the 14th Lok Sabha elections, the BJP is seeking to extend its influence to other states by speaking up once again for Dalit aspirations. Here, the improvement in the seat and vote share of the Bahujan Samaj Party in Punjab's 1999 Lok Sabha elections. According to the author, Mayawati's campaign in all the constituencies was the main factor in the Bahujan Samaj Party's success; on the other hand, Congress had no organizational strength and depended solely on charisma and dynasty.

 Ashutosh Kumar and Sanjay Kumar (2002) In "Punjab Elections: Decline of Identity Politics," present an overview of the post-militancy phase. Gurdwara politics are relatively insignificant, and citizens would vote for Congress, which is essential to maintaining state unity. While the BJP's traditional vote bank of upper-caste Hindus has been dissolved, the Congress has gained support. The SAD has lost a portion of its support among the non-jat, especially OBC, Sikhs.*"* The electoral outcome and the factors responsible for the shift in Punjab politics. The authors also examine the reasons behind the defeat of Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) and the victory of the Indian National Congress Party in the 2002 Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections. It analyses the significant trends of the Punjab Assembly elections in 2002. The paradigm change in Punjab politics continues with the decline of identity politics and effective governance. Corruption and widespread economic difficulties in every area, including agriculture, industry, and trade, became a significant hurdle for the SAD-BJP coalition. Other minor parties, like the BSP, NCP, and Panthic Morcha, acted solely as spoilers.

Kanchan Chandra's (2004) "Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India." examines a theory of ethnic party performance in one distinct family of democracies, identified here as "patronage-democracies." Voters in patronage democracies. She argues that we should choose between parties by conducting ethnic head counts rather than by comparing policy platforms or ideological positions. They formulate preferences across parties by counting heads across party personnel, preferring that party that provides greatest representation to their co-ethnic elites. Ethnic parties, and the politicization of ethnic differences more generally, are considered a major threat to democratic stability. An exploration of the processes by which such parties succeed or fail, illuminates also the processes that undermine or preserve democracy. They formulate expectations about the likely electoral outcome by counting the heads of co-ethnics across the electorate. And they vote for their preferred party only when their co-ethnics are sufficiently numerous to take it to a winning or influential position.

Ashutosh Kumar's (2004) article "Punjab: In Search of New Leadership" analyzes how religion, caste, region, language and leadership factors combine differently in different elections to produce contrasting electoral outcomes. Over the last three decades, a polarized party system has existed in the state, where power has alternated between the Shiromani Akali Dal and the Congress. SAD and BJP's alliance is surprising to anyone who observes Punjab politics because of the mixed feelings between Hindus and Sikhs. The long-standing anti-Congress tradition of SAD, and the complementary electoral bases of the two parties could be the factors behind the sustenance of the alliance. The attempts of the Bahujan Samaj Party to carve out an independent space in Punjab politics have not paid dividends so far. This time, the coming together of Akali factions and the factional disunity in the Congress, coupled with adverse perceptions of the people about the performance of the ruling party seem to have determined the outcome in Punjab.

Baxias (2007) "The Dera Sacha Sauda controversy and beyond," examining the "emergence of a de facto consociation mode of governance under the auspices of the Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal)- Bharatiya Janata Party led government in 1997 could deter the assertion of violent communal identity politics in Punjab. It remains to be seen, however, if this method of administration can serve as a hindrance to caste-based identity politics in the state. The current SAD (B)-BJP government's handling of the aftermath of the Dera Sacha Sauda controversy, as well as its accommodation of the steadily asserting Dalit identity, will be vital to maintaining Punjab's peace".

Madan Lal (2009) "Gurudom: the political dimension of religious sects in Punjab,", examines and critiques the close relationship between religion and politics by focusing on the nexus of politicians-bureaucrats and deras (religious sects) particularly in Punjab. It is observed how heads of Deras decorate themselves with various titles, cleverly generate unconditional devotion among followers and present themselves as worldly gods. In addition, books, music and other equipment associated with spirituality are now an industry worth millions of rupees every year. The article notes that the deras with politics take a variety of forms and can cause social conflict. It criticizes the bargaining power of the deras, which causes politicians to seek their patronage. The article discusses worrying trends about the misuse of religion that are now identifiable.

Mahajan and Jodhka (2012) "Religions, democracy, and governance: Spaces for the marginalized in contemporary India" examine the dynamics of religion and democratic politics by looking at political mobilizations of marginalized groups in Punjab and Maharashtra. It argues that even when religious identity remains the bedrock of social life and individual experience, democratic politics brings out various configurations and alignments. As a result, religious differences are largely blurred or overwritten by other identities. The Indian experience also reveals that religious groups are not homogeneous. While political mobilization tends to unite them as communities with common interests, development policies have invariably disaggregated them, reinforcing the internal divisions and diversities within religious communities. They discovered that the SCs were the most marginalized elements of Punjabi society and that they were divided in the same way as other caste groups. For various historical reasons, the second group of Punjabi SCs had been significantly more dynamic and politically vibrant than the others. They had more social mobility than the main caste groups.

Ashutosh Kumar's (2015) paper "The Aam Aadmi Party and Emerging Political Scenario on the Eve of the 2017 Punjab State Assembly Elections", examines the assembly elections looming on the horizon. The political landscape of Punjab is getting more complex with each passing day, and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) remains the main protagonist in the ongoing theatrical mode of politics, so typical of the state. The question in the minds of election analysts is whether a four-year-old party facing two of the oldest surviving parties in India will be able to bring about a critical shift in the bipolar party system well established in the state since the 1997 elections. Punjab for decades has been reeling under endemic crises in the form of agrarian distress, drug menace, crony capitalism, corruption and an overall governance deficit. Arguably then, any significant electoral gain for the AAP in the 2017 elections, as in the case

of the 2014 parliamentary elections, would signify the desperation of the electorate with the firm grip of the Congress and Akali Dal over the levers of power. This explains why despite being a party lacking in terms of state-wide organizational presence, state-specific agenda or state-level leadership, the AAP as a self-proclaimed movement party, committed to clean and principled politics, with politically novice but apparently well-meaning candidates, has been able to raise hope among the wider electorate across the state's three electoral regions. However, since 2014, as the paper discusses in detail, the party has had a checkered history in the state.

After having reviewed the available literature on the themes of caste, religion and state politics related to the research problem. However, even within these frameworks, one can easily identify the changeability of identity politics, both conceptually and in practice. There have been a variety of interpretations, forms of realization, and methods of involvement in politics related to different types of sociopolitical systems and political cultures throughout history. The Ravidassia community in Punjab's Malwa region, however, has largely been neglected in literature. Several studies have revealed that the number of political parties and the participation of SC voters are impacting the level of democratic functioning within a government. They are playing an active role in forming the government at national and state levels.

1.7 Research Questions

1. What are the key factors that have influenced the emergence and continuation of identity politics in Punjab at the present time?

2. In what ways does socio-economic transformation affect identity politics and the socio-political position of the Ravidassia community in general and the Malwa region in particular?

1.8 Objectives of the study

1. To analyze the pattern of identity shaping and reshaping among the Ravidassia community in Punjab.

2. To examine the impact of various factors on identity politics amongst the Ravidassia community at local and state levels in Punjab.

3. To illustrate the impact of socio-economic transformation on the identity politics among the Ravidassia in the Malwa region of Punjab.

4. To study the rise and spread of identity politics in the Malwa region and Punjab in general.

1.9 Hypotheses of the study

Based on the aims, the researcher has developed hypotheses in relation with the objectives:

1. Socio-religious factors and insensitive attitude of the Sikh community contributed to the political consciousness of separate identity among the Dalits in Punjab.

2. There is a positive correlation between agrarian relations and identity formation among the Dalits in the Malwa region.

1.10 Limitations of the study

1. The study is confined to the Malwa region of Punjab.

2. The study is limited to the Ravidassia community.

3. The data collected from respondents may not be entirely true and accurate, which may lead to such gaps being revealed throughout the study. There may be gaps in the information collected from respondents, so the study may show such gaps at some points. However, extra care has been taken to ensure the information obtained is accurately reflected. The study has been made as realistic as possible despite these problems.

1.11 Research Gap

There have been multiple dimensions taken into consideration when studying identity politics and identity assertion. There are studies on the Doaba region of Punjab and Dalit assertion but there is a lack if not complete absence in the Malwa region. This study provides some insights into how different factors, including cultural and political, contribute to the identity formation and politics of the Ravidassia community in the Malwa region. It is an attempt to understand the socio-cultural, and political processes involved in forming identity politics in the Malwa region of Punjab. It explores the diverse and distinct processes and patterns of identity politics amongst the Ravidassia community spread across different spatial dimensions.

1.12 Research Methodology

The present study uses historical, analytical and empirical methods to study the identity politics in Punjab. The formation of identity politics in the context of caste and religion in Punjab took a historical approach. This is used to explain the historical background of the Ravidassia community. Empirical method is used to examine the transformation of identity politics at the state and local levels. The study collected both primary and secondary data. The primary sources include official documents and census reports, and the secondary sources include books, journals, research articles, newspaper clippings, etc. The nature of this research being largely empirical, the research methodology of non-doctrinal research has been applied in the collection of empirical data. The research tools adopted include: (i) Questionnaire (ii) Interview Schedule and (iii) Observation. The research work has been scientifically tabulated (uses Excel software for data calculation) and analyzed, and systematically presented.

1.13 Chapterization

This study has been arranged in these five chapters.

CHAPTER-1: INTRODUCTION

The first chapter introduces the politics of ethnicity, identity, and the background of identity politics in Punjab and India. This chapter provides a detailed outline of the present study under these heads: The Statement of the Problem, Review of Literature, and Objectives of the Study, Hypotheses and Research Questions, besides stressing the Significance of the study, Methodology, and Limitations of the Study and Chapterization.

CHAPTER-2: CONCEPTUALIZING EMERGENCE OF RAVIDASSIA COMMUNITY IN PUNJAB: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In this chapter, a brief analysis of the formation of ethnic communities has been done. In this chapter historical analysis of Sikh identity and transformation of socio-religious identity into a separate ethnic identity which resulted in separate identity consciousness of the Dalit community has been analysed. The chapter discusses the emergence of identity politics in the context of the Ravidassia community. In the history of Dalits in Punjab, two types of movements emerged; socio-religious and political movements. In the beginning, it was socio-religious in nature, but it entered a political phase towards the end of the 1940s. It has succeeded

in building new consciousness and instilling a sense of dignity in the Dalit community. It was the only movement in Punjab that aimed to secure political assertion, social status, and religious transformation for the community. It tried to separate Hinduism from other religions such as Islam, Sikhism, and Buddhism. It attempted to build new empowerment in the Dalit community and worked independently without pressure from the upper castes. There are sub-factors such as attempts for distinct identity from both castes (Hindus and Sikhs), the contribution of deras, movements, Dalit diaspora, and conversion to other religions to explain the pattern of identity formation and forming a separate identity from the other religions. In this chapter, we examine Ravidassias' community's shift from autonomy politics to a politics of naming within Sanatan Hindu identity. The Ravidassia Chamars' self-identity is at an intersection between two factors, the first of exclusion and the second of transformation.

CHAPTER-3: STATE AND IDENTITY POLITICS IN PUNJAB

This chapter examines how identity politics gradually shape the political discourse of various groups in the state. The focus of the study in this chapter is broad and includes issues like caste, religion, language, and ethnic identity which acts as a determining factor for identity politics. This chapter focuses on the role of political parties and ruling elites, the centre's policies toward the communities, and the state's reaction to Sikh and Dalit demands for recognition. It also discusses how the state has reacted to community identity assertion and its politics. Punjab's political dynamics are defined by a move from disputed identities, which result in conflicts, to these identities, which forge alliances via justifiable privileges. It is not continuous; there are reversals back to confrontations before moving on to alliances. The second part of the chapter discusses the significant consequences of the emergence and decline of BSP for the Dalits in Punjab. The chapter focuses on how political leaders empowered the Dalit community in Punjab? It has also been attempted to understand the process of mobilization within the mainstream political parties in the region.

CHAPTER-4: CASTE INEQUALITIES AND IDENTITY ASSERTION AMONG THE RAVIDASSIA COMMUNITY IN THE MALWA REGION OF PUNJAB

The chapter tries to examine and analyze the nature of the caste system and the role of caste identity in Punjab. It also examines caste inequalities and identity assertion, in terms of distribution and the extent of change in the rural agricultural structure in the Malwa region of Punjab. Historically, the transformation of the traditional agrarian economy and social

structure has been a key component of the major socio-economic transformation of society. The contemporary agrarian economy of the rural Malwa region is characterized by distinct divisions of the farming community along caste and class lines. Caste is significantly associated with the size of landholding, land ownership pattern, use of advanced agricultural technology and so on. It highlights the factors impeding social, economic, and political development in the state. These factors include the dominance of economically and politically significant landowner castes, the exploitation of agricultural and landless labourers, and the formation of local party factions. It shows the impact of agrarian change on caste relations. It focuses on Malwa villages' change and land holding structure and its relationship with caste based identity politics at the grassroots level.

CHAPTER-5: STATE AND IDENTITY POLITICS: STATUS OF RAVIDASSIA COMMUNITY IN MALWA REGION OF PUNJAB

The fifth chapter is based on fieldwork dealing with aspects of identity formation, politics and assertion among the Ravidassia community of the Malwa region of Punjab. This chapter is based on the empirical data collected in the Malwa region to examine and analyse changing socio-economic conditions and socio-religious assertion for a distinct identity. The chapter provides a detailed explanation of the respondents' perspectives and points of view. This chapter contains various statistical tables that demonstrate the replies and reactions of the respondents to the questions. It aims to assess the political awareness and political involvement of Dalit respondents in the Malwa area. An attempt has been made to find out the specific issues faced by Dalits and how are these issues different from those of similar other marginalized sections of society?

CHAPTER-6: CONCLUSION

The findings of the study have been summed up in this chapter.

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Chapter 2

Conceptualizing Emergence of Ravidassia Community in Punjab: A Historical Context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the historical background of the rise of identity politics, pattern of identity formation and the success achieved by the Dalit community. It also discusses the emergence of the Ravidassia community in the context of identity politics (the politics of naming) in Punjab. In the history of Dalits in Punjab, two types of movements emerged; socio-religious and political movements. In the beginning, it was socio-religious in nature, but it entered into a political phase towards the end. It has succeeded in building new consciousness and instilling a sense of dignity in the Dalit community. It was the only movement in Punjab that aimed to secure political assertion, social status, and religious transformation of the community. It tried to separate Hinduism from other religions such as Islam, Sikhism, and Buddhism. It attempted to build new empowerment in the Dalit community and worked independently without pressure from the upper castes. There are sub-factors such as attempts for distinct identity from both castes. The contribution of Deras, movements, Dalit diaspora, and conversion to other religions to explain the pattern of identity formation and the success in forming a separate identity from the other religions.

There is also argument that the Ravidassia Dharm began to oppose the encumbrances of Sikh religion, such as its symbols. It developed from the complex power politics of assertions based on sacred texts, Rehat Maryada[4], symbols, rituals, and histories. Still, these assertions remain a significant factor in the conflict between the Ravidassia community and followers of the Sikh religion. A critical examination of the factors that led to the formation of the Ravidassia Dharm

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[4] The Sikh Code of Conduct and Conventions is known as the Rehat Maryada. Following Guru Gobind Singh's death, various unsuccessful attempts were made to construct a realistic picture of Sikh conduct and traditions in the eighteenth century. These efforts were contradictory and inconsistent with many of the Gurus' teachings, and most Sikhs rejected them. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.) attempted to create a new standard Rehat in 1931. The most distinguished Sikh scholars and theologians of the twentieth century were involved in these efforts, which resulted in the present text. The prepared document has been adopted as the official version, which provides guidelines by which all Sikh individuals and communities can measure themselves. The Akal Takht, the seat of highest temporal authority for Sikhs, has only approved the Rehat Maryada. Its implementation has resulted in a significant uniformity in Sikhism's religious and social practices.

and its final clash with Sikhs is long overdue. This chapter revisits the Ravidassia assertion of religion through the Dera Sachkhand Ballan, providing an alternative conceptual framework for studying, understanding, and analyzing religion-based identities in the modern era.

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2.2 Caste in Punjab: A Historical Overview

There have been three basic ways to provide salvation from caste discrimination to Dalits: Sanskritization, Conversion, and Social Reform movements. The term "Sanskritization" used by M.N. Srinivas implied the adoption of Hindu rituals to remove the effect of caste and untouchability. Conversion is the second way to get rid of caste-based discrimination. In most caste literature, the predominant approach has been to describe it in homogeneous terms as a system throughout India, with various levels of similarities. Therefore, less emphasis has been placed on the historical characteristics and socio-economic realities of various geographical settings. For example, dominant caste theories have always used a "varna model of hierarchy, with brahmins at the top and untouchables at the bottom" (see Srinivas and Dumont's caste perspectives). However, there have been substantial regional disparities in the rise of social relations among the different caste groups. Different caste groups exist in other parts of the region, and "purity and pollution" are preoccupations in every region of the country (Beteille, 2000b:172). The various cultural patterns, characteristics of political-economic transformation observed throughout the post-independence period, and various ethnic populations all impact caste relations in a specific place.

Among all the states, Punjab has the highest proportion of the Dalit population in its total population. The percentage of scheduled castes in the state's entire population was "28.3 per cent in 1991, more than the national average of around 16 per cent. The growth rate of the SC population during the decade 1991-2001 at 22.4 per cent is higher by 2.3 per cent compared to the overall growth rate of the total population. According to the 2011 census, the Scheduled Caste population in Punjab is 88.60 lac, 31.94% of the State's total population (277.43 lac). The population of Punjab is 2.3% of India's total and 4.3%" of its Scheduled Caste population. They are less urbanized than the other castes and are more prevalent in rural regions. In certain Punjab villages, scheduled castes would account for more than half of the population. The Scheduled Caste population is predominantly in rural areas.

According to Census 2011, the majority of SCs people live in rural areas (73.33%), whereas 26.67% live in urban areas. The distribution of the SCs caste-based population is as follows: Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar (42.51%), Sri Muktsar Sahib (42.31%), Firozpur (42.17%), Jalandhar (38.95%), Faridkot (38.92%), Moga (36.50%), Hoshiarpur (35.14%), Kapurthala (33.94%), Tarn Taran (33.71%), Mansa (33.63%), Bathinda (32.44%), Barnala (32.24%) and Fatehgarh Sahib (32.07%). This is to say that most of the districts in Punjab have one-third or more of their population belonging to the Scheduled Castes. Out of the total 12,168 inhabited villages in the State, 57 villages have 100% SC population, and 4,799 villages (39.44%) have 40% or more SC population. The village/tehsil/district-wise detail of villages having 40% or more SC population is given in Part-IV (II) of the document. Among 217 towns, 175 towns have 20% or more SC population, and the majority of them are either small towns or villages (Government of India census, 2011).

In Punjab, there are 39 Dalit castes or subgroups, including two (Mahatam, Rai Sikh, and Mochi) included in the scheduled list of castes for the first time in 2007 following 2001 and were therefore enumerated for the first time during the 2011 Census. However, the vast majority of them belong to two classes, traditionally known as "chamars" and "chuhras." Even though they are known by various names (Ad Dharmis and Ramdasis in the case of chamars and mazhabis, balmikis in chuhras), they constitute around three-quarters of the Dalit population in the state. Smaller groups among them were less well-structured and faced a more significant disadvantage. The Punjab government has classified 13 communities as "depressed scheduled castes" to target their development initiatives (Jodhka, 2008). Punjab is also one of the few Indian states where Hindus, who constitute over 80% of the country's population, are in the minority.

According to the census of 1991, "Punjab's Hindu population was just around 35% of the total population. Sikhs made up about 63 per cent of the population, with Muslims and Christians constituting the rest" (Jodhka, 2004: 181). The uneven rural-urban distribution of Punjab's religious sects is another crucial feature of the province's demographic structure. Hindus are the majority in urban Punjab, despite being a minority in the state. Simultaneously, Sikhs are more concentrated in rural areas, where several districts constitute over 90% of all rural populations.

The colonial administrative structure had also begun to implement new social aggregation and categorization groups. They conceived of the population in terms of caste and religious

communities and viewed them accordingly during the governance process (Cohn 1996: 20; Dirks 2001: 41). They urged people of each community to present their case in communal terms (Grewal 1989: 195). These administrative discourses of British rulers, as elsewhere, had far-reaching effects on the process of identity formation in the region (Fox 1985: 25).   In Punjab, however, not only a subset of Dalits follows Sikhism, but the vast majority of the dominant groups in the village are also Sikhs. This is because caste has no theological foundation. Sikhism rejects untouchability, but its supporters claim that one of the religion's primary goals is to create a caste-free society. The Sikh movement, on the other hand, was primarily ideological in its opposition to the dominant Brahmanical worldview. Punjab has several social movements, particularly those against untouchability.

The state has seen various reformists and radical mobilizations, beginning with Sikh gurus who preached against caste. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, colonial Punjab experienced various autonomous Dalit mobilizations and reformist Hindu and Sikh organizations. Mangoo Ram's[5] famed 'Ad Dharam' movement successfully organized numerous chamars in the Doaba region during the 1920s and played an important role in changing their social position and identity (Juergensmeyer, 1988:20). In the next section, it will explore the prevalence and persistence of caste among Sikhs; it is vital to place the Sikh faith within Punjabi society, where it began. We can trace the Sikh movement back to the first Sikh Guru, Nanak Dev, and his response to the religious, social, and political setting of Punjab in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Dalits followed the path of conversion to get relief from their sorrows and miseries originating from their caste status. They converted to other religions,

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[5] Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, a great freedom fighter and the founder of the ad dharm movement in Punjab jan.14, 1886-april 22, 1980. In the early 1920s, he was known as the Prophet of the Dalit Struggle in Punjab. He was one of the few Dalit visionaries who saw that the true salvation of the oppressed lies in total social and cultural transformation. Only emancipation from colonial rulers would not make enough for this. He was adamant that the national struggle against British rule would not serve the fundamental interests of millions of Dalits unless and until it undertook a systematic and all-encompassing struggle against Brahmanical orthodoxy based on the Hindu Shashtra doctrine of purity/pollution. For centuries, they have been subjected to marginalization and oppression. Dalits were victims of British rule and the upper castes in their own country. This reasoning led him to organize the Ad-Dharm Movement in Punjab when Mahatma Gandhi was also actively involved in India's national liberation movement. Babu Ji gave his people a new religion (Ad-Dharm) to believe in, including Gurus to worship (Rishi Valmiki, Guru Ravi Dass, Maharaj Kabir, and Bhagwan Sat Guru Nam Dev), a symbol (Soham) to show, and a slogan (Jai Guru Dev) to greet one another. He and his organization developed a sense of dignity and confidence among Punjab's Dalits.

e.g., Ravidassia, Islam, Sikhism, and Christianity but could not achieve equal status in society. Both conversion and discrimination continue.

2.3 Sikhism and Caste Hierarchy

The emergence of the Sikh movement was a significant turning point in Punjab's history. It originated from the interaction between Islam and Hinduism. Within the broader Islamic tradition, Sufism and the Kabir-bani have significantly affected the Sikh movement. Between the 16th and 17th centuries, the Sikh movement went through numerous phases. The Sikhs' separate identity began to take shape in the third quarter of the fifteenth century, with the teachings of the first Sikh Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539), who established a society distinct from both Hindus and Sikhs. Specific structures and ideologies he introduced into Indian society were entirely new to them. His successors developed and evolved Guru's newly established institutions, principles, and beliefs. W. H. McLeod, who has studied religion for over half-century, recently stated to have such a tendency: "To truly understand Sikh history and religion, one must first understand the true nature of Sikh society. It is when caste plays its role. To recognize Sikh society, one must first understand the nature of caste as it impacts the Panth. Comprehending caste as practised by Sikhs is extremely important for understanding the future development of the Sikh religion. Social scientists are already aware of this, although some of their books and articles may skirt around it or entirely ignore it. It is also necessary for those of us who are historians. Without it, our understanding of the Panth and its religion is bound to be unjustified" (Hans 1985: 134).

The literature on Punjab and Sikh studies has mostly ignored the issue of caste prejudice in Sikhism. However, because sociological and other empirical research has shown the existence of caste and untouchability among Sikhs, it is no longer possible to ignore or hide this uncomfortable question in historical discourses as it was in the previous fifty years. Sikh scholars such as Kapur Singh, Khushwant Singh, J.S. Grewal, Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, and Daljeet Singh have questioned this concept. They are sure that Sikh institutions and values displayed continuity, uniformity, and coherence from the first Guru to the tenth Guru. Gokul Chand Narang shows that "Guru Nanak tried to seek reforms in the Hindu religion by establishing a distinct sect in the form of Sikhism. At the time of Nanak's birth, Hinduism was confined to ritualism and formalism. The essence of Hinduism was certain forms of eating and drinking, unusual ways of cleaning and painting the forehead, idol worship, pilgrimages to sacred regions, and the practice of specific marriage and death customs" (Narang, 1912:28).

Sikhism did not arise suddenly but rather due to the political, social, and religious conditions that prevailed at the time. The political, social, and religious situations were deteriorating on the eve of Guru Nanak's birth. It is critical to understand the conditions that existed at the time to have a perspective on Sikhism's origin and evolution. According to Harbans Singh, "the origin of Sikhism lies in its historical necessity when India was passing through a crucial phase in which the masses suffered much from ignorance, injustice, and discrimination" (Singh 1968, Introduction p.VI). Sahota describes   the birth of Sikhism as Nanak's "extreme denunciation of the ritualism and farce of the Brahmanical religion and bigotry of the followers of Islam. Many adherents of these religions became Guru Nanak's followers and gradually evolved into a new sect that ultimately transformed into an entire religion" (Sahota, 1971:48).

 In such a situation, Nanak rejected the then-prevailing ideals and institutions of Hindu society, such as idol worship, the concept of incarnation, polytheism, and the caste-based concept of purity and pollution, trying to lay the foundation for a new religion known as Sikhism. The first move to the Hindu way of life occurred when Nanak refused to participate in the sacred Brahmanical ritual of worshipping Janeau (a holy thread), which was needed to enter the Hindu religion. Hindus and Muslims saw Guru Nanak as a representative of God who had shown himself in human form to guide humanity. Nanak was highly popular among both Hindus and Muslims. Nanak's rejection of the Brahmanical ritual led him to construct a new religion based on his beliefs and institutions. Nanak was opposed to the Hindu tradition's empty ritualism. As a result, he began to opposed the caste-based social structure, which he claimed had become a source of repression for Hindus from lower castes. Nanak established institutions like the Langar (free community kitchen), Sangat (religious congregation), Pangat (sitting in a line without discrimination to eat a meal), and Dharamsala to eliminate caste-based disparities (later developed into Sikh Gurudwaras). Later on, these institutions became symbolic of the Sikh and Dalit communities' particular way of life. They played a significant role in maintaining the different identities of both communities (Dhillon, 2001: 68).

The Sikhs used to meet in the Gurudwaras in the form of Sangat and heard the recital of the Guru's teachings. It created the feeling that they now belonged to a separate and distinct religious community (Kaur, 1992: 18). The trio of Sangat, Pangat, and Langar translated the idea of equality into practice and removed the long-entrenched caste and colour-based distinctions of the Hindu society. The creation of these novel institutions helped establish a just and equal social order and played an active role in de-Hinduising the newly born Sikh faith

from the Hindu concept of purity and pollution. (Ahluwalia, 1983: 48) The institution of Langar gave a significant move to the concept of caste, encouraging the process of establishing a separate Sikh identity and separating Sikhs from the old Hindu way of life (Singh,1998: 77) . The first Guru ushered in reforms to the caste structure by beginning agriculture after the udasis[6]. It was a shift from tradition since it questioned the dichotomy between manual and non-manual labour, which formed the basis for separating the pure and polluted castes.

Sikhism has significantly influenced Dalits (or untouchables) in Punjab. The teachings of many gurus in Punjab from religious organizations such as 'Sangat' and 'langar' have resulted in a casteless priesthood in society, resulting in the need for a Khalsa. There were two famous gurus, Kabir and Ravidas, who had taught the teachings of the Bhakti poets. They were not only against the social hierarchy system but also challenged it. They also recognized that there were more Muslims in Punjab than Hindus in the 19th century, and Islam had the power to control. The development of the Sikh Panth in the current territory of Punjab has significantly altered the workings of caste. The 10th Guru established the Khalsa based on the idea of caste equality. The Shudra castes were represented by the panj piaras[7] (Cherished Five). Besides defining religious and social customs for the Khalsa to the Panj Piare, Guru Gobind Singh himself became baptized for the first time for his own community. He wanted to inform the Sikhs that Panj Piaras held a higher authority and could make decisions than anyone else in the community. The Panj Piare is seen as a manifestation of the Guru himself. This symbolic sign laid the basic framework for establishing the Khalsa Panth, the beginning of the practice of

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[6] the origin and etymology of Udasis as follows: "In Sikh history, the name Udasi first alludes to Guru Nanak's (1469- 1539) journeys or missionary trips, and secondly it means an order of ascetics created by Baba Sri Chand (1494-?) the eldest son of Guru Nanak." It is derived from the Sanskrit term Udas or Udasin, which means "one who is indifferent to or disregardful of worldly attachments," or "one who is stoic or mendicant." Sri Chand's followers are known as Udasis, and the religious tradition he formed is known as Udasipanth. Udasis are unconcerned with worldly belongings, considering the world unworthy of their attention; instead, they seek a greater goal of personal enlightenment through a stringent regimen of religious activities and rituals. Udasi is an ascetic religious sect based in northern India. The Udasi mahants were removed from Sikh shrines when the Singh Sabha, which Khalsa Sikhs ruled, held them responsible for engaging in religious practices that were contradictory to Sikhism, as well as personal vices and corruption.

[7] Panj Piare' is not just a group of five baptized people but a concept and tradition founded by 10th Sikh Guru Gobind Singh. On the day of Baisakhi in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa and created the institution of Panj Piare. Before a large crowd, he requested for five heads to be sacrificed. Five men accepted his call, and the Guru baptized and named them Panj Piare.

caste equality. Sikh movement began with the establishment of Khalsa, which lasted until the death of the 10th Guru. Finally, it culminated in the late-nineteenth-century rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

The reason behind the relative weakness of the influence of caste hierarchies in Punjab is: *"The presence of Islam, Sikhism, Arya samaj, and Christianity with their reforming zeal and their ever-increasing rivalry in matters of proselytization was another factor that not only affected caste-rigidities. However, it helped to improve caste relations in the province as well as the situation of the depressed classes"* (Gupta, 1985:122). Within Sikhism, Dalit Sikhs are divided into two groups. The Dalits whose profession is "scavenging and cleaning are called Mazhabis or Rangretas. Mathis and Rangretas were Chuhras (sweepers) who converted to Sikhism. Mazhabi Sikhs are mostly confined to the Majha sub-region" (comprising Gurdaspur and Amritsar Districts) of Punjab. Ranger-tas are "a class of Mazbi (sic) found only in Ambala, Ludhiana and the neighbourhood, who consider themselves superior to the rest.*"* Despite their rigorous observance of Sikh religious ideologies, the Mazhabi and Rangreta Sikh castes are not considered equals by the other Sikh castes, who have refused to associate with them, even at religious ceremonies. In other words, even after converting to Sikhism, they were still subjected to the humiliation of hereditary pollution.

Sikhism brought about fundamental changes in social relations by changing the dominant paradigm of the opposition between manual and non-manual labour. The first Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Nanak Dev, who belonged to the Khatri caste, started farming at Kartarpur (now in Pakistan). Later, Sikh Gurus emphasized human equality in both theory and practice. It must not be inferred from the above discussion that Sikhism transformed the caste structure into an egalitarian moral community of the Sikhs. Sikhism was far from a casteless society. The recognition given to manual labour by the first Guru provided the basis for the emergence of a hierarchy distinct from the one seen among the Hindus. The Sikh community consisted of various Shudra castes that appeared at the top of the caste hierarchy. Among them are the Jats, Mehtons, Saini's, Ramgarhias, and Ahluwalia's. (Judge, 2002:184). The first Sikh Guru was Guru Nanak, who rejected the caste system. One of his *"Shabad,'* fakir Jatti phakar Nau, sabhana Jia Ikea Chau,' states."[8]

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[8] (Worthless is caste and worthless an exalted name; for all humanity, there is but a single refuge)

Another practice introduced by the fifth Sikh Guru would be that people from lower castes must present 'Karah prasad' to the Gurudwara, which is then regarded as 'holy prasad' and distributed to everyone in the gathering. Everybody shares a single dish, emphasizing equality between everyone. "This ensures that high castes consume food received in effect from the lower castes or even outcastes and they do so to form a common dish" (Mcleod, 1975:87). In Punjabi society, Sikh Gurus have been strong supporters of equality and the rejection of casteism. Guru Gobind Singh Ji was also against caste discrimination, and at Anandpur sahib in 1699, he established a "Khalsa" (brotherhood and equality) specifically for those people who had caste differences. Jagjit Singh stated: "From a perspective view, Hinduism is such a mash-up of fluid religious ideas, beliefs, cults, etc. It is next to impossible to say what Hinduism is, where it begins and where it ends (Jagjit, 1981:35).

Niharranjan Ray writes of Guru Nanak in 'The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society,' stated that *"He was a man of deep and sharp socio-political consciousness, wide awake to what was happening in the world around him, and constantly applying his mind to the facts, situations, and problems of the time and place he belonged to" (Ray, 1975:50). Guru Nanak challenged the "traditional value system of the Hindus and the dogmatic practices of Muslim minas (religious preachers) who had the moral and political support of the Muslim rulers in India. Guru Nanak was born into a caste-ridden society where individual identity was defined by birth, namely jat (caste). The supreme purpose of human existence, according to Guru Nanak, was salvation, or liberation from the process of death and rebirth. This salvation was the destiny of all people, irrespective of class, religion, or gender" (Kalsi, 1989:125).

Nanak was opposed to all divisions based on religion, caste, and social status. He taught God's oneness and humanity's unity. Guru Nanak, on the other hand, did more than criticize and condemn. As a result of his teachings, a distinct religious movement emerged. His followers used to offer congregational worship and dine together in the community kitchen called langar. Even today, every gurdwara includes a dining area where meals are provided to everyone in the present. The langar tradition stands for the equality of all before God and helps in the removal of social boundaries. It also strikes at the heart of the caste system by opposing the concepts of religious purity and pollution, and Guru Nanak's theory of varnashrama dharma[9]. Like the Sikh Gurus, Kabir rejected the concept of inherent superiority asserted by members of upper caste groups. He questioned the Brahmans' claim to a high caste position (Kalsi,

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[9] Hindu code of conduct is laid down in the shastras.

1989:135). In 1603-4, the fifth Guru, Arjun Dev, wrote the Adi Granth or Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikhs' sacred book. It has works by many Muslim and Hindu saints, including those from untouchable backgrounds, as well as writings by Sikh Gurus.

The presence of low caste saints' works proves that the Sikh Gurus rejected caste as a social position as Khushwant Singh has said, *"The Granth reflected Nanak's beliefs in its totality"* (Singh, 1963:58). In the early seventeenth century, the Sikhs constituted trading communities, especially the *"Khatria (mercantile group), agriculturists, the Jats, and skilled artisans like carpenters and blacksmiths, and bricklayers. The Jats' numerical dominance within the Sikh community increased their influence substantially during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."* Guru Nanak's concept of equality was primarily religious. His egalitarian worldview had societal consequences, and he was interested in social equality via the langar and Amrit[10] organizations. However, because Guru Nanak did not openly challenge the socio-economic structure, it remained even when Sikh Guru followers wielded political power. Without a clear connection with the existing socio-economic framework, primarily based on feudal relationships, the Sikh movement could only move continuously like many other religious movements in pre-industrial societies (Kalsi, 1989:72).

By the 18th century, the Jat constituency had overtaken all other constituent groups in the panth. In this Census, a total of "1,706,909 people identified as Sikhs. This figure's caste analysis showed a clear majority favouring the Jats (more than 66 per cent of the total community). With 6.5 per cent, the Tarkhans (carpenters) are the second-largest constituent. Other components with more than 2% were two outcaste groups, Chuhra (2.6%), Aroras (2.3%), and khatris (2.2%)" (Ibbetson, 1881:139). Another point made by Irfan Habib is that the Jatt people were pastoral in Punjab during the 7th and 9th centuries, and they (the Jatt) were indifferent due to their tradition and Gurus. The Sikh Panth has had numerous followers, and no one knows how many outcasts joined the Sikh Panth. Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1799-1839) ruled the Sikh Jatts (The ruling elite). Sikhs made up barely 6% of their region's population. Muslims made up 70% of the people, while Hindus made up 24%. The districts of Lahore and Amritsar had the most significant Sikh populations. Grewal further highlighted that the

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[10] nectar , solution of water and sugar used at the Sikh initiation. Amrit, the Sikh ceremony of rebirth, takes place in a clean and secluded location at any chosen time. A Sikh attendant carries the Guru Granth to a low draped platform to begin the Khalsa initiation ceremony.

ideology of the "Sikh Panth had given Guru Granth a position to recognize its importance in the abolition of social inequality" (Grewal, 1994:113).

In the context of the Sikh religion, A. E. Barstow stated in the 1920s that "Hinduism has therefore reabsorbed a large part of Sikhism, as it had absorbed Buddhism before it, although many of these religions are opposed to caste and the supremacy of the Brahmans. Sikhism began to lose its distinct identity. Despite their anti-caste religious beliefs, the Sikhs kept the caste structure. Most Sikh preachers reject that caste exists among Sikhs. When it comes to caste in the Sikh faith, they explain the ideal but not the actual reality. In Sikh Ethics, S. S. Kohli states that *"the caste structure has been abolished in Sikh society; thus, there is no limit in the arrangement of marriage relations in Sikhism"* (Kohli, 1975:54). Gurmit Singh "the importance of the Khalsa: brotherhood in A Critique of Sikhism," stated that by expressing opposition to the prevailing caste system and emphasizing equality and brotherhood. The Sikh Gurus established a classless and democratic society in which everyone lived honorably, sat, worshipped, and worked together without regard for caste, creed, or status*"* (Singh, 1967:71). This section looked briefly at the Sikh Gurus' teachings and perspectives on the caste system, showing that the Sikh community is not a homogenous entity. Because the Sikh tradition originated in Punjab, the next section provides a brief examination of the key institutions of Punjabi society. This helps us to understand why caste persists among Sikhs.

II

Socio-Religious Movements

In Punjab, the Dalits attempted to solve their socio-economic issues by changing religion. Separate identities and social mobility are strongly intertwined. Different sects and religious groups initiated many social reform movements against the untouchability/caste system and brought reforms to society. The most remarkable aspect of nineteenth-century Punjab is the point to which religion, on the one hand, and language, on the other, came to define social and political identities. Many socio-religious reform movements were founded in the Punjab's nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The aim of these movements was to revive their religions and communities. There were several movements such as Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Nirankari, Namdhari, Singh Sabha, and more. The different socio-religious reform movements and their influence on the untouchable castes (Dalits) in Punjab. This section will examine these significant historical developments and the politics of recognition.

2. 4 Sant Nirankari Mandal[11] Or Nirankari Sect (1783-1855)

Nirankari is a sect of Sikhism. It is a religious movement that arose in the 19th century. Baba Dayal (1783-1855) was the founder of the Nirankari sect. The Nirarikari movement foreshadowed the main focus of the Singh sabha reformation by emphasizing the importance of the Guru Granth Sahib in the Sikh system and self-identity. The Nirankaris developed into an effective socio-religious reform movement in Western Punjab in the second half of the nineteenth century with a small group. The success of the movement was attributed to a comprehensive organization led by the Guru. Baba Dyal's established a separate Nirankari centre (Nirankari Darbar) in Rawalpindi in 1851-52. It gave his followers a central location to worship, which directly impacted the growth of their numbers. According to Khushwant Singh, "these sects arose as a result of the Sikhs' shifting position in the eighteenth century" (Singh.1991:121).

According to W.H. Mcleod, "the Nirankari sect developed in North West Punjab during the latter years of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. As a result, researchers and historians have different perspectives on the Nirankari Sikh sect, which is also known as a socio-religious movement by others" (Mcleod, 1975:45). During Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign, Sikhism affected the Hindus of Western Punjab. A few accepted the pahul[12] and joined the Khalsa. During this period, the majority of the population identified as Hindus. However, they stopped reciting the Vedas and other Hindu religious rituals in favour of reading the Granth and attending Gurdwara meetings. They developed a tradition which is known as Kesadhari Sikh. This half-Hindu, half-Sikh group belonged to the Khatri, Arora, or Bania castes. Despite their changing religious beliefs, they continued to marry within their castes. The Sant Nirankari's Mission, which was involved in the events in Amritsar in April 1978, should not be confused with the Nirankari Sikhs.

Both of these groups are distinct Baba Dyal, a royal leader under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was responsible for the first group's devotion. Their main office is in Chandigarh. Baba Avtar

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[11] worshipper of the formless - also a member of Sant Nirankari /Mandal - Nirankaris believe in a living guru. On the topic, there is no single complete book available. The references to the Nirankaris found in the recent history of the Sikhs or Punjab appear to be on either Census records from a long time ago or contemporary Nirankari Tracts rather than independent study and observation. However, much of our knowledge of the Nirankaris based on data from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which is not particularly useful in comprehending the movement's origins and early nature.

[12] Initiation or Communion.

Singh, who established a distinct group in the 20th century, was responsible for the devotion of the Sant Nirankari's Mission. The Nirankari's are a group with a sacred ideology and set of rituals centred around their sacred symbols and a system of religious worship, particularly in terms of its rites and ceremonies" (Webster,1979: 9). The Nirankaris claim that they were the first among the Sikhs to demand the revival and acceptance of distinctive Sikh ceremonies connected with birth, marriage and death. Historians generally agree with this claim, and the Nirankaris are depicted as religious reformers. Their love for the ten Sikh Gurus and belief in the Guru Granth Sahib as the Guru brings them even closer to the Singh Sabha Movement. This is considered the most orthodox in terms of adherence to the early Sikh tradition. Baba Dyal, the founder of the Nirankari Movement, was the first leader who gave the first step to the process of reform in the Sikh community in the early 19th century. He became known as 'Nirankari,' or the worshipper of Nirankari (the formless One) (Kaur, 2019: 1041).

Baba Dyal (1783-1857), the founder of the Nirankari movement, was among the first Sikh religious reformers to preach against the social and religious evils that had come into Sikh society[13]. He was concerned about bringing about a religious revival among the Sikhs and preserving religious purity. For this reason, he began his mission with enthusiasm, integrity, and sincerity. He was opposed to unmat (non-Sikh beliefs system)). His direct attack was on the Brahmans and fake saints, who were the cause of Sikh society's perversion. Baba Dyal's message was based on Guru Nanak's teachings. Baba Dyal's message was simple and clear. The first and most significant was that God is one and without form (Nirankari). Baba Dyal's belief led him to reject idol worship and all of the Hindu pantheon's saints. The following central point of Baba Dyal's discourse was that salvation could only be attained by meditation on God. Baba Dyal's followers saw Guru Nanak as a saviour because he taught them the path to salvation. The Adi Granth is the only Holy book of Baba Dyal's ideology. He urged his followers to gather in their Dharmsala regularly for congregational prayer (hearing and reading the Granth).

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[13] Mohinder Singh, The Akali Movement, Macmillan, Delhi, 1978, p.6, According to Fauja Singh, the founder of the Nirankari Movement was a Hindu who had recently come under the influence of Sikhism. Being fresh entrants into the fold of Sikhism, the light of faith in them burned more brightly than it did in most of the older Sikhs. The falling Sikh values made their hearts extremely sore, and they raised their voice of protest against the oncoming rot. Their words fell on receptive ears, and gradually several people began to rally around them' Some Aspects of State and Society under Ranjit Singh, Master Publishers, New Delhi,1982, pp.290-291.

Thus, the Nirankari Movement became stronger and more influential in society in the early nineteenth century. Baba Dyal's followers were more enthusiastic in their quest for transformation. It also brought the manuscript volume of Guru Granth Sahib from 'Peshawarian di Dharmsala', which was written in 1748. Nihal Singh and Taru Rai, two well-known opponents of Hindu Sikh orthodoxy, motivated many reform-minded Sikhs to attend the newly formed Nirankari Darbar (Sher, 1972:10). Initially, it was only Sikh religious practices that were used, which led to a differentiation between Hindus and Sikhs and prevented cultural assimilation between them. As Nirankari followers say, "Touching each other's feet dissolves the grasp of caste systems.". We welcome lower castes as Nirankari does not believe in caste. In our movement, there are no caste or gender distinctions" (Singh, 1991:125).

It was undoubtedly the aim of the movement to influence Hindus and Sikhs to change their social and religious conditions. At the same time, it affected Muslims, some handful of whom became followers of the movement. The Nirankari Movement emerged when ordinary people were burdened with useless rituals and complex religious ceremonies. The Nirankari Gurus used simple social rites to replace the prevalent social and cultural traditions. They stood for truthful and straightforward life, taking inspiration from the Adi- Granth to spread the Gurus' original teachings. The Nirankaris are mainly from the business and trading communities, similar to the Aroras and Khatris. Furthermore, because their Gurus were against caste and class prejudices, many individuals from the lower classes were attracted to the new movement and became its adherents. Even now, many Niranakris come from lower social classes (webster, 1979: 39).

Furthermore, the Nirankaris' strict adherence to the tradition of a living Guru and his indispensability in their way of life stand against the orthodox Sikh concept of Guruship unity. This is because of its impersonal nature and character. As a result, their own line of succession directly opposes the Sikhs' belief in Guru Granth as their Guru following the death of Guru Gobind Singh (Singh, 2014:57). The Nirankaris' focus on truthful living and basic social norms had a significant influence on the people of Punjab, whether rich or poor. Although their efforts were limited to a specific region and the number of their followers was small, their indirect effect appears to have been significant.

2.5 Arya Samaj Movement (1875-1883)

The Arya Samaj movement was the most significant Hindu reform movement in North India throughout the nineteenth century. Arya Samaj represents the Hindu community's effort to develop a modernized Hindu religious tradition. It was also one of the earliest modern attempts to connect Hindu religious ideas to everyday life. Although this movement was not openly political at the time, it ultimately served as the foundation for forming radical Hindu political groups such as the RSS and the BJP. It was founded in 1875 in Bombay by Swami Dayanand Sarasvati. It was most certainly a significant influence in forming the Ad-dharm movement. However, the "Hindu Aryans and Sikhs" never changed their minds. They continued to discriminate against people based on their caste status.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), a Brahmin from central Kathiawar in western India, defined the ideology of the Arya Samaj. Swami Dayanand, a peripatetic ascetic, declared a 'purified' form of traditional Hinduism and emphasized the infallibility of the Vedas. He claimed that the Vedas were the only foundation of authentic Hinduism. He envisioned a purified Hinduism free of contemporary Hindu rituals like polytheism, idolatry, child marriage, and the role of Brahmin priests. These concepts did not conflict with Sikh tradition, and many Sikhs took part in the Arya Samaj campaigns throughout their formative years. Dayanand Saraswati's vision evoked a positive response in Punjab. Dayanand Saraswati's fifteen-month visit to Punjab in 1877 had long-lasting effects on Punjabi society. The Arya's focused primarily on proselytization and Ved Prachar, or "preaching of the Vedas." Although Hinduism does not usually have a conversion ceremony, it prepared to engage professional missionaries to preach Arya principles (Deol, 1996:137).

The entire region was divided into mandalis (circles). With the success of Christian missionaries in converting the lower castes in mind, militant Aryas developed their conversion rite, shuddhi. Shuddhi was used by Arya Samaj activists to convert any Muslim or Christian whose ancestors were Hindus and to purify the untouchable Sikh and Hindu castes. Arya Samaj's militant reforms gave alternatives to the upper caste Hindu elite's dilemma in Punjab. Furthermore, there was considerable anti-Sikh propaganda in the late 1880s. In 1888, the Aryans attacked the Sikh religion. It elaborated on Arya's criticism of Sikhism in a lengthy article titled "Sikhism Past and Present." This article criticized Guru Nanak's infallibility, and Sikhism was depicted as a degenerate and decadent religion. Earlier, young reformist Sikhs had collaborated with Arya activists to stem the tide of Christian missionary success. Still,

public attacks and criticism of Sikhism by Arya protagonists during its Lahore anniversary celebration on 25 November 1888 resulted in an immediate loss of Sikh support for the Arya Samaj (Kapoor, 1986: 17).

The relationship between the Arya Samaj and the Sikh reformers was founded on a feeling of common interests and ideological commitment. Throughout 1887 and 1888, sustained assaults on Sikhism occurred in the Arya press, further trying to ruin relations between Aryas and Sikhs. Thus, changes within the Arya Samaj, the Samaj's developing radicalism, stress on Hinduism's unique and superior features, and the Samaj's expanding organizational power aggravated existing communal cleavages. During this period, All-India Hinduism was challenged by Western interference. The Dharma Sabha became a generalized public arena for a Hindu nation, opposed to unreformed Brahmanical hierarchy, C. A. Bayly writes in his comments on this significant change: "Whereas in the past, dharma (righteousness) had always been qualified by a religion — for example, Raj Dharma, or Maharashtra Dharma" (Bayly, 1994: 8).

The Arya Samaj was founded by Scheduled caste members and it was a for equality and power. They want it for the sake of a progressive ideology based on traditional cultural values. It accepted people from lower castes into the Samaj. Its schools, for example, were linked to its SC groups, such as Dayanand Dalit Udhar in Hoshiarpur. Before forming the Ad-dharm movement, Hoshiarpur Sant Ram's Arya Samaj members introduced a new equality movement. In 1922, Sant Ram founded the Jatt Path Thorak Mandal (Caste Abolition Society). By 1924, they were involved in minor conflicts with the Arya Samaj organization and had abruptly left it. There were four Arya samaj social uplift organizations: "Patat Udhar, Antaj Udhar, Achut Udhar, and most importantly the Dayanand Dalat Udhar in Hoshiarpur". Ad-Dharm criticized Arya Samaj for putting up false fronts in order to preserve the Hindu caste system (Ram, 2004: 45).

The identities of these organizations were unfamiliar to them. The fact is that these groups were made up of selfish individuals who had not been exposed to Hindu culture. Therefore, they re-enter Hindu society. From 1877 to 1905, there was an Arya-Sikh relationship. Firstly, Aryans identified with *"Sikhism as a movement like the Samaj"* that had sought to create a purified *"Hinduism"* without caste and the evils of dominance. Some educated Sikhs reacted to the Samaj with interest, and a few enthusiastically took part. Both Bengali and Punjabi, Religious Reformers saw Dayanand as an ally in their struggle with tradition. For Dayanand, "Sikhism was one of the innumerable cults of Hinduism to be noted and forgotten*"* (Jones, 1973:457).

Khushwant Singh, in his book *"A History of the Sikhs-1839-1964"*, commented on Dayanand's view of the Sikhs and the scriptures. The Aryans of Punjab could not dismiss the Sikhs as Dayanand did in three and a half pages of the *"Satyarth Parkash,"* nor did they choose to do so. Bhai Jawahir Singh worked closely with him during his tour of Punjab, serving as the Secretary of Lahore Arya Samaj. Aryans and reformist Sikhs stressed the similarities of 'true' Sikhism and Aryan Hinduism, parallel to Aryans' identification with Sikh goals and past achievements. The Aryans criticized current Sikhism for many of the same faults found in existing Hinduism. The past of Sikhism was significant, but the present is dismal. Since its origin, the Khalsa (Sikh) community has experienced several changes. The pure faith founded on the Vedas, which Guru Nanak and his successor preached, has declined rapidly. For Sikhs, both conversion and reconversion had a traditional aspect. However, caste conflicts existed and continued within their community as they did among the Hindus (Singh,1978:25).

Arya's and Sikh cooperation or *"shuddhi"*[14] were a significant and contradictory relationship between reformed Sikhs and Arya's. There was a paradoxical relationship between Sikhs and Hindus in general Apart from *"shuddhi,"* no single institution would significantly affect the relationship between Sikh-Hindu identities. The practice of *"shuddhi"* became a permanent feature of Punjabi life. The Arya Samaj saw the importance of maintaining Hinduism, particularly against the rising influence of Christianity. Similarly, another similar organization, known as the 'Akhil Bhartiya sharadhan and Shuddhi Sabha, was established in 1934. On the other hand, they formed this organization due to a split in the "Bhartiya Hindu Shuddhi Sabha" (cf. Pareek, 1965:159). It organized reconversions of untouchables who had accepted Christianity and structured Shuddhi. Identity was a significant issue within the Sikh community and among Hindus. They became involved in the Samaj campaign to purify and save outcastes from Christian conversion). Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity were competing religions (Jones,1976: 1).

Based on the descriptions and discussions, it is possible to argue that the emergence of the Arya Samaj movement and its widespread acceptance within Punjabi culture were influenced by the existing socio-economic conditions. These circumstances made the Hindu caste aware of their own identities. The Arya Samaj and Singh Sabha movement, which started during the last

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[14] In religious terms, Shuddhi means (i) conversion to Hinduism of those belonging to a minority religion; (ii) reconversion of those who had recently or in the ancient history accepted the different religion; and (ill) reclamation, i.e., raising the status of the oppressed groups (Census, Punjab,1911:148)

quarter of the 19th century, was a response and reaction to the revolt of the untouchables owing to their large-scale conversion to Islam and Christianity, made a significant contribution towards the liberation of the untouchables from the purity-pollution debacle. According to the analysis, the untouchable had the lowest position in the Hindu social system and was excluded for all practical purposes, presenting a significant challenge. In search of a better life, the untouchables left Hinduism and adopted other religions.

2.6 The Singh Sabha Movement (1870-1919)

Although various groups within the Sikh community tried to redefine Sikh identity, we shall concentrate on the activities of the most influential Sikh reformers. This is, for example, the Singh Sabha movement. The Singh Sabha social reform movement opened a new era in contemporary Sikhism's history. They tried to rethink Sikh identity after becoming dissatisfied with the Arya Samaj in the late 1880s. Hence, attempts to connect with the cultural forces unleashed by the British Raj led to the formation of several voluntary organizations and socio-religious organizations in Punjab. Dyal Singh Majithia (1849-98), a Jat Sikh aristocrat, founded The Tribune, a 12-page English weekly publication published on 2 February 1881, which generously supported and supported the Brahmo Samaj. The Tribune became a powerful medium for spreading the Brahmo doctrine in Punjab. Similarly, several prominent Sikhs campaigned in forums organized by these associations (Deol, 1996: 140).

This was the formation of the Sri Guru Singh Sabha in Amritsar in 1873. The early Sikh reform movement, known as the Singh Sabha or Tat Khalsa movement, was led by Sikh rulers, agricultural aristocracy, and traditional thinkers. It became a forum for polling public opinion on social issues such as mass education, social custom reform, changes in normal behaviour such as female infanticide, widow remarriage, women's rights, economic growth, and broader religious questions. These leaders (Dayal Singh Majitiha), who came from the established social strata, had remained loyal to the British authority and were unprepared for the rapidly changing cultural milieu. Another Singh Sabha was established in Lahore in 1879, and by 1899, there were 121 Singh Sabhas in existence. The fast growth of Singh Sabhas demanded the establishment of a central institution to coordinate their activities. The Chief Khalsa Diwan was established in 1902, and Sunder Singh Majithia (1872-1941), a prominent member of the Sikh agricultural aristocracy, served as the Diwan's first secretary. The British patronage was one of the reasons that contributed to the Lahore Singh Sabha's (1879) triumph (Kapoor,1986: 17).

Before we examine the fundamental ideological issues surrounding the Singh Sabha movement, it is important to note that there was a diversity of opinion on specific issues among Sikh reformers, and a shifting variety of expression associated with the Lahore Sabha, later the Chief Khalsa Diwan. However, the main focus was on internal difficulties. The rising concern was over the clear demarcation of Sikh communal boundaries and the defense of the Sikh religion from attacks by other religions. The Sikh aristocracy and ruling classes required religious specialists to conduct ceremonial activities under Sikh rule (1801-49), and religious mediators gained significant endowments from their aristocratic clients in pre-colonial Punjab. As a result, from the eighteenth century, a group of guru lineages and other holy men, known as the Sanatan Sikhs took control of Sikh temples. The question of Sikh identity was affected by strong Arya Samaj attacks on the Sikh religion. In 1899, two widely spread pamphlets titled Sikh Hindu Hain, or 'Sikhs Are Hindus,' asserted that Sikhism was a reforming tendency within Hinduism. In response, Bhai Kahn Singh published his classic book, Ham Hindu Nahin, or 'We are not Hindus,' which laid the basis for a distinct Sikh identity. After that, Arya Samaj polemicists began sustained attacks on the Sikh religion, making attempts to incorporate it into the Hindu fold.

 The 'inclusivist' tendencies of the Hindu movement were opposed by the Sikh reform movement in the 1880s. Scholars of the Sikh religion overwhelmingly agree that Sikhism has traditionally emerged as an 'exclusive' religion. The Sikh gurus established specific norms of conduct, prescribed membership rules, preached adherence to certain dogmas, and purged the heterodox in the Sikh tradition. This helps explain why the 1880s Sikh reform movement was 'exclusive,' as opposed to the 'heterodox' and reformist Hindu Arya Samaj movement, which sought to include other religions. This philosophy of Hindu inclusive tolerance led a group of the Sahajdhari[15] Sikh leaders to declare themselves Hindus and support a resolution declaring Sikhs to be members of the Hindu community during a major public conference commemorating Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in Lahore in 1897 (Singh, 1989:160).

The central theme of Harjot Oberoi's book, "The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition' (1994), is an examination of the processes of construction and transformation of religious identities among Sikhs during the

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[15] Sehajdhari, or the slow adopters, refers to those Sikhs. The latter do not observe the unshorn hair of the Khalsa nor accept the Khalsa normative order instituted by the last Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh. Historically, their numbers have dwindled over the centuries.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He examines the pluralism of religious traditions, which he says was a distinguishing central feature of early Indian religion, to question universal, monolithic religious categories such as 'Hindus,' 'Sikhs,' and 'Muslims.' Against this, he argues that the history of early Sikh tradition, which was firmly rooted in the diversity of Indian culture, was distinguished by a lack of concern for demarcating religious boundaries, which remained dynamic and ambiguous. Only later, with the social and political upheavals brought about by the British Raj, was a structured discourse of Sikhism formed. It is a classic example of the 'hegemony' approach to studying religious change in colonial India. The 'hegemony'[16] approach to religious reform in colonial India explains how its position in modern capitalism empowers the rising middle class. It used religious reform to gain cultural hegemony by gaining control over sacred centres and defining a uniform, undifferentiated religious discourse with discrete boundaries.

Hence, the Tat Khalsa leadership was a new class that formed a new discourse of contemporary Sikhism. This new class needs a meaningful, standard cultural idiom to universalize its objectives. They developed and propagated modern Sikhism's discourse by creating recent literature and selecting symbols, rites, and practices. The Tat Khalsa provided Sikhs with a distinct and independent Sikh identity through several developments by endowing them with history, scripture, ceremonial calendar, life cycle rituals, sacred space, and celebrations. In other words, Oberoi's claim that the Tat Khalsa movement's beliefs and practices in the nineteenth century constituted a fundamental transformation in Sikh identity and were significantly distinct from earlier Sikh tradition is challenging to sustain empirically but also self-contradictory. The Sikh gurus' central teachings were iconoclastic monotheism and egalitarian social norms (Oberoi, 1994: 323).

The ideas and religious practices of Khalsa Sikhs and Sanatan Sikhs differed significantly. Whereas the Khalsa normative order required Sikhs to keep the external symbols of the Sikh religion. Moreover, they had to follow the rahit injunctions. However, the Sanatan Sikhs[17] did not think it was necessary to keep unshorn hair and felt that they could obtain salvation through

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[16] According to the hegemony approach, the urbanized, semi-English educated middle class attempted to change their religion by purging it of superstition, irrational and magical ideas, and rejecting traditional customs like devotion to local saints. The participation of many religious communities in the worship of local saints is interpreted as proof of inherent tolerance.

[17] The Sanatan Sikhs (Udasis, Nirmalas, and Namdharis) were challenged and subsequently marginalized for the first time.

their own unorthodox ways. The priestly class was primarily responsible for creating and preserving the Sanatan Sikh tradition. As a result, a group of guru lineages and other holy men (Sanatan Sikhs) took control of Sikh temples and codified Sikh theology and practice. The Sanatan Sikhs not only rejected the rahit-namas as binding on them, but they also practised idol worship and worship of live gurus and recognized the caste structure as fundamental to the Sikh faith. The Sanatan Sikhs (Udasis, Nirmalas, and Namdharis) were challenged and subsequently marginalized for the first time.

The new doctrine defined a Sikh differently, and the new rhetoric was universalistic and firmly imprinted with a dominant ideology. Thus, a significant and permanent transformation occurred over the nineteenth century from an earlier pluralist Sikh tradition to a highly uniform Sikh identity. The Sikhs began to regard themselves as a distinct and homogeneous religious community. However, Sikhism only provides a partial understanding of the historical process of identity formation. This viewpoint is based on the claim that the Singh Sabha reformers articulated a fundamentally new Sikh ideology that radically changed Sikh identity. Another fundamental shortcoming of Sikhism is that only a small section of the middle class adhered to this different and standard interpretation of religious identity. As a result, the Singh Sabha focused most of its efforts on preserving Sikh identity against Christian missionaries and Hindu proselytizers. As a result, early Sikh organizations were involved in defining group boundaries and differentiating themselves from other communities. Kenneth W. Jones writes (1973), 'Sikhs in future years could question who they were, but they understood with growing certainty who they were not: Ham Hindu Nahin,' (Jones, 1973: 475).

It was inevitable for an organization with such a wide range of activities as the Singh Sabha to develop its own politics. These culminated in the formation of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902, which promised to cultivate loyalty to the monarch to protect Sikh rights with other groups and fight for proper Sikh representation in the society. Some Khalsa Diwan members attempted to form their own "depressed class movement" to gain support from their castes. There were organized demands for gurdwara reform laws to allow them free entrance to Sikh places of worship (Juergensmeyer, 2000: 28). As a result, the Singh Sabha found it very difficult to establish their own gurdwaras, which were to be served by priests who supported their ideology. Although socio-religious reform movements aimed to abolish untouchability, they wanted to do so without changing the caste system's fundamental basis. Because it primarily focused these movements on social reform, they could not devote themselves to removed

untouchability (puri, 2004:155). Hence, it has already been discussed above that caste hierarchies in distinct religious movements or organizations should be seen as competing.

As a result, castes with common names are given equivalent status based on their religion. On the other hand, this part looks to understand the link between caste/ religious identities and the growth of communalism in Punjab. It contends that the development of communalism between Hindus and Sikhs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was principally attributable to the evolution of competing castes within the two religious' groups. Despite the construction of communal boundaries between Sikhs and Hindus over several decades, Sikhs and a large population of Punjabi Hindus have strong bonds. A similar identity connected the two groups with social and historical traditions and a shared spoken language and culture. Following the enactment of the 1925 Act, Sikh leaders' primary concern became the preservation of a distinct Sikh communal identity. Communalism in Punjab is perpetuated by history, by its interpretation and selective appropriation. It tries to explain its present perspective by constructing an *"imagined"* past. Culture has a role in building this awareness in two ways: first, by creating communal culture, and second, by appropriating existing cultural practices. This culture is tied to religion in both circumstances. In the case of Punjabi Sikhs, the construction of the 'self' and the 'other' began with 'we are not Hindus' and culminated in 'Sikhs are a different community/nation.' Surprisingly, the formulation of these two assertions included a reasonable discussion of the caste system (Judge, 2002:185).

It is important to remember that Sikh folk memories are infused with brutal fights against the oppression of Mughal authority. Despite the emergence of inter-communal consciousness, the relationships between Sikhs and Hindus remained strong. A shared identification connects the two communities with the same social and historical traditions, a shared spoken language and culture, and a similar caste identity. Even in religious concerns, Sikhism had its origins in the Indian intellectual tradition. Therefore sociologically, Sikh and Hindu religious ideologies overlapped a lot. In effect, the most crucial role played by the Singh Sabha was to introduce new associational forms, such as the SGPC - a central committee for the management of Sikh shrines and its political wing - the Akali Dal, which moulded the growth of modern Sikhism. Sikh temples remained a focal point of Sikh agitation. The development of educational institutions and the establishment of a printing press that issued newspapers, books, and religious tracts in the Gurmukhi script were other significant contributions of the Singh Sabha. Thus, the most significant impact of Singh Sabha reformers' vigorous work, which spanned

fifty-five years, was the development of significant institutions in reclining and revitalizing Sikh communal consciousness.

2.7 Hum Hindu Nahin Hain (We Are Not Hindus)

Bhai Kahn Singh in his book "Ham Hindu Nahi", has provided some critical definitions of Sikh and Hindu along with some important terms related to them. He elaborates on his views on the distinct identity of the Sikhs. The debut of this book corresponds to the growth of Tat Khalsa in the Singh Sabha movement. Kahn Singh Nabha was a Dhillon Jat by caste who rose to prominence as a Sikhism scholar with the publication of his Mahan Kosh in 1930. 'Hum Hindu Nahin Hain' is a polemical text whose major purpose is to prove that Sikhs should not be mistaken for Hindus since they are a distinct religious group. In his Mahankosh, Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha defines a Sikh as one who follows Guru Nanak and believes that all ten Gurus are equal. He follows the Guru Granth Sahib as his holy scripture. Sikhs also adhere to the Sikh code of conduct and the Rahit. Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, and Muslims have their own scriptures. The scriptures of all these religions preach a determination to believe. Dyal Singh Majithia's death in 1898, and the court's decision to depict him as a Hindu, brought a new face to the identity conflict; his widow was fighting the case to establish he was not a Hindu but a Sikh (Ballard, 2015: 12).

According to the 1881 Census report, a Sikh was defined as a keeper of five Ks[18] who did not use tobacco. Others who lacked the five Ks were considered non-Sikhs, and because Census records were unable to determine religious affiliation, they were classified as Hindus. Because of the colonial state's religious classification, Nanak Panthis, Ravidasis, Nirmala, and Udasis were not counted. They were regarded as Hindus. The definition of the word Hindu provided by Bhai Kahn Singh is unclear. According to Bhai Kahn Singh, a Hindu who follows the Vedic religion believes in the Varna system, accepts the Vedas as sacred writings, and does not consume non-veg. Arabian and Persian writers also used Hindus to describe black/dark, enslaved people, and robbers. Further, he says Brahman is related to Brahma. It is the first Varna of Hinduism. Braham religion/ Braham Dharam is the Dharam told by the Vedas. Bhai Kahn Singh believes that all people have the right to listen to religious verses and attend ceremonies. Traditionally, Shudra and women were not allowed to attend religious traditions

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[18] Five Ks are five articles used by Sikhism-baptized Khalsa. They are Kes/hairs, Kangha/comb, Kara/iron bracelet, Kirpan/sword, Kachha/shorts.

in some religions. But in Sikhism, all are equally regarded. In Sikhism, caste is determined by occupation/Karma, not a by the birth.

In this context, Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha is supposed to have written his most famous work, Ham Hindu Nahi. Internally and internationally, Singh reformers had to struggle. Some Sikhs opposed the reformers because they believed in Sanatanism. Sant Badan Singh wrote a conservative interpretation of the Adi Granth. They rejected this commentary because it was considered Hinduized discourse and supported Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha's Gurmat Prabhakar and Gurmat Sudhakar, both published in the late 19th century. In this context, Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha's works, which emerged from this religiously transformed environment, are historically significant. Kahn Singh believes that the people should follow the concept of universal brotherhood. The only differences are those of culture and language. Discrimination of any type should not be based on such distinctions. The focus should be on each other's improvement and growth. This, he claims, is what the Sikh Gurus preached (Nabha, 1922: 23).

Hence, it explains how Sikhs differ from Hindus. There is no similarity to Hindus. Even though Sikhs are distinct from Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists, some individuals still consider Sikhs to be Hindus. Writing this book aims to make a strong declaration of the Sikhs' separate identity. People had started following false rituals, worshipping idols, and discriminating. A Hindu participant claims that the Sikhs are Hindus, for which he provides various examples to prove it. He says that Sikhs, due to their birth from the Hindus, their eating habits, their relations with Hindus, and also being the residents of Hindustan, shall be called Hindus. In Ham Hindu Nahi, the Sikh community rejected the claim that all Hindus were represented. Hindus and Sikhs are fundamentally different because of the Gurbani from Guru Granth Sahib.

Nabha found the third and most critical concern is the Hindu practice of untouchability. It formed the Sikh religion by merging the four varnas and castes. Because all castes are derived from Karma, changing one's occupation affects one's caste. Caste is divided according to work. Any individual from a lower caste can work in an upper-level occupation, and the same is true for anyone from a higher caste. Sikhs also discuss Sikhism's opposition to the caste system. Sikhism has no caste system. Hinduism, on the other hand, follows the caste system. In the book "Ham Hindu Nahi", references to numerous Hindu texts are provided where Brahman is considered correct even though he is wrong in some cases. At the same time, Shudra, the lowest caste, is always presented as wrong even when he is right. In this way, Sikhism differs significantly from Hinduism. The Sikhs had abandoned the Hindu faith and the system of law,

which is the basis of that faith and which was inseparable from it. For a hundred and fifty years, they had been governed by another code altogether as far as chiefships were concerned. It was as reasonable for them to refer to Manu and the Shastras as the source of legal authority as it would have been for Muhammadans. The latter had accepted Sikhism (Singh, 2019: 175).

According to Sanatan Sikhism's Khalsa Dharam sastra (1914), "all individuals who belong to the fourfold caste system, from "Braman to Nai, including chipped and jhivara, are not allowed to participate, be looked at, or touched by outcastes". This means that, just as untouchables can pollute the four Hindu castes, in the Sikh Khalsa realm, they can pollute all upper castes as well. Untouchable Sikhs (such as the Mazhabi, Rahita, and Ramdassia Sikhs) are a distinct caste. These untouchable classes are not allowed to ascend above the fourth step of Amritsar's Golden Temple. Members of the upper castes should avoid mingling with members of the lower castes; if they do, they lose their claims to be from the upper castes". Bhai Kahn Singh points out some critical points on which Sikhs are declared entirely distinct from Hindus.

 Bhai Kahn Singh created two characters; one was a Hindu participant and another was a Sikh. Sikhs are Hindus or are they a separate ethnic group? Dr J.S. Grewal believes that the arguments supporting the Sikhs and Hindus are less elaborated. The Hindu participant in the book Ham Hindu Nahi supports the idea of the sanctity of Vedas, Puranas, Smritis, and Shastras in Adi Granth. He also refers to Guru Nanak's views on the Varna system, saying that Guru Nanak stated that the entire world had become one cast and there was no religion/Dharam. It suggests he focused on the Varna system. The Hindu character in the novel also quoted a hymn from the Adi Granth, in which Guru Nanak is supposed to be wearing the sacred thread (Grewal, 1999: 231). Sikhs rejected the effectiveness of prevailing laws because they were not Hindus. Most of the time, customary laws were in effect. Sikhs followed the Gurbani and Rahitnamas, and the Anand Marriage Act was also approved, opening the basis for the Sikh code of rules. It could not impose Hindu laws on Sikhs who converted to Sikhism.

Hindu socio-religious reform movements defended Hinduism, which the Sikhs constantly attacked. It resulted in a clash between Hindus and Sikhs. Hence, Sikhs organizations formed Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj, and many other socio-religious reformist groups to defend Sikhs. The Singh Sabha was divided into two groups. First, The Amritsar group was considered conservative, and second, the Lahore group. It had battled against the Arya Samaj. Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha defended the concept of a coexisting "qaum" (community) with Hindus and Muslims in his arguments. The Sikhs became a political community as a result of this. Dr

Grewal also mentions the concept of Sikh politics based on Sikh identity, which was accepted by the Chief Khalsa Diwan, the Akalis, and the Khalistan movement. In the form of Ham Hindu Nahi, it was a statement of Sikh ethnicity. Many socio-religious reform movements came into existence and rejected the priesthood and rituals. It also opposed idol worship and preached monotheism. Like Swami Dayanand, Bhai Kahn Singh elaborated on the separate and distinct identity of the Sikhs during colonial times (Grewal, 1999: 232).

These socio-religious reform movements in Punjab remained an extremely significant in raising consciousness among the lower castes. There was a strong urge to improve their social and economic conditions, a spirit of the quest for religious thought, and an enthusiasm for social reform. The Chamars, disillusioned by the program of Arya Samaj, felt that the program of social uplift of the untouchables kept them under the overlordship of the caste Hindus. There they decided to organize themselves separately and work to alleviate the difficulties of the Chamars. The rising conflict between Sikhs and Dalits is seen more due to the rising aspiration among Dalits for self-identity and self-respect. The social and religious status of the Chamars (leather workers and landless labourers), also known as Ravidasis, will be examined in the following section to understand their significance in society. To identify the Chamars' religious identity, we must first analyze the concept of a Ravidassia and their religious movement- The Ad-Dharm movement in Punjab.

2.8 Dalits (Chamars) in Punjab

The Chamars are one of the ancient castes within the social structure of Indian society. Chamars are one of the Untouchable communities, also known as Dalits, who are now classified as a Scheduled Caste under modern India's caste system. They have always been considered untouchables outside the Hindu Varna caste hierarchy system. They are primarily found in India's northern states. According to Sachchidananda, "the scheduled castes number nearly eighty million in contemporary India and account for 14.6 per cent of the Indian population" (Sachchidananda, 1977: 3). Historically, the Chamars were farmers and associated with traditional occupations. The name 'chamars' has also been used as a derogatory term for someone considered of low status by the upper caste community (Rawat 2011: 5). Punjab's SCs are not a homogeneous group as they are elsewhere. They are divided by the same concept of caste hierarchy and Brahminical social order depicted by the varna system. SCs are highly divided, with distinct social identities and economic levels, as well as endogamous multi-caste strata. They also see a social status hierarchy from high to low.

In Punjab, Chamars are known by different names depending on their religious affiliation. Their popular nomenclatures are chamars and Ramdasias among Hindus and Sikhs. Social scientists have used several terms to describe the "biradari of Chamars or Chamar an umbrella caste category-includes Chamars, Jatia Chamars, Rehgars, Raigars, Ramdasias and Ravidassia. The two primary languages of the Chamar Sikhs are eastern Punjabi and Hindi. The category of "scheduled castes" was created by the British in 1935. The Chamars are now known as AdDharmis/Ravidassia in the Punjabi region, which is a respectable title. The Chamars are religiously associated with Saint Ravidas and worship him as their Guru. Chamar is a Dalit sub-caste mainly found in the northern states, such as Punjab and Uttar Pradesh (India). Chamars are India's second-most population caste and the most powerful among the scheduled castes. In the 1931 Census report, it was proved that Ad-Dharmi / Chamars and Ravidassia Sikhs were more literate than other members of lower castes and that they were probably better off financially as well. Since their numbers were higher in Punjab's wealthier areas. In Punjab, the Scheduled Castes (SCs) constitute around 31.94 per cent of the population, compared to 16.6 per cent in the rest of the country. In many districts of Punjab, this percentage varies from 32.07 per cent to 42.51 per cent, with 57 villages having a 100% SCs population (Ram, 2017: 1).

2.9 The origin of the Ad Dharm movement (1920-1950)

The recent Dalit assertion in Punjab may be traced back to the Ad Dharm movement in the 1920s, which emerged with several similar movements in India. The movement aimed to define a distinct identity for the untouchables, separate from Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims. The primarily low-caste basis of this movement, and the intensity with which it struggled against social control structures, made it highly significant. Ad Dharm, the only movement of its type in the country's Northwestern region, tried to gain a separate and respectable space for the Scheduled Castes through cultural transformation, religious experience, and political assertion rather than seeking equality within the Hindu fold. This movement, which laid the foundations of Dalit consciousness in Punjab, has drawn limited attention from others, Mark Juergensmeyer's s pioneering work being the only exception. Furthermore, the contribution of the lower castes and untouchables was significant in all struggles and movements, including the Bhakti movement led by Dhanna, Sadna, Sain, and Ravidass, among others. In Punjab, the Ad Dharm movement was influenced by saint Valmiki and the Bhakti movement, particularly Ravidass, Kabir, and Namdev.

The term "Ad-Dharm" is derived from Sanskrit. It is a combination of two words: Ad, which means "original," and Dharm means "religion." This compound term became popular in Punjab in the1920s, and the Chamars adopted the title "Ad-Dharmi"[19] as it is considered more respectable by other caste groups in Punjab*"* (Kalsi, 1989:130). The beginning of the 20th century witnessed a series of political developments that led to the formation of Adi movements in different parts of colonial India. The major goal of the Adi and Ad Dharm movements was to free the so-called untouchables and give them the opportunity to live in dignity and equality. While similar socio-political situations existed throughout the country, Punjab's case is distinctive due to numerous communal organizations (Arya Samaj, Christian church, Sikh Khalsa Diwan, Ahmaddiya movement).

Although the abolition of untouchability was on the agenda of the social reform movements, they wanted to do it without changing the caste system's fundamental structure (Manuqu 2003: 5). The Separate electorates, implemented in 1909 and 1919, increased communal and separatist politics (Tanwar 1999: 29), with serious consequences in the province of Punjab, where Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs had their own political organizations pursuing their vested interests (Malhotra 1976: 488). For the Scheduled Castes, there was no independent organization to represent and protect their interests. Hence, other communal organizations attempted to attract them in order to gain numerical superiority over them. For the first time in Punjab's history, the presence of Scheduled Castes was recognized and its social and political organization was developed for them. The distinct electorate provision gave the SCs the opportunity to form an independent organization without being influenced by other groups, such as the Arya Samaj. Before becoming independent and active in the movement, the Ad Dharm movement, particularly some of its key protagonists, had close relationships with the Arya Samaj.

In the early 1920s, a group of educated young untouchable activists met in Jalandhar to discuss the possibilities of political organization. Vasant Rai, Thakur Chand, and Swami Shudranand who were prominent as pracharaks (preachers) or updeshaks (missionaries) in the Arya Samaj were the three who first developed the idea for the Ad Dharm movement. Adi Danka (the drum

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[19] During the 1920s, under the influence of the Ad-Dharm movement, a group of Chamars in Punjab's Doaba region began to refer to themselves as Ad-Dharmis. Despite their claims to be a separate religious community, they were classified as different castes of Hindus in Punjab following independence from colonial rule.

of the Adi people) was a newspaper published in Urdu and read by many literate untouchables as a protest against social oppression and inequality. Vasant Rai had been a teacher with the Arya Samaj, and afterward,s with the Sanatan Dharm, the Samaj's orthodox Hindu opposition (Juergensmeyer 1988: 38) Even after incorporating them into the newly formed Ad Dharm movement, the Arya Samaj drew them back by giving them key responsibilities in the movement[20].

In Punjab, Mangu Ram was a well-known person. Mangu Ram's[21] entry into lower caste politics marks the beginning of the Ad Dharm movement as a movement. In Juergensmeyer's words, "movements challenge the normative order in two entirely different ways: either they reverse it or they replace it. The prevailing Hindu traditions constitutes anti-structural reversals of ordinary social hierarchy: they have upended social roles and proclaimed the superiority of the lower caste. The idea that untouchables constitute a qaum, a distinct religious community similar to those of Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, and that the qaum had existed from time immemorial" (Juergensmeyer 1988:249). Ad- Dharm had its first organizational meeting which took place in Jalandhar in 1925. Mangoo Ram and the early founders of the Ad Dharm had seen the development of a new and distinct religion as their priority. During 1925, the gatherings grew as new participants were brought in. During their first meetings, they established an organizational framework and laboured over a basic ideological theme to build a system of religious concepts and symbols (Madhopuri 2010:8). Untouchables were considered a separate community that was distinguished from Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims because of their religious beliefs. They also appealed to the untouchables (Achhuts) to come together and fight for their liberation and upliftment. In their first year, they announced their basic manifesto. "We are the indigenous inhabitants of this country, and Ad Dharm is our religion."

The Hindu qaum came from outside and oppressed us. They deprived us of our property and forced us to become homeless. They (Hindus) became lord and called us 'others.' Hindus oppressed us for centuries; destroy all relations with them. The moment has arrived; be cautious, for the government is now taking appeals seriously. Together, we can save the race

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[20] Interview: Chanan Lal Manak, Jalandhar, 1 May 2001; K.C. Sulekh, Chandigarh, 1 July 2001

[21] Mangoo Ram took the movement to the doorsteps of the untouchables in the Doaba region and soon emerged as a cult figure of the Dalits in Punjab. He was born at Mugowal, a village in the district of Hoshiarpur, on 14 January 1886.

with the help of a democratic regime. Send representatives to the Councils so that our m Quam is re-reinforced and never consider ourselves Hindus; remember that Ad Dharm is our religion " (Ram, 2004: 330). Ad Dharm leaders separated the untouchables from Hinduism and reconnected them to their ancient religion, Ad Dharm, to restore dignity and freedom. In truth, reviving their old faith was difficult, as the untouchables had lost their Gurus and other sacred symbols during the Savarnas' long persecution. The preachers were found unworthy of theology and were denounced as impure. For the Achhuts, reviving Ad Dharm was equivalent to establishing a new and distinct religion. Mangoo Ram's claim that the Dalits were the actual residents of this country had a strong psychological influence on the untouchables. This provided a theological basis on which the new Dalit identity could be maintained and developed. There was a powerful myth aimed at a vulnerable population.

Hence, they conducted the Ad Dharm movement's foundation conference on June 11-12, 1926, at Mangu Ram's school in his village Mugowal, district Hoshiarpur. Mangu Ram was unanimously elected as the organization's[22] president. People came from all around Punjab to attend the gathering. All untouchables attended Chuhras, Chamars, Ravidasias, Sansis, Bhanjaras, Burrs, Julahas, Kabirpanthis, Dom, and other castes. Juergensmeyer (1988) described "Mangoo Ram's personality as a restless, even ambitious man, socially sensitive, and politically ideal. In spite of the fact that he did not consider himself a "saint," an "avatar," or a "guru," he played an influential role in religious affairs. He was something like a broker, making religious symbols and ideas accessible to ordinary people" (ibid: 44). The critical point is that the Chamar community was the forward community of the Ad-Dharm movement, as this movement's leadership was mainly from this sub-caste. Mangoo Ram, the movement's hero, was also from the Chamar community.

Mangoo Ram emphasized that the untouchables had three powers: communal pride (qaumiyat), religion (majhab), and organization, which he started with reality and ended with a wish (majlis). They attempted to persuade their followers that they were members of a vast

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[22] As the nineteenth century came to an end, Punjab was characterized by a division between society and religion. Branches of The Arya Samaj, Sanatana Dharma, Singh Sabhas, Muslim Anjumans, Caste Associations, district associations, and social reform/ literary societies were common in districts. In the following century, these gave rise to a new set of organizations, such as Hindu Sabhas, the Sikh Educational Conference and Chief Khalsa Diwan, Shudhhi Sabhas, and political parties active in local, provincial, or national regions., N. G. Barrier, "Quantification in Punjab Social and Political History: Sources and Problems," Essays In Honour of Ganda Singh, pp. 204-5.

Qaum and not just village Chamars by presenting a mythical history. The Ad Dharmis rejected established religious entities and sought to develop their own identity by establishing their own symbols, practices, and rituals. They were told to welcome one another in the name of 'Jai Gurudev' (victory to the almighty Guru) and react with 'Dhan Gurudev' (blessed be the divine Guru). Ravidas, or one of the other lower caste Sants, was believed to be the Guru in this case. The greetings were intended to distinguish them from different religious communities; for example, Hindus used Namaste, Sikhs used "Sat Sri Akaal", and Muslims used "Salam" (Juergensmeyer 1988: 53). The Sanskrit word sohang (I am that) became a mantra of the reformed Ad Dharm religion, and it is still used in Guru Ravidass' wall calendars. They have formed a part of the Ad Dharm movement's history in terms of salutations.[23]

 The Ad Dharm leaders urged their followers to remain devoted to the Gurus. They encouraged people to meditate and worship one of the Gurus daily. "It is a sin to live without a Guru."[24] The Ad Dharm's Satsang followed a format similar to the Sikhs. The Ad Dharm, like the Sikhs, wanted to have its own scriptures, and the writings of Ravidas and other lower caste instructors were assembled for that purpose. it was influenced by an Arya Samaj term, Ad Parkash, which means "pristine." Ad Dharm attached special significance to the colour red and urged that it be widely worn. They claimed that the red colour was the symbol of the Ad Dharm. The Arya Samaj was attracted to the Ad Dharm because of its conflict. On October 10, 1929, Ad Dharm leaders presented the idea of having Ad Dharm included as a separate religion in the census to the government. They accepted the idea. The census report of 1931 stated that it did in response to Mangoo Ram and Ad Dharm Mandal's representations. They contended that because the oppressed classes were India's locals and the Hindus kept them at a respectful distance, they should be allowed to declare Ad Dharm as their religion during the census (puri, 2000:157).

The dominant higher castes of Hindus and Sikhs attacked Ad Dharmis violently in the districts of Ferozpur, Lyalpur, Nanakana Sahib, Ludhiana, Baghapurana, and Kangra in the early years. The Ad Dharm movement successfully classified a significant number of low castes in Punjab as Ad Dharmis during the 1931 census. 4,18,789 individuals enrolled as Ad Dharmis (Punjab Census Report, 1931: 318) Interestingly, even when the community reconciled itself to being grouped with Hindu SCs for census enumerations, the Ad Dharmi identity remained significant. "14.9 per cent (1,047,280) of the 7,028,723 members of SCs in Punjab were listed

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[23] The particular emblem and mantra of the Ad Dharm were Sohang means I am that, taken from Upanishads.

[24] Ad Dharm Report 1926-31, p. 37

as Ad Dharmis in the 2001 census, substantially more than those who registered themselves as belonging to the Ad Dharmi Quam in 1931. In religious terms, as many as 59.9 per cent of Punjab SCs enumerated themselves as Sikhs and 39.6 per cent as Hindus. Only 0.5 per cent declared their religion to be Buddhism" (Punjab government census, 2011).

After the 1937 election, the Ad Dharm movement began to decline after a strong beginning. The Ad-Dharm movement began to decline after the Poona Pact of 1932 and the implementation of the Government of India Act in 1935. The Congress and the Hindu Sabha were upset by the Ad Dharm's electoral alliance with the Unionist Party during the Punjab Assembly elections, first in 1937 and then again in 1945-46. The Hindu leaders were unconcerned about the Ad-Dharmis' growing connections to the British government, which campaigned for them in the 1937 election (Saberwal 1976: 71). The Ad Dharm movement was split into two factions; the first was the Ad Dharm Mandal, led by Mangoo Ram and had its headquarters in Jalandhar. The second was the All-India Ad Dharm Mandal, directed by Vasant Rai and had its headquarters at Layalpur. Both Gandhi and Ambedkar claimed to be the true representatives of the untouchables at the Round Table Conference. The meeting lasted several weeks. Seth Kishan Das and Master Gurbanta Singh were the primary leaders in the factional struggle. Seth Kishan Das was a wealthy member of the Boota Mandi[25], and his financial support for the Ad Dharm Mandal was well known.

Generally speaking, a movement is a phenomenon that only exists within the boundaries of a particular group or political party. Gandhi finally consented to separate electorates for Muslims and Sikhs, but not for untouchables, as suggested by Ambedkar. Gandhi refused to recognize Ambedkar's claim to represent the untouchables. Mangoo Ram and other organizations (untouchables) from all across India supported Ambedkar. The movement was later incorporated into the Ambedkar Scheduled Castes Federation and transformed into the non-communal Republican party. The Dalits' representative at the round table conference, Dr Ambedkar, was supported by Mangoo Ram by telegrams sent to the government. He also demanded the government to provide free or low-cost education to the poor Dalit students (Saberwal, 1976:68).

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[25] Boota Mandi, also known as Ramdasspura, is situated on the Nakodar road in Jalandhar. It is highly dominated by Ad-Dharmis who had come from different villages to settle there for leatherwork and trade.

In 1950, Mangoo Ram requested his "qaum" to relieve him of active social service life, and he encouraged young Ad-Dharmis to continue the fight for Dalit liberation. From 1950 to 1970, the Ad Dharm movement remained inactive for reasons best known to its leaders. Most of the Adi (Ad-Dharm) movements in different parts of the country ceased to play an active role in post-colonial India until 1970. The Ad-Dharm movement established an Ad-Dharm Mandal in order to fulfill its political goals. It contested the elections in 1937 and won only one seat. It successfully spread awareness and assertiveness among the lower castes. In 1945-46, Ad-Dharm Mandal formed an alliance with the Unionist Party and contested the election where Mangoo Ram won the election. After independence, the Ad Dharm movement lost its effect, and none of the Dalit leaders emerged as an impressive personality.

The leaders of the Ad Dharm movement were unable to get the support of all Dalit castes; instead, they were only able to enlist the help of the Chamar caste. The leadership became divided into various groups by getting involved in politics, and they began to pull each other apart. The first to depart Ad-Dharm Mandal was Master Gurvanta Singh. He became a member of the Congress party. Similarly, several prominent leaders left the movement to join the mainstream of national politics. They elected Mangoo Ram and a few of his political allies to the Punjab legislative assembly. Mangoo Ram was only a member of the Congress assembly for a few years. However, evidence suggests that he utilized his position to help the lower caste in several ways. He pushed for land redistribution, demanded that more government posts be made aside for them, and attempted to establish holidays on lower caste Gurus' birthdays. Ad-Dharm identified itself as a religious identity and demanded official recognition as a religious movement, which may have contributed to its collapse. Essentially, it was a political movement (Jodhka, 2009:81).

In Punjab, the legacy of the Ad Dharm movement remains active and influential in two ways. The first is the "name" itself, which has become the Chamar's caste name in parts of the Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur districts. The second is the movement's affection for Guru Ravidas. The continued emphasis on Guru Ravidas' devotion, even after the collapse of Ad Dharm's political structure, was a deliberate decision on the part of the Ad Dharm leaders. After the collapse of Ad-Dharm, they began to develop their own religious identity under the name Ravidasias. After changing its name to Ravidas Mandal in 1946, the movement's activities shifted to social and religious issues. However, to do that, they chose a caste-based religious identity: *"Chamar = Ad Dharmi = Ravi Dasi."* Even though the Ad Dharm movement had aspired to bring all the formerly untouchable communities together into a new faith during its

early days, the movement had appealed to the Chamars of Doaba. As the Ad Dharmis were listed as one of the SCs, it became evident that they were part of the Chamars.

Hence, Mangoo Ram Jaspal worked hard to protect the Chamars' distinct identity and socioeconomic well-being in Punjab and abroad. He and his colleagues built a temple for Ravi Das in Banaras. They established a press and printed the Ravi Das Patrika, and founded a memorial college for Ravi Das in his honor. He began to recognize their pride in their culture and launched economic activities such as 'Qaum' by establishing "The Punjab Co-Operative Society". The Dalits of Punjab have extremely diverse and pluralistic religious lives on a day-to-day basis. Along with the well-known syncretic religious practices that have long existed in the area, Dalits in Punjab and other parts of India have also grown more enthusiastic about forming their own independent religious identities and separating themselves from Hinduism. They blame Hinduism for their poor social position within the caste system. During the later phases of British colonial rule, an educated middle class began to develop, greatly strengthening and intensifying this tendency.

The Ad Dharm movement of the 1920s was a clear example of this. This movement represented an intense struggle for dignity and a distinct and assertive cultural and political identity. In order to achieve the movement's goals, they followed socio-religious and political practices. The Dalits of Punjab supported this movement extensively and provided every resource for its success. Its aim was to establish a quam, "Ad Dharm quam," that was different from other religions. Mangoo Ram made restless efforts to preserve their own culture, festivals, religious scriptures, places, and teachings of Gurus to provide a distinct identity to Dalits in Punjab.

III

2.10 The emergence of Ravidasias/ Ravidassia community in Punjab

The followers of Guru Ravidas are known as the Ravidasias/Ravidassia, and are often confused with Dalit Sikhs[26]. The Ravidassia or Rabdasi or Raidasis Chamars are named after Guru

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[26] Ramdassias and Ravidassias are probably of the same origin – Chamar. Ramdassias, the second of the two segments of the Dalit Sikhs, are usually Julahas (Weavers) who converted to Sikhism during the time of the fourth Guru of the Sikh faith, Guru Ram Dass. Though there is a vast distinction between the Ramdassias, typical weavers, and the Ravidassias, typical leather workers. "yet they are connected by certain sections of

Ravidas, himself a Chamar who was a contemporary of Sant Kabir and Guru Nanak. Guru Ravidass[27] is known as a significant leader in the medieval northern Indian Bhakti movement, particularly the nirguna sampradaya or sant parampara. He was a cobbler, a saint, a poet, a philosopher, and a social reformer. "Ravidas, along with Namdev and Kabir, is one of the few Bhaktas to cross-linguistic borders and become influential in different parts of India" (Zelliot, 2003:27). His popularity can be judged by the various names given to him by his followers in different regions and languages. He is known as Raidasa, Rohidasa, Ruidasa, Ramadasa, Raedasa, Rohitasa, Rahdesa, Rav Das and Rab Das (Singh 1996:25). Everyone is affected by his poetry. It is complete with radical zeal and boundless love for the formless God.

Although Ravidass' poetry refers to God's devotion and love, it also makes references to "hope for a better society and a struggle against exploiters, powerholders, and oppression persists under the name of religion" (Omvedt, 2003:33). Over the last few decades, Ravidassias, the most upwardly Dalit community, have established their separate identity and found their own Ravidass Sabhas and Gurdwaras. These are different from mainstream Sikh organizations and Gurdwaras across the world. However, they are still classified as Chamars in official records (for further information, see Chandra, 2000:31; Deep, 2001:7; Ram, 2004c:5). However, in sociological terms, they are a distinct community, distinct from both caste Hindus and Sikhs.

2.11 Origin and Role of Dera Culture

In Punjab, deras have emerged as symbols of religion and played an influential role in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Deras, or denominations, are not new in Punjab. Dera is derived from the Persian word 'dair,' which means monastery or convent (Steingass, 1973:552). Deras are religious monasteries, hermitages, or seminaries founded by religious people. Their location is usually far from the nearest village or town. The dera, as W. H. McLeod pointed out in his paper, is a rural institution (Mcleod, 1995:70). A Dera is controlled by a person who typically calls himself a 'guru.' Most of the followers of such Deras come from marginalized groups or poor lower classes. The reason why these people follow them is that they are stable,

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leatherworking classes who have taken to weaving and thus risen in their social scale," argued Ibbetson (Ibbetson, 1883, rpt. 1970:296).

[27] Guru Ravidass was born (1450 A.D and died in 1520) into the Chamar caste, also known as untouchables, one of Uttar Pradesh's Scheduled Castes. Chamars are well-known for their skills in leather and tanning, and the upper classes believed their touch and sight to be unclean. Ravidass stood up to oppose this inhuman system of untouchability.

concerned, equal, honourable, and most importantly, they feel safe and secure under their protection. Participants in satsangs, kirtans, and religious workshops regarding life after death are some examples. Vasudev notes that "it is as if the Bhakti movement is resurgent. Non-believers are often astonished by the range of activities of the Deras. They are lured by tactics that frequently emphasize certain forms of asceticism, reconciling many non-believers to religion and attracting them to sectarian groups (Vasudev 2003:42).

As the group's organization grew and their changing identities were recognized and accepted the followers transformed into a sect. According to Paramjit Singh Judge and Gurpreet Bal, "Deras is a part of Hindu and Sikh religious traditions. The Sufi fakirs' place of worship may be considered a part of the same cultural roots if Sufi tradition is taken into consideration. In the Middle Ages, there were Yogi Nath Deras. Sufism was practiced by Sants, and they had their own deras. These deras have a conflict with mainstream religious institutions." Another group of holy men and their followers represents Hinduism and Sikhism's merged beliefs and practices. Such as Udasis, Minas, Ramrais, Handalis, Dhrimalias, Gulabdasis, and Nirmala's (Singh 2009:192).

Some of the Ravidasia deras already played an active role during the Ad Dharm movement. Mangoo Ram often visited the Ravidasi deras during his campaign. The development of Deras in Punjab has been connected to the presence of caste prejudices and practices. In rural Punjab, the landowning groups' dominant culture, particularly the Jat Sikhs, is responsible for the Dalits' social discrimination, humiliation, and economic exploitation. Except for historically significant gurdwaras, which are open to all devotees, rural gurdwaras are controlled by certain castes. In these religious institutions, Dalits and low-caste individuals are not treated equally. As a result, several people left Sikhism (which is supposed to be free from the castes) and joined the so-called Deras (Lal, 2009: 227).

According to 'The Indian Express,'[28] a Sikh scholar, Darshan Singh, believes that the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and the individuals who managed it ruined the institution for vested interests in the flourishing of the deras in Punjab, especially after the 1950s. Balkar Singh, another Sikh scholar, points out that the SGPC and the Akal Takhat were responsible for deravad, or the tendency to promote Deras. When these institutions became politicized, the people of Punjab turned to Deras. There are about 9,000 Deras in

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[28] The Indian Express, 24 May, 2007, p. 5.

Punjab. They command a substantial following among all sections of society. Based on the field study of 'Desh Sewak,[29]' there are more than nine thousand Sikh and non-Sikh deras in twelve thousand villages. According to Surinder Singh Jodhka, there are considerable differences in form and substance among the different Deras. Many Deras are Sikh gurdwaras being controlled by an individual Baba/Sant. In the second category, some deras continue to practice Sikhism but do not follow the model evolved by the SGPC in its entirety. The third category of Deras is where a living Guru's institution is still practiced. Some of the Dalits have separate Deras of their own where centrality is given to Guru Granth Sahib[30].

In Punjab, these Deras have a different story because Deras opened up for Dalits' who struggle for identity and equality in society. In rural areas, modernizing trends are significantly less influential, whereas traditional patterns remain most prominent and distinguished. The economically empowered lower castes in Punjab have built their own gurdwaras or deras due to discrimination in religious places and quest for cultural autonomy. Even separate caste-based cremation grounds have become commonplace in the villages. Deras are specifically attracted to the socially marginal castes, notably Dalits, because of their secular demand to end caste-based discrimination and focus on adherence to egalitarian ideology by referencing sacred scriptures/bani (kumar, 2014: 341).

In Punjab, the two deras – Sarwan Das and Chak Hakim remained significant pilgrimage places. However, these were never exclusively Ad Dharm domains. They continued to exist as separate institutions. In Punjab, the majority of these deras have a Chamar social background. They became well-known through an annual pilgrimage. An internally focused religiosity was taken to the public arena and turned into a dominant paradigm. As the times changed, they embraced their Guru's ideals of equality and humanity. This consciousness led to the formation of separate Ravidasia religious places and deras in urban and rural areas. The memory of Guru Ravidas has been preserved throughout Punjab through these deras. The development of Dera Sachkhand Ballan is related to the newly emerging consciousness among Ravidasias (Rani, 2018: 41).

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[29] Avtar Singh Tehna,"Kyun Bande Han Dere," Desh Sewak, 3 June, 2007

[30] Surinder Singh Jodhka, "Of Babas and Deras" Seminar 581, January, 2008, p. 3

2.12 Dera Sachkhand Ballan: The Question of Dalit Identity

This section focuses on the Dera Sant Sarwan Dass Ballan (Dera Sachkhand Ballan-DSSDB) in Punjab, and its leadership of the Ravidassia community. The DSSDB is the most prominent example of a new form of religious transnationalism. It examines the general assumption that transnationalism creates new divisions and social hierarchies in Punjabi society. Transnationalism may be a powerful agent of religious and social transformation in caste-based religious organization like the Dera Sachkhand Ballan (DSB), which engages in subaltern religiosity among Ravidassias. The DSB has emerged as the key promoter of the Ravidassia identity in Punjab by developing international networks, particularly in the United Kingdom. Thus, central to the process of differentiating between the followers of the DSB and Sikhism (Singh, 2013:183). In 2010, the Ravidass Dharm, a new religion, was also established with the help of DSSDB.

In the last three decades, there has been an increase in the interest in religious changes to understand religion-based identity movements that connect migrants to their traditional homelands (from south to north) and uplift them through social, economic, and political aspects. Likewise, Punjab is a witness to a new form of development, particularly among the migrants from the north. This is because the caste system provides the opportunity for social and other kinds of development. Ravidass' egalitarian social philosophy, expressed in poetry, became the Dalit awareness manifesto in Punjab and the Punjabi Dalit Diasporas. The Dalits have established many Ravidass Deras in Punjab and abroad in recent years. This is an example. Almost all Ravidass Deras in Punjab and elsewhere in India and overseas have idols of Guru Ravidass in their sanctuaries. Most of the Ravidassia Dalit Diasporas in Doaba follow DSSDB. Some Ravidassia Dalits have established themselves in their native countries and actively participated in community activities. More activities have taken place in Punjab's Doaba region, including the districts of Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Hoshiarpur, and Nawanshahr, marking the end of Jat dominance (Lum, 2010:35).

On May 24, 2009, an incident occurred where some people attacked the Guru Ravidass Temple congregation in Vienna. Sant Niranjan Dass, the head of DSB (Dera Sachkhand Ballan, also known as the Dera), a religious organization popular among Ravidassias of the Chamar caste (Dalits, traditionally known as 'untouchables') in Punjab, and Sant Rama Nand were also attacked, and the latter died because of injuries. The latter was angered by the DSB's nonconformist religious practices, which included, among other things, disrespect for the Guru

Granth Sahib (the Sikh holy book) and devotion to living gurus' (Lum, 2010:35). Consequently, the Vienna incident sparked widespread agitation among DSB supporters and other Dalit groups in Punjab. Although the Punjab government-maintained law and order, the incident had long-lasting effects. On 30 January 2010, a large group of religious leaders and pilgrims gathered at the Ravidass Mandir in Goverdhanpur, Ravidass' birthplace, to declare the birth of a new religion. Ravidass Dharm is a newly formed religion with its own religious book (Amrit Bani Shri Guru Ravidass Ji Maharaj), logo/communal flag (Har), and greeting (Jai Guru Dev) (see Times of India, 1 February 2010, online edition). In summary, the Ravidass Dharm, which had been in the making for nearly a century, had come of age.

Dera Sachkhand Ballan, is a religious organization and is in the village of Ballan, district of Jalandhar, Punjab, India and is one of the popular dera of Ravidasias. Bhakat Ravidass is referred to as Guru Ravidass in the Ravidass sampradaya[31], in which he is recognized as the founder of a new religious tradition. This dera has small shrines, a langar hall, and other rooms (mainly a dispensary). The shrine has seen much expansion in recent years, primarily financed by the Dera's British, European and Northern American followers. The Temple of Ravidassia Chak Hakim in Phagwara and the Dera of Sant Jagatjit Giri in Patankot are also famous Ravidassia Deras. During the 20th century, Sant Pipal Dass founded the Dera, and his son Sant Sarwan Dass became very popular among followers due to their dedicated work in different aspects (Tatla, 2012:33).

Sant Pipal Das ji (former name was Harnam Das) established the dera in the village of Ballan on the periphery of Jalandhar in the early twentieth century while travelling in pursuit of the truth. He was born in a Gill Patti village in Bathinda district of Punjab in the Malwa region. When he arrived, he saw a Pipal tree that looked to be dead, but once he irrigated it, it came back to life. It is thought that Pipal Das saw this as a clear sign that the truth could be found in the same place. He gave up worldly pleasures after his wife died and decided to leave his village. Under the pipal tree, he recited the Nam of God and meditated. The villagers treated him with high respect. He decided to inspire and guide people about religious matters. He moved out on a quest to spread Guru Ravidas' teachings. He travelled from village to village preaching and motivating others to practice God's bhakti (Rani, 2018: 49). Pipal Dass Ji

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[31] The term sampradaya describes "an endless transmission from one spiritual master to another in terms of doctrine, as well as social and religious organization based on this particular doctrine, to perpetuate it" (Clémentin -Ojha, 1990, p. 19)

continued to worship the almighty and read out the teachings and amritbani of satguru Ravidass Ji to the Sangat every morning and evening. he basic principle of his teachings was Nam Simran[32] through the bani of Guru Ravidas. Baba Pipal Das served the people of the area till their last breath. After him , Sant Sarwan Das succeeded Gaddi[33].

Sant Sarwan Dass Ji (1895-1972) was spiritually initiated into the service of the community by his father. "SWEA-SIMRAN-SATSANG" were the three norms guiding his life . He became famous and an example for others for noble values. He treated his patients with free Ayurvedic medicines and blessings and taught children. He powerfully preached education among children, including girls. He donated funds to schools and colleges. Hazara Singh, the Zamindar of Ballan, was inspired by his positive views and ideas, so he offered him one Canal of land to construct his "kutia." Later, this place emerged and developed as Dera Sachkhand Ballan. In the end, sant Sarwan Das was successful in bringing his people together. He was a follower of equality. He preached against prejudice and discrimination based on race, caste, class, and status, and so on. Devotees had different aspirations and expectations from the Sant.

Sant Sarwan Das established a small Dawa khana (ayurvedic clinic) in Dera for the benefit of the poor who could not afford the market's overpriced treatments and medicines (Rani, 2018: 56). Sant Sarwan Das considered constructing a temple in Seer Govardhanpur, Benaras, where Guru Ravidas was born. After almost 600 years, there was no central monument dedicated to Guru Ravidas. Guru Ravidas became a source of inspiration for the community. This is because he preached the doctrine of human oneness. He was the first to devote his efforts to liberate the community from the depths to which they had been subjected for centuries. Sant Hari Das (1885-1982), who was appointed by Sant Sarwan Das, laid the foundation stone of the Kashi temple on June 14, 1965. The temple's construction was supported in many ways by lower caste people from both within India and abroad. After setting the foundation stone, he stayed in Kashi for a few days. In his discourses, Sant Hari Das emphasized out evil customs and rituals and always stood for literacy in society.

Sant Garib Das (1717-1778)- Sant Garib Das followed the instructions of Sant Sarwan Das. He spoke little but served the devotees peacefully. He used to say that talking too much is not

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[32] The recitation of Nam (word) is the central motif to reach God. It is the essential mean of purification and salvation for human Being

[33] This comment is based on conversation with the devotees of Dera Sachkhand of village Ballan.

necessary for Seva and Simran. As a disciple, Sant Garib Das's guiding principal was Seva. Sant Garib Das continued the tradition of serving the poor and accelerated his efforts in this direction. He laid the foundation stones and inaugurated the Ravidas temples: (i). "Shri Guru Ravidas Mandir Dudly Road 181, Wolverhampton in 1986. (ii) The foundation stone of "Shri Guru Ravidas Bhawan" Birmingham in 1990 was laid on March 12, 1992. He established a small dispensary at Dhaipur Kapur, Adda Kathar, in his master's memory. Sant Garib Das was persuaded to visit his British followers in 1985 to raise funds for the dispensary's development. Sant Garib Dass returned to the UK five times more during the next four years, and he expanded his work to North America (Jassi,2004:142). At the same time, he continued to build Guru Ravidas Janam Sathan Mandir in Kashi. Sant Garib Das was appointed to oversee the development and completion of the temple's construction. He used to take a group of volunteers to Kashi to help with the temple's kaar seva. He aimed to make it a meaningful symbol of worship and identity for its followers.

Sant Niranjan Dass(1942- present) became the fifth head of DSSDB in July 1994, following the death of Sant Garib Dass. Ballan shrine has undergone several changes under his administration, including constructing a four-story structure for overseas devotees and expanding langar facilities. The international connections of Dera have been strengthened through a visit abroad. He established a charitable trust in the United Kingdom, followed by one in Canada. He has completed numerous initiatives begun by his predecessors and created new ones through close collaboration with his overseas followers. Sant Niranjan Dass inaugurated a new hall on 14th January 2004, which is the most prominent in Punjab. It has all the facilities and a seating capacity of about 15,000 devotees. Within the Hall, the Dera had facilities for broadcasting a weekly program on the Doordarshan channel that showed the several buildings around the main shrine. Sant Niranjan Das turned the pathshala of dera into reality by establishing the "Sant Sarwan Das Model School" at Hadiabad, Phagwara, in remembrance of Sant Sarwan Das. Sant Niranjan Das performed the school's inaugural ceremony on February 19, 2004. Children from all castes, creeds, and religions received a high-quality education at the school.

Some of the most prominent Ravidassia shrines abroad are in the following cities: Vancouver, Calgary, Brampton, Toronto, Montreal (all in Canada), New York, Sacramento, Pittsburg, Seattle, Fresno, Houston, Selma, Fremont, and Austin (all in the USA), Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Bradford, Coventry, Derby, Lancaster, Southall, Southampton, Kent and Bedford

(all in the UK) (Schaller,1996:94). Many Ravidassia Temples and Gurdwaras have also come up in Austria, Italy, France, Germany, Spain, Holland, New Zealand, Greece, and Lebanon in the last few years. Sant Niranjan Dass of Dera Ballan has laid the foundation stones of all these Ravidassia Deras. The Sant of Ballan pay regular visits to these various overseas Ravidassia Gurughars and blesses the vast Ravidassia Naam Jeevan Sangat (devotees of Guru Ravidassia) there. Sant Niranjan Das laid the foundation stone of many religious places devoted to Guru Ravidas in Punjab: (i) Baba Pipal Das Sadhna Sathal, Bathinda. (ii) Shri Guru Ravidas Dharm Asthan, Hadiabad, Phagwara. (iii)Amar Shahid Sant Ramanand Ji Dharm Ashtan, Nakodar, Jalandhar. II Outside the Punjab: i Guru Ravidas Dharm Asthan, Sirsgarh Haryana. ii Guru Ravidas Dharm Asthan, Pune, Mahashatra. (iii) He laid the foundation stone of a hall at Shri Guru Ravidas Mandir (Dera Baba Lal Das Kapal Mochan) on March 5, 1999 (Bahadur, 2004:3)

Hence, it laid down the foundation stone of the Community Centre at Dr. Ambedkar Bhawan Trust. He also offered one lakh rupees for this project. Another major project under his guidance was the construction of Shri Guru Ravidas Gate, Lanka Chauraha, Banaras. On May 25, 1997, Kashi Ram and Sant Niranjan Das laid the foundation stone for this gate. The finance for this gate was provided by Sant Sarwan Das Charitable Trust, UK. The Nishan Sant Niranjan Das hosted the sahib at Gian Ashram Balmiki Tirith, Amritsar, on July 25, 1999. By the 1980s, the DSSDB and Ravidassias abroad had formed close relations, which meant more resources for developmental projects. Sant Garib Dass approved the establishment of the Sant Sarwan Dass Charitable Hospital Trust in 1983 with the help of these donations (SSDCHT). This trust was registered with the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA 1976), allowing it to accept foreign donations. Besides these, many Chamars also began establishing their own gurdwaras. The gurdwaras were called 'Ravidas Bhawan.' By establishing Ravidas Sabhas in Birmingham and Wolverhampton, the Chamars took the first step in proving to the British Sikhs that they had equal status and tradition within the community. These Sabhas functioned as caste societies and were significant parts of religious movements. The temple became a symbol of pride for the Ravidasia community, which has moved there (Jassi,2004:64).

Hence, it further expanded it by inviting them to significant dera occasions such as the birth and death anniversaries of former dera masters. This tradition had taken the shape of Sant Sammelans, which were gatherings of holy men for preaching. The Sants of Dera's participation in Sant Sammelans (meetings) organized by Guru Ravidas' followers in various

Punjab locations and beyond showed their deep concern for the propagation of Guru Ravidas' bani. Dera Sachkhand Ballan has become a significant religious centre for the oppressed castes in Punjab. This is due to the availability of satsang halls and modern hospital medical facilities in rural regions. Apart from charity , Dera Ballan also receives large contributions from many local supporters and overseas followers. The Dera Sachkhand Ballan's focus on literary activities brought it to the forefront of the movement for Dalit upliftment.

In northwest India, Dera Sachkhand Ballan became a symbol of the Ravidass movement. It made a lot of effort to distinguish the Dalit community from the two main religions—Hinduism and Sikhism—by developing their own unique identity. The structure of Dera Ballan has a distinctive feature. It has the appearance of both a temple and a Gurdwara. Unlike a Gurdwara, the Dera has the Guru Granth Sahib, but it also has idols of Guru Ravidass and the late Dera Ballan leaders. They are worshipped alongside the Guru Granth Sahib. The membership of the Ravidass Deras' management committees is strictly limited to Ravidassia Dalits. Upper caste Sikhs cannot participate on the Ravidass Deras and Sabhas' management committees. However, the deviation and the strategic silence focus sharply on the separate Ravidassia Dalit identity rather than on distancing from close ties with mainstream Sikhism. The prominent followers of the Dera have widely perceived the deviation as a permanent solution to the blown-up communal issue of the violation of the Sikh code of conduct at Ravidassia Deras.

Dera has grown in popularity among Guru Ravidas' followers in a short period. It began in the early twentieth century and has gained support from the lower castes, particularly Chamars. The Chamars have been successful in creating a religious and cultural space. They have constructed their own Ravidas Deras, Gurudwaras, and mandirs where they enjoy a sense of pride and equality. In the cultural field, the Chamars have emerged as a distinct religious community who only follow Guru Ravidas. They have their own values and rituals. They have their own religious scripture – 'Amritbani,' slogan – 'Jo Bole So Nirbhai, Sri Guru Ravidas Maharaj Ki Jai,' (he who will speak Jai of Guru Ravidas Maharaj will never be afraid of anyone). As a result, they are inspired by a strong belief that Guru Ravidas will protect them wherever they go. They should not fear from the upper castes; instead, they should speak out against social injustice, discrimination, and atrocities. That is why they chose the colour red to symbolize social revolution. Their greetings are different, including 'Jai Guru Dev, Dhan Guru Dev,' a different color – "red", and a sign - "Har Sohang," which means "I am the ruler." The Chamars reverse him to (Satguru) or (Maharaj.) Thus, they have emerged as a separate

community with a distinct religion known as 'Ravidassia Dharm.' Therefore, the Chamar caste has become the most assertive Dalit community in Punjab.

2.13 Summing Up

The process of identity formation or identity consciousness among the Ravidassia community began in the colonial context. The early 20th century was a very progressive period for the Dalit community in India, especially in Punjab. In the 1920s, several movements began. The Dalit and Sikhs also experienced a sense of self-awakening, which made them increasingly conscious of their separate religious-cultural identity. The differentiation that had already taken place, due to 'Arya Samaj' and 'Singh Sabha' assertions, between the Hindus and Sikhs, got further strengthened. The Sikh community asserted a separate identity, which was opposed by the Hindus. During this time, the Sikhs' concept of self-identity was constrained to issues of religion and culture.

There have been several movements among Sikhs and Dalits in Punjab, such as the Arya Samaj movement, the Singh Sabha movement, the Ad-Dharm movement, etc., aiming to eradicate the caste hierarchy and socio-religious identity (politics of religion). Social reform movements have their own significance. In the history of Dalits in Punjab, two types of movements emerged; socio-religious and political movements. The first type of movement started in the pre-independence period. The leaders of these movements also entered politics and contested elections in 1937 and 1946. The Ad-Dharm movement succeeded due to the leadership of Mangoo Ram. Because of his leadership, the movement was very successful, and Dalits started to consider themselves as a separate identity or quam (Ad-Dharmis/Ravidassia) and started worshipping Guru Ravidas as their own Guru. The movement also attracted people from other castes. This movement succeeded in transforming the status of Dalits in terms of socio-economic and political identity. Consequently, the Ad-Dharm movement has succeeded in spreading the message of self-respect and assertion.

At present, the Ad-Dharmis are the most progressive and assertive community among the Dalits of Punjab in terms of both socio-economic and political spheres. It has succeeded in building new consciousness and instilling a sense of dignity in the Dalit community. It was the only movement in Punjab that aimed to secure respect, political assertion, social status, and religious transformation among the Dalits. It tried to assert a separate identity from Sikhism. It attempted to build a new religion and caste within the Dalit community-the Ravidassia

religion operated independently without being pressured by upper castes. On October 10, 1929, the Ad Dharm leaders petitioned the government to include the religion 'Ad-Dharm' as a separate religion in the census. As a result of the Punjab Ad-Dharm Mandal's petition before the 1930 census, 4,18,789 SCs identified themselves as Ad-Dharmis in the 1931 census. So, on 26th, Feburary, 1930 the Ad Dharam was recognised as a separate religion. The Ad Dharam Mandal presented a Memorendum to the Government in which it demanded more representation in the political field also. In addition, they demanded educational facilities for the Dalits.

The Ravidassia community of Punjab is a Scheduled Caste community and known for their devotion to Guru Ravidas and his teachings. According to the Census of India, Chamars, Jatia Chamar, Rehgar, Raigar, Ramdasi, Ravidasi, Ram Dasia, Ramdasia Sikh, and Ravidassia Sikh have all been classified altogether. However, the Ravidasias group has numerous followers among Ad-Dharmis, who have been included separately. With the cultural influence of Islam and Sikhism, caste has survived in Punjab and has worked as a disabling institution for those found at the margins of Punjabi society, the Dalits. Though Sikhism, as a theological system, opposes caste-based divisions and its social and religious institutions are controlled by prominent caste groups. Ravidassia has tried to carve out an independent identity for themselves in response to this dominance. Dalits in Punjab have mostly joined the Sikh faith and gained power within the religious establishment, but the Ravidasis/Ravidassia prefer to remain outside of the religion.

 The Ravidassia movement was successful due to the support of the lower castes. A religious agenda was to create a distinct religion and community, (called the Ravidasis Quam), which is different from other religions. To fulfil the movement's ideas, the movement's leaders accepted Guru Ravidas as Guru. He played a vital role in establishing equality and fraternity in society. He gave a middle path between assimilation and radical separation. It was an obvious choice, as Guru Ravidas and his teachings already existed in the consciousness of Punjabi Dalits. The basic idea of the movement revolved around Guru Ravidas. He was not only a Guru but also a symbol of the cultural and religious identity of the lower castes. He occupied an important place in the Sikh Holy Book "Guru Granth Sahib". Ravidassia/Ad-dharm presents a different view of a religion that always works for people"s welfare. It was an organization that presented a real vision. Sant Ravidas was projected as a spiritual preceptor and Guru Bhagwan,

SatguruNamdev, Sant Kabir and Rishi Valmiki were also included in the theology of Ad Dharm".

As an identity movement, the movement used both socio-religious and ideological methods to achieve its goals. This movement represented an intense struggle for dignity and the formulation of a distinct and assertive cultural and political identity. A major claim is that the oppression of the lower castes comes from theological practices, untouchability, as well as socio-economic factors. In the next chapter, continue to analyze the rise of Dalit political awareness that is- political identity in Punjab. Identity politics occupies the centre stage in a multicultural state like Punjab. We find vast diversities based on caste, religion, language, region, and tribe with various political oppressions. These diverse communities continue to claim recognition for their identity. The post-independent Punjab state devised its own way of dealing with and accommodating these diverse identities through identity-based political parties, constitutional provisions, legal interventions, and policy frameworks of the welfare state.

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Chapter 3

State and Identity Politics in Punjab

3.1 Introduction

The present chapter will focus on the role of the state and the rise of identity politics. Identity politics is a problem itself in the state. Identity politics in Punjab has been influenced by religion, language, class, and caste identities. As a result, Punjab's political dynamics have changed from contesting identities to causing conflict between Dalits and Sikhs. With the highest number of Scheduled Caste people in Punjab, Dalit participation in state assembly elections presents a political dilemma. It shows how caste and religious divisions manifest communities' ideologies and conflict with mainstream political parties, and this has shifted the political landscape in the state of Punjab. Dalits in Punjab have a thriving political movement, which provides a context for analyzing their lack of political assertion. Even though Punjab has sub-caste differences, Dalits continue to play an active role in vote-counting. The role of the vote bank can be understood by examining how political parties mobilize their supporters through Deras, rallies, electoral pledges, and religious-cultural aspects.

3.2 Caste Identities and Electoral Choices (1947-2012)

Identity politics in the state is characterized by the growth and development of Sikh identity consciousness. It can be argued that communal identity is a tendency of groups to maximize their economic, social, and political power. A renewed consciousness and reinterpretation of traditional identity emerged from the social mobilization process that brought old animosities and exclusion. Sikhs and other communities began to develop more cohesive identities. Sikhs have established a significant political status and distinct group identity through their evolution. According to Narang, "identity consciousness, political consciousness, and political action are ongoing processes that require particular circumstances to develop." (Narang, 1983: 31). Brass argued that "the movement from communal awareness to political action required two factors; the first was a perception of inequality in the distribution and the second was the creation of an organization able to articulate the group's demands, which could create a myth of the community's identity and destiny.

However, political demands are based on calculations, and the inefficiency of government policies to satisfy group demands" (Brass, 1974:45). Similarly, the Sikh community was very

susceptible to these pre-requisites, for developing their group identities, before annexation. In 1947, the Sikhs had developed a significant form of group consciousness. The Akali Dal was able to unite urban and rural people on a unified platform despite being dominated by urban middle and professional classes. It is based on the two political identities -- "Sikh nationalism" and "Indian nationalism," although there are sometimes ambiguities (Heeger 1971:334). When India became an independent country, the Akalis began to view themselves as the only representatives of their community and joined politics. Sikh leaders have already raised the demand for a separate political status for the region, by taking advantage of their numerical dominance. Hindus and Sikhs were minorities in Punjab before independence. They were in the process of mobilization. They struggled for political power and sought to protect their language, religion, and culture from the dominant Muslim majority.

Before independence, Punjab had an overwhelming majority of Muslims. Muslims were approximately 53% of the population, Hindus constituted over 30% of the population, while Sikhs were only 14% of the population. After India's partition, Hindus in Punjab became the majority, constituting 62% of the population. Sikhs have transformed from a small minority group into a substantial minority of nearly thirty-five percent (Sarhadi, 1970:54). The migration had the most significant impact on the formation of Sikh populations in various regions of East Punjab. More than three-quarters of their population remained in Malwa, the birthplace of Sikhism, and they became a majority. According to the 2011 census, Punjab has a majority of Sikhs which constitute 57.69% of the Punjab population. While, 1.93 percent of the population identified as Muslim, and 1.26 percent as Christian. The Hindu community plays a significant role in Punjab state elections with 38.49 percent of the population.

Punjab politics have been controlled by urban Khatri Sikhs since colonial times. The Akalis claimed that because of the state's secular framework, the Sikhs had been inherently marginalized in the post-independence era. In response, Master Tara Singh said in 1948 that "we want to establish a province where we can maintain our culture and our tradition. We follow a different culture than Hindus. Our literature is written in the "Gurmukhi" script, and our culture is "Gurmukhi culture" (Nayar, 1966:38). There was a demand for the reorganization of provinces on a language basis. At that time, Congress was in favour of linguistic reorganization states. After independence, the 'Linguistic Provinces Committee' was appointed to advise the Constituent Assembly on the reorganization of the provinces.

Developing linguistic states may change the socio-economic structure of a country (Kumar and Siberer; 1991:177).

Sikhs were the only remaining minority group when the Hindu community was in majority. Therefore, their demands for official recognition of the Punjabi language and reservations were seen as a strategy attempting to establish a distinct " Sikh state" (Rai, 1986: 251). In 1948, the East Punjab Legislative Assembly's Sikh members released a list of thirteen requests for the Indian Constituent Assembly's consideration. There were several demands made, such as providing fifty percent representation for the Sikhs in the legislature and cabinet. A governor and chief minister of the state were also given alternative positions. In addition, providing forty percent representation for the Sikhs in the services of Punjab, and ensuring five percent representation for the Sikhs.

Due to the intermingling of traditional and rational authority, caste became politicized in democratic India. The partition had a different impact on Hindus and Sikhs. Sikh migrants and local Sikhs were largely peasant proprietors. According to Singh, it was the first step towards fulfilling their cultural and political ambitions. Hindus, both local and displaced, mainly belonged to commercial and industrial groups in urban centers. As a result, they were expected to gain economically by identifying themselves with India's vast Hindu community. According to Khushwant Singh, "one of the chief causes of the unrest of Sikhs and other minorities, was the resurgence/renaissance of Hinduism. It threatened to engulf the minorities. The Punjabi Hindus were more aggressive than the Hindus of other provinces because Arya Samaj acted on behalf of the Hindus. It posed a severe challenge to the Sikh leadership. The question was raised, how could Sikhs retain their distinct and separate identity?" (Singh, 1985:137). The next section will provide the answers to this question.

I

3.2.1 Evolution of the SAD: Organization of Society in Pre-Partition Punjab

The SAD is one of the oldest political parties in India. It took part in the Indian struggle for liberation from British colonial control and, subsequently, became the representative of a distinct Punjabi language and culture in post-independence India. Since 1966, SAD has been fighting for enhanced autonomy under the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (ASR) and for secession from India to form Khalistan, a separate Sikh nation. In the process, non-Sikh and non-Jat Sikh

segments of the Punjabi society have gradually been convinced to challenge the SAD. On 14 December 1920, the Shiromani Akali Dal was founded as the leading religious-political party of the Sikhs. In the early 1920s, it was an extension of the Akal movement to reform Sikh places of worship. It also formed the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC- the supreme body for management of gurdwaras- Sikh places of worship). In its early years, SAD was active in organizing '*morchas*' or protest movements to control and reform '*gurdwara*' management. It aims to achieve this by enacting the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925, and by legalizing SAD (Shiromani Akali Dal) and SGPC Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee ("Chief Management Committee of Sikh Shrines"). After that, SAD became an independent political party, and functioning under the SGPC, sought to control it through the electoral process (Singh, 2014:331).

3.2.2 SAD'S Dilemma: Region or Religion?

The Shiromani Akali Dal is in favour of the formation of provinces on a linguistic and cultural basis throughout India. A new Punjab should be established immediately, as it is an issue of life and death for the Sikhs. The Shiromani Akali Dal has reasons to believe that a Punjabi-speaking province may protect the Sikh community. (Kaur, 1992:56). The SAD, which represents both region and religion, has become a Jat-Sikh political party (Sikh agricultural caste). Therefore, it is very important to understand how the SAD looks for coalition partners, as well as the shifting social demographics within Punjabi culture and the history of SAD's emergence as a Jat-Sikh political party.   A 'scheduled caste' is part of the Hindu community which includes 'Majabhis', 'Ramadasias', 'Kabirpanthis', and 'Sikligar' Sikhs. It was conveyed that these communities would be eligible for safeguards, only if they are willing to become a part of Hindu society (Navlakha, 1996:85). Their main goal is to create sovereign spaces by articulating their identities and exercising political power. However, their main goal was to establish hierarchical social and political structures. The state provides a formal, rational explanation for identity fragmentation. Even though the Akali's were formally a part of the coalition, the potential merger allowed them to keep their own organizational and ethnic identities (Wallace, 1988:5).

3.2.3 The Punjabi Suba Movement (1956-1966)

After the partition, Punjab saw the emergence of a distinct form of identity politics. Before independence, the Congress government had made solemn commitments to secure Sikh self-determination. In addition, except for Punjab, the Sikhs opposed the newly formed Indian Union's state boundaries division, which were based on mother language. The Sikh conflict over Punjabi Suba ("Province") started in the 1950s and the early 1960s. The Arya Samaj represented Hindus.   It began a campaign to urge Punjabi-speaking Hindus to renounce Punjabi in favour of Hindi, particularly in the 1951 and 1961 censuses. The concept of 'Hindi, Hindu, and Hindustan' was crucial to Hinduism's resurgence. It was a new challenge for the Sikh leadership. Hence, the question was raised how the Sikhs could maintain their distinct and separate identities. Though the Indian state was formally committed to secularism, it grew increasingly in Hindu practices (Singh, 2006:293). Some considered it a first step towards Punjabi Suba. It met with severe criticism from the Hindus   and their organizations e.g. Arya Samaj, Jan Sangh and Hindu Maha Sabha in particular. The Hindu vernacular press criticized the Akalis. The Akali leadership and its press retaliated. In the Punjabi-speaking region, greater support was shown in favour of using Punjabi as their mother tongue. Hindus rejected Punjabi as their official language, while others recognized it as a separate language.

 The Sikhs interpreted this move as an attempt to eradicate the Punjabi and the annihilation of their cultural identity.   In response, the Akalis argued that the majority of Hindus were trying to destroy the Sikhs' unique identity. In the meantime, a Hindu-dominated Municipal Committee in Jalandhar had passed a resolution, favouring Hindi as a medium of instruction in schools within its jurisdiction. The Akali leaders said that after the Jalandhar incident, the Sikhs were persuaded of the communal intentions of the Hindus in Punjab and since then, the Sikhs have been eager to establish Punjabi Suba (Narang, 1983:96). Punjab was transformed into a multilingual state. It was mainly done under communal pressure, which came from Punjabi Hindus. They opposed Punjabi Suba and disowned their mother tongue in the census of 1951. They gave Hindi in place of Punjabi, as their mother tongue. "It very much helped in equating Punjabi culture to Sikh culture" (Gill and Singhal, 1984:603-8).

 Master Tara Singh accepted the Regional Formula. A convention of the Akali Dal held at Amritsar on October 2, 1956, under the chairmanship of Master Tara Singh stated that the Akali Dal had to trust Congress and its leadership. It was decided that the Dal would focus on improving the Sikhs' religious, educational, cultural, social, and economic position.   It also

provided that no member of the Dal would join other political organizations, without permission from the Akali Dal Working Committee. But complete integration did not take place between the Congress and Akalis. The Akalis, despite the merger, maintained their separate organizational identity with the SGPC. In terms of policy outputs, it was a Congress-led an inter-communal coalition of Akali Sikhs, Congress Sikhs and Congress Hindus (Wallace, 1988:5). In the meantime, Master Tara Singh was defeated in the SGPC's annual presidential elections by Giani Kartar Singh, who was then a member of Congress. Then, he raised the issue of "jats" and "non-jats." (Nayar, 1966:198). After Master Tara Singh's loss, the Hindu press referred to it as a "vote against Punjabi Suba."

When Sant Fateh Singh emerged on the scene, the entire concept of Punjabi Suba demand underwent a radical change. He presented his demand based on 'linguistic consideration' alone, and not based on religion (Brass, 1991:114). It brought his demand in line with the country's goal of democracy and secularism. He did not emphasize either on the size or territory of the Punjabi speaking state. Even the proportion of Hindu-Sikh population in his demand was not a relevant issue. His criterion for the newly created state was the creation of a unit comprising the Punjabi-speaking areas, with Punjabi as its official language (Anand, 1983:1). As Fateh Singh demanded Punjabi Suba on a linguistic basis, the Government of India became willing to negotiate. But adherence to linguistic demand did not mean that religious arguments were less effective. Due to this, it could be argued that the refusal to concede the demand constituted discrimination against Sikhs.

3.2.4 The Anandpur Sahib Resolution (ASR)(1973)

When the government kept many Punjabi villages out of Punjab during the state's reorganization, the Akalis experienced a sense of injustice and discrimination. The Akali Dal redefined its strategy to protect Sikh identity after 1973. It demanded greater autonomy for the states and other religious-political concessions in terms of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. The Punjab and Haryana governments shared the new capital of Chandigarh as a union territory. In contrast, the central government maintained total authority over river water, irrigation projects, and power in Punjab. Nonetheless, the 'green revolution' of the 1960s and 1970s transformed Punjab into India's fertile farmland. In 1973, the Sikhs' most prominent political party, the Akali Dal, approved the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (ASR), which demanded expanded autonomy for all Indian states. As a result, ties with the Indian government grew more tense over the years. The ASR demand for more autonomy for all Indian states provided Prime

Minister Indira Gandhi the opportunity to position herself and depict the Akali Dal as a "separatist" movement. The demand for a Punjabi Suba was described as "communal" by Jawahar Lal Nehru. The Punjab Congress Party and Indira Gandhi perceived the ASR as a religiously based separatist manifesto even though its objectives were basically secular due to the language it was written in (Shani 2008: 53).

The most controversial phrase in the ASR sub-preamble, "the pre-eminence of the 'voice of Khalsa' in the Panth," gave legitimacy to increasingly sectarian factions within internal Sikh politics. There had been a majority-minority dilemma' since the formation of Punjabi Suba. With this conflict, the Akali Dal could not form its own government because all the Sikhs did not vote for the Akali Dal. The reorganization of Punjab enhanced the electoral prospects of the Akali Dal. As a result, political power also became one of its main concerns. According to Sant Fateh Singh, The Akali Dal would continue to defend the Sikhs' rights and privileges (The Statesman, May 31, 1966). However, despite a sizeable Sikh majority, the Akalis have been unable to form their own government due to the electoral number theory. From 1967 forward, the Akali Dal has followed a policy of developing coalition governments with opposition parties and significant changes were expected in the next Assembly and Parliamentary elections.

The Punjab crisis began peacefully in the 1960s and became violent in the late 1970s. This was due to the rise of a new class of politicians known as extremists. It set a sequence of circumstances that culminated in the years-long Punjab crisis in movement. The emergence of extremism might be seen as a political chess game, keeping religion and caste in mind.   An entire generation of Punjabi youth were influenced by the Khalistan movement, which also had an impact on Punjabi politics and divided leaders.   After the state violence in 1984 and its aftermath, the concept of Khalistan and its ideological strategy to establish Sikh hegemony over Punjab (Shani 2014: 23). During the Khalistan movement, there were significant divisions within the Punjabi Sikh community. Religious leaders, who are often confused by political interests, have been hesitant to express their support for the movement.

Since the 1970s, the Sikhs' militancy in the region has steadily increased, which makes this claim questionable (Chopra 2011: 32). The discourse of identity politics was shaped by leaders like Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who demanded a separate Sikh state. Although SAD never had a positive relationship with Bhindranwale, they could not *"disown him completely because he was working for the panth (Sikh community); others think that demands for an autonomous

Khalistan in Punjab are unlikely to re-emerge (Van Dyke, 2009: 985). Due to SAD's support for Jarnail Singh during the Khalistan movement, communal riots occurred in Punjab throughout the 1980s that alienated the Hindu community. It was also considered a Sikh religious party, which limited its chances of electoral success. Brass stated, "Congress' help to Jarnil, whose focus on panthic[34] and Sikh unity was intended to lure rural Jats and Sikh Scheduled castes to the Grand Old Party in the state" (Brass, 1998:197). With the formation of Dharam Youdh Morcha in 1982, Akali Dal Longowal renewed the demands envisioned in the ASR.

The rural Punjab, Jats, and Scheduled Castes were inspired by Sikh revivalism and voted for the Akali party which formed an alliance in the 1983 Panchayat elections, which dealt a blow to the Congress (Singh, 1983: 182). In 1978, Punjab and Sikh politics were affected by several changes caused by the Sikh-Nirankari conflict. During this period, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale represented a religious and political power. It provided a platform for Sikh extremists such as Jagdev Singh Talwandi and Gurcharan Singh Tohra to challenge the leadership of moderates such as Badal. It also helped the rise of extremist Sikh leaders and organizations like Bhindranwale, Akhand Kirtani Jatha, and the Dal Khalsa. The Sikh-Nirankari clash contributed significantly to the development of Hindu chauvinism, since many Hindus in northern India defended Nirankaris. Its membership had flourished among Punjabi Hindus because of the influence of Arya Samaj (Brass, 1991: 139). During this time, Sikh leaders mobilized the Sikh community and a major issue of Sikh identity arose.

3.2.5 The Need of Social Support Base

Since the formation of Punjabi Suba, there has been a conflict between the majority and minority. In Punjab, Sikhs became a majority, around sixty-one percent, but at the national level, they remained as a minority, less than two percent. In the 1960s, the structure and composition of SAD underwent a significant transformation owing to the rise of the Jat-Sikh peasantry in Punjab's politics. SAD became a party of the Jat-Sikhs. During the fifteen years of the Punjabi Suba Movement, SAD mobilized a large section of the rural Sikh population to take part in various agitations and morchas. This resulted in democratic deepening. Additionally, gains from the Green Revolution led to the Jat-Sikh peasantry's economic emancipation that came to have a vested interest in politics and representation. Its leadership

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[34] The term panthic could characterize religious beliefs and practices' mystical and spiritual dimensions.

was predominantly derived from urban middle-class and upper-caste communities before 1966. Sikh and Akali politics have been dominated by Jat Sikhs since the Punjabi Suba Movement (Kumar, 2005:115). As SAD's popularity among rural peasants increased, its appeal to other sections of society gradually declined. In order to form coalitions with other parties, SAD needs to build up its support base.

The Jat Sikh landowners became more powerful due to agricultural development. The Akali Dal's first Jat leader, Sant Fateh Singh, inherited power from Khatri Sikhs (Master Tara Singh). By focusing on cultural diversity and the idea of "Punjabiyat," he was able to successfully shift the discourse away from religious identity. The Naxalite movement reached its peak in Punjab during the 1960s, inspiring an entire generation of the state's youth with its revolutionary zeal. In 1971 and 1972, the Congress Party won a massive victory in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections. Indira Gandhi's 'Garibi Hatao' slogan was highly influential in gaining votes. The 1970s marked a returned to the era of one-party dominance. The Congress party won Punjab. One of the reasons for Akali Dal's failure in Punjab was its inability to gain support from Scheduled Castes and agricultural labourers (Dhami, 1985: 36).

Due to their Panthic ideology, the Akalis were able to gain the support of the most powerful Dalit group—the Mazhabi Sikhs. The Balmikis joined Jan Sangh, and the Chamars and Ad-Dharmis moved to Congress. The combined Jat Sikh community, which constitutes 21% of the population, benefits from this party division in electoral politics. Despite these differences, Dalits in Punjab are significant voters who have a big impact on who controls the state (Trehan, 2018:67). The Akali Dal decided to utilise agitational strategies to urge the central government to make more significant reforms after their defeat in the elections in 1971. When the economic issue was linked to "discrimination against Sikhs" explicitly, it became a political matter.

Between 1970 and 1990, there was unrest in the state of Punjab. It was Indira Gandhi's slogan 'Garibi Hatao' which helped the Congress party to gain power in Punjab under Gianni Zail Singh leadership. The Congress party aimed to gain the support of two Dalit communities, the Mazhabis and Balmikis- by providing sub-reservation of 12.5% for the two communities within the 25 percent quota for SCs. The Malwa and Majha regions are mostly populated by these communities. The reservation policies were only partially successful in increasing support for Congress. The Punjab government alienated the Jat landlords by implementing specific programmes for backward classes and SCs, such as land limitations. On the other hand, the policies did not extend far enough to help the landless and marginal farmers of backward

communities. The Mazhabis, who were mostly engaged in agriculture as tenants, were unhappy with the land policies while receiving help from a reservation in finding jobs. The Balmikis were prohibited from taking advantage of reservation policies. For example, in the Doaba region, caste conflicts among SCs have increased because of the Chamars' predominance in government jobs and educational institutions due to the sub-quota (Trehan, 2018:68).

SAD has become more prevalent in rural agricultural communities. Sikhs are more prevalent in rural areas, while Hindus are more prevalent in urban areas, which limits the influence of the Congress party. According to Paul Wallace, "Punjab has a peculiar demographic feature which leads to both a significant Sikh and Hindu majority in the urban and rural areas. In rural regions, the SAD has been successful in winning over the upper classes of rich Jat-Sikh peasants; yet, in urban areas, it receives only limited support from either the high classes of Hindu and Sikh merchant groups or the lower classes of craftsmen and wage labourers. The majority of urban non-Jat-Sikh votes for other parties, like the Congress, counterbalance or even cancel rural Jat-Sikh votes for SAD. The non-Jat sections of the Sikh community voted for other parties rather than the SAD, such as the Congress, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and the Communist Party of India, because the SAD has formed a party of the Jat-Sikhs to represent their rural agricultural interests. It is therefore limited in its appeal to a broad cross-section of Punjabi society" (Wallace 1985: 367).

After some time, there was stagnation in agriculture besides a lack of industrial growth in the state. The benefits of the Green Revolution were not evenly distributed between different categories of farmers. The financial assistance given to Punjab by the centre for industrial development has always been neglected because of the communal character of Punjab politics. Therefore, their experience taught them the importance of political power in promoting the economic interests of their supporters. They were prepared for increased government power (Singh, Ajit,1988: 72). One could argue that in the context of electoral politics, the Congress's influence and the charisma of its leaders began to wane. In a short period of time, the concept of Khalistan completely vanished from Punjab. Punjabis were primarily concerned about peace and Hindu Sikh unity during the 1990s. The leadership of the Akali Dal came under severe pressure from the Sikh clergy to protect the Sikhs' distinct identity. This was in relation to the economic and political difficulties they faced.

Table 1: The Punjab Assembly Elections and Party Position 1967-2022

Year of Elections	Winning political party	Percentage of votes
1967	Shiromani Akali Dal led coalition	37.62%
1969	Shiromani Akali Dal led coalition	46.85%
1972	Congress	42.84%
1977	Shiromani Akali Dal led coalition	56.49%
1980	Congress	45.19%
1985	Shiromani Akali Dal coalition	38.01%
1992	Congress	43.83%
1997	SAD-BJP alliance	45.97%
2002	Congress	35.81%
2007	SAD-BJP Alliance	45.4%
2012	SAD-BJP Alliance	44.8
2017	Congress	38.5
2022	AAP	42.01

Source: Statistical Reports on the Assembly elections, www.eci.gov.in Congress; SAD: Shiromani Akali Dal; BJP: Bhartiya Janta Party.

Due to rising violence in the state, the Barnala government could not finish even half of its term and it was removed in May 1987. Punjab was under President's Rule until February 1992, when elections were held. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which defeated the Congress to win 9 seats with 16.2% of the vote, emerged as the biggest opposition party in the election, which was another significant development. Beant Singh was elected as the state's chief minister, but on August 21, 1995, he was executed for his anti-insurgency efforts, which eliminated terrorism within a few months from the state. The Congress suffered a devastating loss in the 1997 assembly elections. SAD and BJP win significant numbers of seats together. Parkash Singh Badal has indeed been chosen as the next Chief Minister of Punjab. The Akali Dal (Badal) won a majority of votes in rural and semi-rural constituencies in all three regions of Punjab. At the same time, the BJP performed well in urban and semi-urban areas. Only 14

out of 117 seats won by Congress with 26.3 percent of the vote. It was only able to win 9 and 5 seats in the Malwa and Doaba areas, respectively, and could not get a single seat in Majha. In 1997, the BSP gained only one seat with 7.5% of the vote, compared with 9 percent in 1992 (Sekhon, 2018: 124).

During the 1998 parliamentary elections, SAD supported the BJP due to its alliance. The perception was that "the BJP represented the Hindus, while the Akali Dal represented the Sikhs, and that they would work together to achieve peace, harmony, and prosperity in Punjab" (Verma, 1999: 3519). Due to the polarization of Hindu and Sikh politics in Punjab, SAD and BJP are complementary. This transformation had the clear implication that political regimes could no longer endure by merely appealing to local identities or mobilizing animosity toward the central government. This was because of its past mistakes. The Congress had anyway been defeated and was no longer a ruling party even at the centre. During the 1998 parliamentary elections, the moderate Akalis and their allies defeated the opposition candidates in 94 out of the 117 assembly districts. In 1999, this number fell by 34. Congress and its allies attempted to gain more assemblies. In terms of the actual number of seats in the parliament, Congress candidates won eight constituencies.   The Akali Dal (Badal) candidates secured two seats. The BJP, CPI, and Akali Dal each won one seat (Mann).

In Punjab's 2007 Assembly Elections, the SAD-BJP coalition won 68 out of 117 seats under Parkash Singh Badal's leadership. The BJP won 19 seats with 8.21% of the vote, while the SAD won 49 seats with 37.19% of the vote. Without forming an alliance, the Congress fought in the 2007 elections and won 44 out of 116 seats with a 40.9 percent vote share.   Even though the SAD had a stronghold in the Malwa region, the Congress had won a massive victory there. This may have been due to the support of the head of Dera Sacha Sauda, who has large followers and widespread popularity in the region. The ruling government in Punjab saw a significant loss in popularity during the 2012 assembly elections as it was consistently defeated and unable to gain support from voters. On the other hand, the populist agenda of the Akali Dal, included new leadership which helped the party in maintaining power by focusing on issues like free electricity, social welfare programs, the atta-dal plan, and bicycles for girls in school, among other things. There was significant dissatisfaction with the Congress party at the national level because of the party's miserable failure to promote its programme (Sekhon, 2018: 125).

Sanjha Morcha became one of the key factors for neutralizing whatever anti-incumbency was in the state after the People's Party of Punjab (PPP) won with 5.17 percent votes in 2012 and in 2007 could not get a single vote. The BSP won 4.30 percent votes in 2012 and in 2007 won 4.10 percent of the vote, and it also helped the SAD-BJP triumph by keeping the vote share of Hindu Dalits in Doaba, which had previously been the Congress party's traditional support base. In this framework, the present research examines the development concerns of the community's weaker members. Does it inquire if religious political parties (in this example, the Akali Dal) aid in the empowerment of oppressed groups? Does the party make a point of resolving the Dalit community's concerns? Has it affected the more vulnerable places if it represents the interests of the ruling castes? For example, have they been even more marginalized? The lack of cooperation between the leadership at the state and national levels was one of the factors that led to this. Additionally, the aristocratic and arrogant behaviour of party leaders, disputes and divisions within the party, as well as dissatisfied and rebellious candidates

The Akali's adopted a populist strategy during their rule rather than bringing up "controversial issues" such as regional autonomy in Punjab or a distinct Sikh identity. The Sikh majority would now examine the Akali's on their performance, which was a key victory for them as it allowed them to reclaim the trust of the Sikh community and end their "alienation" from mainstream politics. In religious celebrations, too, the question of identity had been banished to the backstage. Despite losing the 1999 elections, the Akali's undoubtedly succeeded in changing the terms of the political discourse from 'religion-political to 'politico-economic.' In terms of their political priorities, the Akalis supported rural elites more than urban rich. Neither the general issues of the Sikh community nor the regional politics of Punjab were mentioned. The Akali's were no longer seen solely as pursuing a communitarian or "panthic" agenda. Furthermore, as religious identity was no longer the dominant concern in the state's electoral politics, the Congress was no longer perceived as an anti-Sikh party.

In this way, the problem of Sikh identity was politicized. The Akali Dal believed that capturing political power in the state was the most effective way to protect Sikh separate identity. In addition, the Akali Dal leadership has tried three types of strategies to preserve the separate identity of Sikhs, which are: Integrationist, Coalitional, Agitational. However, none of these strategies has helped the Akali Dal in achieving its goal. In fact, the discourse over the issue of Sikh identity between the Akali and the national leadership has not been very effective. It was

impossible to resolve the problems of the Sikh community permanently because of mutual suspicions. There was a sharpening power struggle between the two parties in the state. This was because Akali Dal had been consistently defeated by the Congress.

In the following sections, it has been examined how the Dalit community was developed with the help of the interaction between Sikh identity assertions and the state apparatus. It explains how the Dalits were positioned within the political system at various points and how they attempted to preserve their culture from the mainstream. They attempted to establish a small, region where they could gain power and achieve their social, economic, and political aims. There have been two major developments in the history of Dalits in Punjab during the pre- and post-independence periods. The first was the Ad-Dharm movement, and the second was the Bahujan Samaj Party, both of which were considered a movement. As a result, it is worth analyzing the leadership patterns of these two major developments. It highlights the leadership of the Dalit community in the Ad-Dharm movement. It discusses the rise and decline of the BSP. It discusses the party's ideology and strategies for raising Dalit consciousness, and the role of its leaders in empowering the Dalit community in Punjab.

II

3.3 Dalit political Assertion and Bahujan Samaj Party in Punjab

The decline of the Ad-Dharm movement and the rise of BSP in the post-independence era marked the beginning of a new phase. The Ad Dharm movement was unable to continue its journey due to its internal problems. Why did the BSP not become more powerful in state politics? The primary factor was the lack of Dalit leadership in Punjab from the 1950s to the 1980s. Punjab has been known for its liberal religious practices based on caste structure. Sikhism and the Arya Samaj both have emancipated the Dalits from rigid purity-pollution-based behavioural patterns. Furthermore, the BSP's political ideological framework has not been able to effectively understand the regional, cultural, and economic characteristics of Punjab. In the Malwa region, the alliance worked to the advantage of the Akali's, particularly in Ropar, Patiala, Faridkot, Bathinda, Sangrur, and Ludhiana. This reinforces the religion-cultural ethos, which negates the existence of exclusive caste categories for electoral mobilizations (Kumar, 2010:65).

Historically, the BSP played power politics at the state and national levels and became the party of the Dalit community to capture political power. In recent years' caste has emerged as a critical factor in Indian politics, and it has been reinforced through elections in the practice of Indian democracy Caste and caste affiliations play a significant role in political participation, leadership, and political awareness among the citizens of a democracy. In this broader context, Dalit politics can be understood. In the past few decades, political means have emerged as a primary factor in the development of Dalit consciousness. Historically, Dalit politics was based on patron-client relationship (between Dalits and upper-caste parties) before becoming an independent Dalit movement with its own caste parties. Elections have played a crucial role in inducing Dalit political participation in Indian democracy (Chandhoke, 2006:11).

The RPI (Republican Party of India), which was founded in 1957, was an alternative. It was based on Dr. Ambedkar's theories and gained popularity between 1957 and 1959. RPI now included several Dalit leaders. Jogdand (1998) described "this period as the golden age of RPI. Mangoo Ram, the Ad-Dharm leader, wanted Dalits to join RPI, but divisions and incompetence caused it to collapse. Kanshi Ram, a Dalit from Punjab, learned about untouchability and discrimination while working in Poona" (Jogdand, 1998:1072). It was Kanshi Ram, the leader of the BSP, who introduced the umbrella identity to the Dalit masses that led to the largest change in their consciousness. The term Bahujan has been used by Kanshi Ram to unite Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs, and minorities. The Doaba region has been considered the main Centre for BSP support in Punjab, which has not yet spread to other areas. Also, it has not been able to eradicate the Dalit tag.

In many ways, the BSP's ideology is inextricably linked to Ambedkar's ideas, which means that it sees no difference between them. It believes that socialism can transform Indian Society. A major obstacle is caste, the diversity of languages, religions, ethnicities, and culture, which have divided the working class, preventing socialism from transforming Indian society. Kanshi Ram supports caste-based reservations in educational institutions and jobs, and he recognizes that the reservation also gives equality. Several characteristics distinguish the BSP from mainstream parties, such as the Congress party. One of its main characteristics is exclusivity, that is, its goals and ideology. A subgroup of Dalits and backward castes are the BSP's primary supporters, not those from poorer castes. As a result, its appeal was narrower because it was primarily aimed at the Chamar and other Dalit sub-castes such as Balmikis and Khatris. "Social Justice" is a core principle of BSP ideology, which gives Dalits their socioeconomic and

political status in Indian society. It aims to transform social and political structures. The BSP leadership claims that gaining state power is crucial for achieving these goals (Singh, 2019:45).

Chandra (2000) analyzed the BSP as an ethnic party in Hoshiarpur. Her argument was that the party's success depends on its organization, which provides representation for Scheduled Castes, Backward Classes, and Minorities. According to her, there has been a transformation in ethnic politics. BSP promotes local concerns and gives the Dalit community a distinct direction. The primary purpose is to counteract the Congress party's decline in power, and provide a balance of power among political parties in coalition governments. Kanshi Ram began to establish a base for forming a political party by giving impressive speeches. In order to achieve the party's success, he developed a group of educated government employees through affirmative action. He founded two organizations: BAMCEF (Backward and Minority Community Employee Federation) in 1978 and DS4 (Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti), in 1981. The Ad-Dharm movement, SCF, and RPI, the first three political mobilizations which gained significant support among Dalits, laid the foundation for the emergence of the BSP. The Ad-Dharm movement helped many Dalits, especially in the Hoshiarpur district, by providing them with education and upliftment (Chandra, 2000: 26).

Since 1985, the BSP has been active in Punjab to achieve the same objective. The BSP has recently claimed that Ad Dharm ideology has become the spine, heart, brain, eyes, feet, and arms of the party's struggle. However, in the 1990s, BSP formed a pre-election alliance with Congress. The Congress and the Communists have a competing support base with the BSP. BSP contested the parliamentary elections in 1989 in Punjab and won one seat with an 8.62 per cent vote share. After that, it improved its position; however, since 1998, it has not been able to win a seat from Punjab, and its vote share has decreased. Similar results were achieved by BSP in the Punjab assembly elections. Punjab had chosen BSP as its primary opposition party in the 1992 election. In 1992, the BSP used the Dalit castes for the first time as political tools. In Punjab, the BSP had seen a decline in support. In 1992, it won 9 seats with 16.19 percent of the vote when Akali Dal boycotted the elections. This number dropped to 6% in 2002 and 4% in the 2007 assembly elections, respectively. In the 1997 elections it secured only one general seat with a 7.49% vote share. Both the Lok Sabha elections in 2014 and the Punjab Assembly elections in 2017 secured only 1.9% and 1.5% of the vote share, respectively, without winning a single seat (Gundimeda, 2014: 23).

It is a matter of the fact that some Dalit leaders control the BSP and its organizational structure. Some opponents of the party always argued that BSP is a Dalit party meant only for some Dalit castes and not for all the Dalit communities. It only works to capture political power by any means. The regional culture and economic features of Punjab have been challenged by the BSP's ideological framework. In the Punjabi socio-cultural domain, BSP was unable to assert itself. The Dalits were easy targets for the political parties in the state because of their "uncertain religious-affiliation." Singh stated that , "the BSP has been controlled by specific castes, such as Ad-Dharmis and Chamars, who are more powerful groups among Dalits in Punjab. He also argued that hierarchical disparities among Dalit groups are responsible for organizational weaknesses and poor party performance. The Dalits got substantial representation from the Shiromani Akali Dal, which has been dominated by Jats. The main problem with BSP was that it had lost Dalit support and their confidence, after the 1990s. In the present time Only, a few Dalits believe that BSP is the most effective party for their development compared to other parties like SAD, Congress, and BJP. There is a split in BSP which has to led to the formation of other fronts among Dalits like BSP (Ambedkar), Democratic Bahujan Samaj Morcha (DBSM), etc. They support different political parties like Shiromani Akali Dal and the Congress party" (Singh, 2011:83).

The BSP is not an anti-systemic party or movement but it has challenged and attempted to reform the fundamental structure of the Indian social order by opposing caste with an egalitarian society. Instead, it is a party which aims to transform the system with its ideas and philosophy According to Harish. S. Wankhede, "Kanshi Ram emerged as the real representative of the Amberkarite cause in Indian politics during the post-Ambedkar era. Kanshi Ram has made a significant contribution by conceptualizing Bahujan as a political constituency and a strategy for controlling power. The main aim of Bahujanwad was to increase the number of electorates by 85 percent" (Wankhede, 2008: 5). The BSP came up with the slogan 'Brahman Shankh Bajeyega, Hathi Dilli Jayega' in 2009. This meant that Brahmin support would help the BSP to gain power in Delhi. However, the 2009 Lok Sabha elections results were not up to expectations. BSP won 20 seats out of 80, and its vote share came down to 27.42% (Tripathi, 2014:25).

In fact, the BSP leaders do not consider it as a party but rather as a movement to achieve social equality and help Dalits in reclaiming their self-respect and identity. In a political rally for the Lok Sabha elections in 2014, Mayawati stated that the BSP is a movement. In 2014, BSP chief

Mayawati gave the slogan "Jiski jitni bhagidari, uski utni hissedari" (share in election ticket and power based on support). However, she also claimed that the formula applied to all castes and classes. Even her own party leaders accepted that her main targets were Brahmins and Muslims. That is why she had given tickets to Brahmins (31) and Muslims (19), together making up to 50% of the total number of seats. 17 seats were reserved for Dalits, and 23 seats were reserved for other castes. Further, to keep her Dalit vote intact, Mayawati has also recycled the old slogan "Kanshiram Teri Nek Kamai, toone soti Qaum jagai" (Kanshiram's achievement is the Dalit awakening) (Times of India, 2014: 2).

Even after Dalit groups were divided, they still maintained dignity in their identity by supporting a party like the BSP. Although early 1990s success was encouraging, the BSP has failed to replicate its U.P. experience in Punjab. Even though the BSP has a base in Punjab, it has not developed enough leadership there, especially with the High Command's stronghold being in Uttar Pradesh. Its more successful candidates, particularly from the Doaba region which is highly dominated by Dalit communities and joined other parties, including AAP. As a result, the BSP's chances have suffered a substantial setback. Thus, it is possible to view the BSP and AAP as outside contenders in the 2017 election. Despite the differences between Dalits' religions and regions, the BSP failed to lead an anti-caste movement in Punjab and was unable to develop a local leader who could bring Dalits together (Trehan, 2018: 212).

Another reason for its poor performance was that it could not yet establish its strong base among the Dalit voters in the state. In the state, Brahmins and Banias are strongly allied with the Congress party, while Jats are strongly aligned with the Akali Dal. It shows that both Akali Dal and Congress Parties have a strong base, but it is not true for BSP. BSP's vote bank has changed because of the poor leadership in the party. It is also a fact of Punjab Politics that no single party can dominate its vote bank. This attitude of BSP has remained the same even at present and resulted in the party's poor performance during the 17th Lok Sabha elections. According to the results of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP emerged the largest party and won 303 seats under Narender Modi's leadership. The Congress party won only 52 seats, and the UPA won only 93. The caste-based agenda also helped BJP to create a substantial vote bank. It was the upper castes who united to support Modi, which had been divided into different non-Dalit parties. Modi's government's policy to attract upper-caste Hindu voters was successful. Also, Modi's schemes like Digital India, making toilets, providing gas connections

under the Ujwala Yojana, Pardhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Mudra Yojana, etc., attracted the poor, and they did well in reaching them even in the rural areas (Deepti: 2019: 21).

Judge (2015) also argued that "Punjab is the new example of pressure politics through caste associations. Because of the recent developments in state and national politics, the future of small parties like BSP has come to depend upon the support base they could gain in the heightening polarization between Congress and the BJP. His argument was that the government's egalitarian policies had led to economic transformation. However, state intervention was the main contributor to reductions in atrocities, caste discrimination, and rigid caste hierarchy. There have been several caste conflicts in Punjab, such as the Talhan case. On the other hand, BSP attempted to win Dalit support by participating in this case and supporting the Dalit Action Committee (DAC) against Jat-Sikhs in the Grurdwara Trust" (Judge, 2015: 55).

Furthermore, the *'Punjabiyat'*[35] known as cultural identity has developed into a diversified and inclusive regional identity which partially transcends caste differences. Traditional Punjabi values are merging through caste, religious, and territorial boundaries as a result of Punjabis' migration. Consequently, political parties have begun to identify themselves with social and political differences in Punjab due to the importance of cultural identity. For example, the BSP and the AAP both suffer from this lack of understanding of Punjabiyat. The AAP has become an outsider party and gaining power appears to be a challenge because "Sikhi" and "Panjabiyat" norms are strongly maintained in Punjab, (which are based on the Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the rules established by the Sikh Rehat Maryada, a code of behaviour and traditions) (Singh, 2014:15).

In a globalized society, religion and caste interact with the concept of Punjabiyat, which makes it difficult to examine Dalit political assertion in the state. Thus, political mobilization of Scheduled Castes in Punjab is conceptualized narrowly in terms of caste and region sub-categorization, which makes it difficult to forge coalitions with other Dalit movements throughout the country. Dalit politics in Punjab have been affected by the different caste

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[35] Although the use of the term Punjabiyat is not widespread, which probably means that its contours have not been sharply defined, the universe of Punjabiyat has been stated to represent "a shared way of life." The base of Punjabiyat is the Punjabi language. And Punjabiyat itself is a counterpoint to the partition of the Punjabi language and the Punjab division in 1947.

dynamics (Trehan, 2018: 63). For example, the establishment of separate Deras and Gurdwaras affects politics. Dalit political mobilization and voting behavior in Punjab is different from other states. The *"social engineering*[36]*"* formula has been used by different parties over the years, transforming Punjab politics into a state of chaos. The rise of the 'Modi wave' brought Punjab's growth and development problems to the centre. During the 2017 assembly elections in Punjab, the Modi government tried to focus on developmental issues solely to gain votes. This election was mainly focused on issues of governance and attracting the youth of Punjab due to the increase in unemployment levels, agricultural decline, migration, drug epidemic, etc (Kumar, 2017:45). Although this focus may be appropriate, it has not relegated identity politics to the periphery.

The Akali Dal tried to gain popularity in Doaba, which has the highest Dalit population in Punjab, by implementing a variety of schemes. Similarly, SAD, Dera Sacha Sauda, and the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) also agreed to control the Malwa region. During the 2014 general election, the AAP had won four parliamentary seats in this region. Dera Sacha Sauda, a socio-religious organization led by Guru Ram Rahim Singh, has a huge following from the backward caste and maintains political power, particularly in Malwa. In 2007, the Akali's attacked the dera chief for dressing up like the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, thus disrespecting him. The Akal Takht, the highest temporal seat of the Sikhs, issued an order (hukamnama) urging a boycott of the dera. Akal Takht forgive Guru Ram Rahim in 2017 as the Akali's wanted the support of Dera Sacha Sauda, which caused controversy among the Sikh leadership who claimed that the forgiveness was "politically motivated."

In the 2017 elections, the Aam Aadmi Party was expected to be a game-changer because it caused serious political problems for the Congress and Akali Dal. After its failure in Haryana, the party struggled vigorously to establish itself in Punjab despite being consistently referred to as a non-Punjabi political party. Dalits became a crucial choice for AAP, because of their political and economic marginalisation. It was an alternative for the dalits and non-dalit castes. AAP released a special "Dalit Manifesto" with its 19-point plan that included a variety of initiatives and the guarantee for them. The party focused on the Malwa region after gaining a few seats in the Punjab General Elections in 2014. The impressive electoral gains of the AAP in Punjab at the cost of both the Congress and the SAD-BJP combine may be attributed to the

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[36] Social Engineering' means to include the poor people from other communities and minorities and do the developmental programs for the upliftment of the SCs. But its strategies were not clear.

leadership factor. It was not only the popularity of Arvind Kejriwal but also the local 'new' leaders, projected as party candidates, that helped the party in a big way. Arguably, it was also the critical issues afflicting the state's society and economy, raised with fervour during the campaign, which helped the AAP electorally.

The party having the advantage of being a first-timer in the fray and none of its candidates being in public office in the past, could raise the issues of unemployment, price-rise, corruption, agrarian crisis, suicides of farmers and marginalization of small and poor peasants and blame the SAD and the Congress for the dismal situation. The AAP party said, Dera Sacha Sauda also follows Akali's path to gain popularity and influence Dalit communities. Both major parties had angered the farming community because they supported the AAP party. However, the party's success in terms of winning the seats came only from the electorally, which comprises of as many as sixty-nine out of one hundred seventeen assembly constituencies in the Malwa region. It was in the Malwa region that the AAP registered all its victories in the constituencies of Sangrur, Faridkot, Fatehgarh Sahib and Patiala with an overall vote share of twenty-nine per cent. Significantly, the party did not fare badly in the other nine constituencies as well (Kumar, 2016: 18). During the 2017 election, the Punjabi diaspora showed overwhelming support for AAP as Punjabis well-received its brand of 'clean politics' promoted by the party settled abroad. The AAP also won massive popularity among the Punjabi diaspora with its influential political role. The Doaba region, which has a large percentage of the Dalit diaspora, saw massive mobilization and support for the party in terms of financial donations and rallying.

The process of mobilisation also weakens the difference between political and cultural identities. Dalit identity is asserted through a variety of processes, including music. During the Ad-Dharm movement Ravidas' hymns were used to mobilize the Dalit community through music and in the 2017 state assembly elections too, the same process was used. As a result, the socio-cultural route becomes an effective means of mobilizing Dalit communities. For example, the 'Bootan Mandi Mela,' which has been celebrated as Ravidas' Gurpurab since 1937, attracts many Dalit singers who are proud of their 'Chamar' identity. The reinterpretation of Dalit identity in Gini Mahi's songs as 'Danger Chamar' provides a tool for sociopolitical resistance and assertion by providing a space for Dalits in mainstream Punjab politics. Music has been used to assert individuals' identities and attempts to challenge the Jat Sikhs' dominance. Music allows specific caste communities to collaborate and 'act in concert' to shift

the power relations that exist in the state. For instance, Hans Raj Hans, who converted his social identity into a political identity by joining the BJP (Tehran, 2018: 64).

There is a need to understand why the AAP party has been unable to mobilize Dalit communities in Doaba. Even though the region is mainly populated by Chamars and Adharmis. In the Doaba region, the Chamar community is more urbanized and has higher literacy rates than other SC groups. AAP won only a small percentage of Akali votes. However, it was unable to win over the urban Hindu population, which included Dalits. The NRIs led "Chalo Punjab" campaign, which attracted considerable media attention but was unable to influence voters in favour of AAP. It shows a significant division between the Akali Dal's and the AAP's electorate in the state (Kumar, 2010:78). In 2017, the assembly elections were fought over the performance of the alliance government as compared with 2007. Even with their declining popularity since 2007, the Akali's were still able to win over the Jat Sikhs. According to the CSDS post-poll survey, 50.0 percent of Jats supported SAD party in 2007, but that number dropped to 48.4 percent in 2012 and 34.9 percent in 2017 (CSDS, 2017). The performance includes both successes and failures. Since gaining power, the governing coalition has made several achievements in a variety of areas, including a good transport network, surplus electricity, and numerous welfare programmes for the poor. However, it emphasized that it was still significant among the SAD's core supporters. As pointed out that, Akali Dal played an influential role in protecting minority interests. It became one of the few parties with independent roots and a strong organization base.

Another critical aspect of the election was the presence of a new political party, i.e., the Aam Adami Party (AAP), which fought directly with the two traditional opponents- the SAD-BJP and the Congress. In 2017 assembly elections had the highest ever voting rate of 78.62 percent, with 19.8 million electors. On the basis of individual identity, each region played a crucial role in the Punjab assembly elections. In the last few years, Malwa has also become a land of change, where new entrants perform well in the political arena. In 2017, Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had won 18 seats in the region, which is significant because the party had won only two in Doaba and none in the Majha region. Malwa is the largest region of Punjab, both geographically and politically. Nearly 58 per cent of the state's assembly seats (69 out of 117) fall within this region. Majha had 25 representatives while Doaba had 23 representatives in the region. The highest voter participation in the state was recorded in the Mansa district of the Malwa region, where 87 percent of eligible voters participated. The AAP

and the Lok Insaf Party (LIP) caused the Congress' vote share to decline by 1%. And AAP party got only 24 percent of the vote. On the other hand, the BJP, a member of the SAD alliance, could only take 3 seats with a mere 5% of the vote. Therefore, BSP got only 1.5% of the vote.

Furthermore, it shows that all of Punjab's traditional political parties saw a decline in their vote share while new parties saw an increase in their vote share. After suffering a heavy defeat in the 2017 election, the dominant political parties are attempting to reclaim power by focusing on religious and caste-based ideology (Sekhon, 2018:125). The AAP defeated the BJP's incumbent mayor in the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation elections in December 2021, winning 14 of 35 seats. Bhagwant Mann, the AAP's chief ministerial candidate, was chosen for the Dhuri assembly seat in 2022. The AAP party aimed to capture political power in Punjab. The party offered free power in the state as well as help to the farming community. The opposing party claims it is a political tactic to seek support from the Sikh community. In 2014, the AAP ran for 13 seats again, but only won four. Again, in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, AAP ran for 13 seats and won one. As a result, five state assembly elections have been held, and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) becoming victorious. (The Quint, 2022).

Table 2: Party-wise vote share in Punjab Assembly Elections (2022)

Party	Party-wise vote share (per cent %)
AAP	42.01 %
BJP	6.06%
SAD	18.38%
BSP	1.77%
INC	22.98%

Source: Election Commission of India

The AAP party defeated all opposition parties in Punjab, gaining 92 of the 117 assembly constituencies. Since the state's reorganization in 1966, no single party has gained many seats in the Punjab assembly. Even though the AAP benefited from several causes. Its victory is attributed to a strong anti-incumbency movement against major players in state politics, and people overwhelmingly voted for "change." The three major political parties in Punjab — SAD (Badal), Congress, and AAP —all have their own Dalit policies and programs. In their

manifestos, parties promised to give Dalits rights to land reform, employment opportunities, student loans, and scholarships. Across Punjab, they have been fighting for their rights. However, despite having significant schemes and programmes, Dalits have not been able to achieve success.   .

<center>**III**</center>

3.4 Political Dimension of Deras and Politics

In the recent years, the Dera has become the primary route for Dalit political assertion, especially in the Malwa region. In the last ten years, deras have become more prominent and significant in the political arena, which has further increased the complexity of state politics. Political leaders and candidates from different parties were observed to flock deras during the state's most recent elections. There has been a paradigm shift in state politics in recent years, which has created a new relationship between the political elite and the deras. However, three major political parties—the SAD, Congress, and BSP—view deras in distinct ways. This has led them to seek a social identity based on their economic status through cultural means. Deras' increasing political power has had an impact on their followers. While its supporters include people from different sections of society, their largest support base is from Dalits. This can be largely attributed to the fact that social and political power has not been challenged effectively. This has remained largely unchanged in favour of the state's dominant castes/communities. Deras have already developed as major counter-culture centers, providing the way for Dalits to assert their reclaimed values, rituals, traditions, self-respect, and pride.

Politicization of religious groups is inevitable—it becomes functional as sects acquire a bargaining capacity and can enhance their strength vis-à-vis other religious groups. Religion has degenerated into the politics of religion; the politics of religion has turned into the politics of money. Once religion starts becoming politicized, it is difficult to stop the process, because politics acquires a stake in religion to ensure political support and power. Examples from Punjab include prominently the use of the SGPC, an institution formed in 1925, to have centralized control over all Sikh gurdwaras in India and abroad. Other highly politicized Sikh institutions are supported by the Shiromani Akali Dal, a regional political party with two main support bases among the Sikh peasantry and Dalits (Lal, 2009: 229).

The religious devotion of the innocent public is often changed into capturing currency notes and large amounts of money are accumulated in the form of charity from devotees. These Deras are sometimes used by different agencies (Mahmadpur, 2007c: 3) for their specific interests. The Baba's, as they are often addressed by 'their' people to obtain bliss, teach people to remain aloof from monetary attractions, but themselves indulge in money matters; some even take enough commission from industrialists to convert their black money into white (Longowal, 2007: 44). Besides this, these Deras and their leaders get money directly or indirectly from various politicians. They obtain cheap land and other benefits under different schemes from local authorities. By violating trustee laws, these Deras evade tax; by collecting black money, they become further involved in economic crimes. Their income has increased in billions, and this contributes to their status.

This makes the pandering of various religious groups at the time of elections almost inevitable. Deras often interfere in politics directly or indirectly. The deference shown to Dera chiefs by all political parties before assembly or parliamentary elections reflects the increasing political clout of these Deras. In Punjab, different Deras arise and compete with each other in order to increase their followers and gain political power. Hence, because of their rivalry, tensions arose in the state. For example, the Talhan case (Lal, 2009: 230). In such situations, politics and religion are closely intertwined. But during election times, many politicians are eager to gain the support from sect leaders. Sometimes, Deras advise their followers directly or indirectly to vote for a particular candidate or party. On the other hand, there are various political parties that claim to be in a position to protect religious sects.

In addition, they seek to increase their support in elections. For example, Dera Sacha Sauda, a Sirsa-based sect in Haryana, led by Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, with influence over large neighbouring areas of Punjab, supported the Congress party in the Punjab Assembly Elections in February 2007 and helped it win an unprecedented 37 out of 65 seats in the Malwa region, which consists of 13 districts of Punjab. This area had hitherto been an Akali stronghold and the Akali Dal promptly blamed the dera for the defeat of some of its candidates (Lal, 2009:225). Among the key districts where the dera enjoys a strong political base are Bathinda, Ferozepur, Fazilka, Sangrur, Muktsar and Mansa. When the Akalis formed their own government in Punjab in 2007, they did not waste time in criticising the Sirsa-based dera's public posturing and claiming, in the name of all Sikhs, that the Dera Sacha Sauda leader had injured their religious sentiments. This caused caste conflicts in Punjabi society since the

majority of Dera Sacha Sauda followers were all from Dalit and lower castes. The dera supported individual candidates rather than parties in the 2012 elections and backed the SAD-BJP coalition in 2017, however the alliance was defeated.

Several Sikh organizations, headed by the Akal Takht, (the Sikh main temporal seat), have urged the state government to take proper disciplinary measures against the Dera Sacha Sauda. All devotees of the dera were encouraged to participate in a social boycott" (Meeta and Rajiv lochan, 2007:1909). In response to recent Sikh violence overseas, Chhabra emphasises that "this form of conflict involves the continuous development of a distinct Dalit identity, both Sikhs and Hindus, through the construction of Ravidassia gurudwaras" (Chhabra, 2009: 46). According to Jodhka, "Some of these Ravidassia organizations have 'become extremely rich and prominent since diaspora Dalits bring with them money for the religious Deras" (Jodhka, 2009: 84) Here again, political leaders used sects to influence and inflate their vote banks and claim political significance (Grewal,2007: 64). Conflicts between sects and dominant Sikhism seem to be rather commonplace in the recent history of Punjab, and the significance of this particular episode extends far beyond the short-term politics of revenge (Lal, 2009:232).

Most dera supporters consider the success or failure of certain politicians a matter of dignity. After being defeated in the elections, politicians seek revenge against the Deras who did not vote for them. When a winning party comes to power, the Deras get large subsidies.   A dera's substantial assets, such as land and commercial institutions, are the result of political blessings. The dera leaders believe they are above the law not just due to political patronage but also due to their social acceptance in society. This helps to explain why the enormous, expensive vehicles used by the dera chiefs have red lights and several security guards. Moreover, these dera leaders are able to choose their favorite higher government positions because of their political approach. They could obtain party tickets by recommending specific parties. There is no doubt that Sants and their deras gain wealth from political patronage (Puri, 1989: 336). Due to the small proportion of Sikhs in the Akali group, there was little risk they would ally with their communitarian agenda. Dera politics in India, particularly in Punjab, cannot be seen as a positive trend.

 Political assertiveness cannot be directly linked to occupational transformation in rural Punjab, despite shifting caste dynamics. The Dalit assertion may have originated due to sociocultural disparities, but it has certainly transformed into a political identity. This caused political space for both Hindus and Dalits to assert themselves against the dominant Jat Sikhs. The electoral

dynamics are shaped by the clash of identities that followed the Moga declaration. According to Pramod, Dalits in Punjab are not a monolithic group. In the state, their votes are divided between the Congress, the SAD, and the BSP. Deras help to establish a distinct community identity and recognition. One recent political change in Punjab elections was that Sikh identity concerns have not been raised with the same enthusiasm as they were in previous elections. Nevertheless, Jat Sikh dominance will continue". As a result, Dalit politics is determined to continue to fight against the political hegemony of Jat Sikhs in the coming years. They can further strengthen their negotiating position because they are a powerful vote bank. Dalits in Punjab are already economically and socially stronger than their counterparts in neighbouring states (Bahadur, 2018:6).

3.5 Summing Up

The above discussion has attempted to understand the role of state and identity politics. It examines two aspects: the political marginalization of the Sikh and Dalit minorities in the state, and their cultural assertion; and, emergence of identity politics and questions of how political power affected politics in pre and post-Independence Punjab. The question of distinct political identity, sectarian and communal mobilization, and strata-based, linguistic, and secular groups continued to dominate political discourse. The coexistence of opposing identities and the role of the state gave rise to a variety of political formations, such as coalitions of political parties. In the mid-eighties, the Hindi agitation and Punjabi Suba movement were prominent examples of linguistic and regional issues articulated within the communal frame. The BSP wants to support the Dalits' movement, but caste has always been a dominant political idiom in Punjab. Dalits do not consider themselves as an alternative to political parties due to their lack of participation. As a result, political parties need to focus on grassroot mobilization. This raises the issue of whether there is a consistent pattern in the voting behaviour of Dalits or a distinctive pattern of voting. For example, Dalit Sikhs voted for the SAD or Dalit Hindus and Ravidassia Sikhs/ Dalits voted for the Congress party.

The Akali Dal is dominated by Sikh-Jat-Peasants, whereas Hindu-Khatri-Traders control the BJP. On the other hand, the Congress party represents two opposing identities. Punjab politics is dominated by the Sikh-Jat-peasant alliance. In other words, in Punjab, the religion, caste and class dimension has become a political tool. For example, the Shiromani Akali Dal made political claims varying from religious identity to secular Punjabi identity. The collapse of identity politics and the reintegration of Sikhs into institutional politics has transformed the

political landscape in the state dramatically. The Akali sees itself as a party dedicated only to the panthic or communitarian agenda. Today, they are viewed as a party that represents the interests of the ruling caste and the rural elite. The use of Deras as organizational tool for the emerging caste-based identity politics is still prominent in state politics.

As a result of the turbulent situation, the Punjabi Suba movement and Dharam Yudh Morcha supported the Anandpur Sahib Resolutions. This was followed by militancy in the 1980s. The facade of panthic unity was maintained by invoking the narratives of Sikh struggles and the use of religious symbols. It helped the Akali Dal to protect internal differences among the Sikh community. However, the Akali Dal was not entirely successful in influencing the lower castes of the Sikhs during the period of religious nationalism. There was a lack of lower-caste support because of the Akali Dal's connection to the land-owning, oppressive Jat Sikhs, especially among the Mazhabi voters, who make up the majority of landless agricultural laborers.

As previously stated, the state's large population influence, socioeconomic benefits, effective political participation, and a cultural legacy of rejecting caste-based inequities have not opened the path for the development of any lower-caste party. As a result, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), a Dalit-based 'ethnic party' emerged in 1984. However, the BSP's performance in Punjab has been declining, and the issue now is to establish a support base among Dalits, who represent the vast majority of the population. BSP "s initial success has become a part of history, and nowadays, it is coming to an end. There are some significant factors behind the declining popularity of BSP, especially in Punjab. Dalits are classified into castes, subcastes, religions, classes, and rural-urban divides. There are divisions among party members due to the weak organizational structure, along with the socio-historical structure of Punjab. The main reason for the worrying performance of BSP in Punjab was "factionalism among various caste leaders, which favours the more powerful parties. For example, Dera Ballan gave their support to the SAD-BJP combine by decreasing the traditional Congress and BSP vote.

The political landscape in Punjab changed during the 2017 and 2022 assembly elections due to the AAP party presence. This has influenced how elections were fought in Punjab, compared to earlier elections. Though the AAP party was unable to establish its own political movement, it was able to cause a shift in the votes of both the Congress and the Akali-BJP coalition. In the current assembly election, identity and religion were not on the ballot. During the voting process, several state development related problems were taken into consideration. For example, unemployment and drug addiction. This debate reaches far beyond the traditional

panthic agenda. Even the pan-Hindu identity issue raised at the national level by Akali alliance partner BJP could not secure the votes of the urban Hindu community.

Dera politics in India, particularly in Punjab, cannot be considered as a positive development. The close relationship between Deras, particularly their leaders, and politicians raises several worrying problems. Although religion in Punjab politics is not a new phenomenon, the paradigm begun by religious gurus is not sustainable over the long run. Punjabi society has always been known as a birth place for new cults, but the present politicization of religion is not beneficial for either religion or politics. It is more important for political parties to focus on policy programs than to win votes by any means necessary. In addition, Deras and their leaders receive direct or indirect funding from numerous politicians. Through various schemes, local governments provide them with inexpensive land and other benefits. Even though increased state intervention may not be enough, the media, which is generally seen as the right arm of these deras, could play a more constructive and neutral role.

However, the main solution might rest in the electorate's growing political awareness in order to dissolve the potentially harmful link of religion and politics. Nonetheless, it cannot prepare the way for their fundamental empowerment. Deras is expected to gain politically as the state fails to achieve the much-needed power shift. Since independence, the parties have shown no substantial willingness to allow for internal democracy, which would have allowed marginal community members to fight for leadership positions. Political participation of Dalits and other backward castes has been restricted to simple presence in party forums or legislative bodies, due to reservations for scheduled castes in representative organisations. There has hardly been a real attempt by the Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), or the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), the state's three electorally significant parties, to organise the marginal castes/communities for democratic goals other than securing their vote at the time of elections.

One of the most significant challenges and issues that Dalits face is the lack of a Dalit leader who controls the whole Dalit stratum; now, Dalit politicians have a small constituency. There is a widespread Dalit problem in Punjab, which helps to highlight any significant issues. In the recent elections, no prominent Dalit leader has emerged. Overall, in Punjab, the dispute in Dalit politics between two or three large castes over the distribution of democratic advantages is weakening Dalit politics. Today, Dalit communities have evolved several levels of leadership. Today, Dalit politics suffers from the same political culture as mainstream parties. The conflict of goals, nepotism, and power struggle is weakening Dalit groups. They are being

influenced by what they were supposed to oppose, which is deepening Punjab's Dalit political dilemma. We argue that the recent dera route to the mobilization of Dalit and other backward castes communities should be understood in the context of the state's shifting trajectory of identity politics as the ethno-regional communal division has faded into the background.

The next chapter examines how identity consciousness among Sikhs and Dalits during this time period was confined to religion and cultural domains. It was clear how it could affect politics. In Punjab, there have been significant socioeconomic transformations because of identities   This study examined how this change affected the issue of identity assertions within the Dalit (Ravidassia) community. There is a growing caste-based identity politics movement in the rural Malwa region of Punjab. Even ethnic parties such as the Akali Dal and the BJP have historically been linked to identity politics. They could have realigned themselves with the lower castes and communities by distributing local political power based on identities. The Akali Dal had made attempts to change its political objectives by increasing its own socioeconomic and ethnic base or by merging with other opposition parties. The widespread phenomenon of landlessness among Dalits in Punjab, as well as the Jats' complete monopoly on agricultural land, have led to the current phase of cultural assertions among dalits in Punjab, as dalits have begun claiming and demanding their rights over land. During the Green Revolution of the 1960s, land-owning Jat Sikhs not only became economically dominant, but they also entrenched their control in state politics.

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Chapter 4

Caste Inequalities and Identity Assertion among the Ravidassia in the Malwa region of Punjab

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the prevalent caste identity and the practice of identity assertion in the agrarian Punjab in general and Malwa region. There have been changes in the socioeconomic and political life of the majority of the Ravidassia community in the Malwa region throughout the years. Since Dalits and Sikhs have had a long history of conflict, violence has broken out, while political and socio-economic biases developed identity consciousness and assertion. In this study, we examine the process of agricultural transformations in the rural Malwa region of Punjab. The concept of "caste-based politics" has also been influenced by these interpretations. Therefore, identity politics in rural Punjab are largely driven by land-owning "dominant" castes with political histories. The contemporary agrarian economy of the rural Malwa region is distinguished by caste and class identities among the agrarian community. Despite widespread belief, the Akali government in the state supports the continuation of such identity assertion until today and has not reduced caste and class inequalities.

Due to identity conflicts between the Dalit and Sikh communities, the traditional political structure of the state has been weakened. This weakens their quest for power and society is facing challenges such as inequality and assertiveness. Agrarian societies, for example, may experience inequalities in terms of social and economic aspects. It focuses on landowners' dominant classes, who exploit landless agricultural labourers. There have been factions within the party at the local level, as well as a lack of activity by the panchayat. It is further argued that these rights and customs were in turn grounded upon a system of social norms, beliefs and obligations. These norms governed the relationship between land, kinship and identity in peasant communities in the Malwa region. They are hindering social, economic, and political growth in the region because of their identity-based politics. The Green Revolution had a significant impact on Punjab's identity politics, which changed dramatically.

4.2 Nature of Caste system in Punjab and Role of Biradari system in the Malwa region

For understanding the function of caste in Punjabi society it is useful to clarify the meaning of caste as expressed within interactional contexts. In rural Punjab, the concept of caste in its widest meaning plays a significant role in daily life. This is because it gives a basic philosophy by which members of different vertically classified groups in punjabi society organize their behaviour in relation to one another. Caste status is denoted by the word iati, which is also used to refer to traditional occupations. The caste system can be seen as an extension of kinship at village level. It is difficult to define caste. Generally, jat or zat is the term used in Punjabi, while jati is the term used in all of India. In villages, baradari (brotherhood) is used to refer to the members of the same jat. All members of a biradari can trace their lineage to a common male ancestor, no matter how distant.

In Malwa region, on the basis of biradari, several social classes are divided. Biradari is the most major factor in Punjabi society, more powerful and significant than religion, ethnicity, or any other causes. In Malwa culture, biradari/qaum/zat are considered the most significant and powerful relationships. In the region, political alliances and parties are usually based on the biradari system rather than ideologies Politicians use it frequently in order to form coalitions and maintain loyalty within the caste system. The biradari system has an impact on both local and national politics. The Biradari vote for their own Biradari, which has greater significance than party loyalty. Caste is the first trend that influences voting behavior. The Biradari system played a significant role during local body elections in Punjab. Jatts, are the most significant and effective biradari at state and local politics. Traditionally, the prominent biradari of each district are chosen to serve in district administration. There is a high level of political activity in the Malwa region of Punjab due to its high Jat population.

However, Jat sikhs also wield control over land, religion and politics in the state and in the Malwa. The entire social structure has been divided between higher and lower castes, where the lower caste has no right to enjoy equal rights. This neo-liberal Indian state seems to view constitutional provisions as abstract ideas. Practically, the rights are not meant to help the lower castes. Marx believed that in bourgeois states, the only people with rights are the capitalists, mostly those who control the means of production. There are several instances where the rights of dalits are violated by upper castes and if the victims try to assert their rights, they are

punished by the administration. This study deals with the state of Punjab and Malwa region, where casteism highly exists. In the caste hierarchy, these relationships are permanent and hereditary. The division of castes into sub-castes, known as zat in rural Malwa, shows the more significant aspects of people's daily lives. There is widespread acceptance of the biradari's use and relevance at all sociocultural levels in the region. There can be no denying the significance of biradari, whether in terms of social classes or rural vs. urban regions. According to David Gilmartin, "despite clear pre-colonial origins, the word biradari gained more prevalent political influence in the twentieth century, reflecting the contradictions inherent in the structure of the political entity Through biradari, which emphasizes mutual relationships formed through political interactions, small village leaders were able to establish themselves in larger bureaucratic and political arenas outside the colonial state, while preserving its cultural identity" (Gilmartin 1994:10).

According to 2011 census data, Hindus (38.49 percent) and Sikhs (57.69 percent) make up the majority, followed by Muslims (1.93 percent) and Christians (1.26 percent). Punjab has the highest percentage of Scheduled Castes (SCs) among all Indian states, which constituted 31.9% of the state's total population of 277.33 lakh. In terms of SCs population concentration, Punjab is the state with the highest number of SCs. It is difficult for the State government to recognize SCs because they constitute such a substantial percentage of the state's population. According to the census, 62.3% of the state's total population lives below the poverty line (BPL). According to territorial caste divisions, 73.3 percent of SCs live in rural areas, while 26.6 percent live in urban areas. In terms of religion, 60.8 percent of SCs followed Sikhism, 38.8 percent followed Hinduism, and 0.3 percent followed Buddhism. Between 1981 and 2011, the SCs population grew at a higher rate of 2.3 percent each year compared to the non-SCs population, which grew by 1.4 percent. (SCSP[37], 2016-17:179).

 After 1699, the Sikh community had undergone a radical transformation. In the past, non-militant urban Khatris had controlled the leadership. Among the new converts were Jat peasants from Punjab's central districts, who were low in the Hindu caste hierarchy. According to McLeod, "The emergence of insurgency within the Panth [Sikh society] must be connected to the effect of Jat cultural norms and the economic challenges which forced a violent response" (1976:12-13). As many religious movements in pre-industrial societies, the Sikh movement could not achieve long-term success without breaking with the given socio-economic structure

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[37] Scheduled castes subplan, Report (2016-17).

which was based fundamentally on feudal relationships. There still exists caste among Sikhs despite their religious teachings opposing it. According to D'Souza, "castes from distinct groups dominate the competitive economic sectors. It may be possible for these castes to rely on the support of their caste leaders in order to protect their economic interests from the encroachment of the dominant castes" (D'souza, 1985: 52).

However, he tries to explain how caste and class-based identities emerged and its weakness in rural society. For example, A conflict between Khatri Hindu traders and Jat Sikh farmers over their economic interests becomes an identity problem and leads to animosity between the two castes. There are many differences between caste and the Varna system to be described by the term "dominant caste." The lack of the Dharma-karma philosophy, which supports the caste system, among non-Hindu groups like Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs causes them to suffer. According to these groups, social equality has always been an integral part of their theology. Previously, it was stated that the Indian government recognized Sikhism as a caste-based religion. According to Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, Sikhism, Hinduism, and Buddhism all belong to distinct religions. Due to caste divisions among Sikhs, the untouchable caste has been recognized as a "scheduled caste" and is entitled to caste-based reservations. In contrast, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)'s assertions and manifestations are political and ideological (Mahajan, 2009:25).

Joyce Pettigrew argues that "Sikh society differs from Hindu society due to the absence of a caste system among Sikhs. It is her belief that Sikh culture is more concerned with group identity, respect, dignity and equality, status, and other factors than with norms governing purity and pollution" (Pettigrew, 1975: 4). Caste-based classification often causes a significant difference. As we can see within the Sikh community, there is only one dominant caste. In other words, it shows that "power and privilege" exist in Punjabi society. In the Marxist perspective, economic power always affects the political structure. Dalits who have better economic conditions have been able to attain political power. Their better education has given them more opportunities to obtain jobs, and even higher positions. The transformation among some of the dalits has created a new category among them i.e., the 'elite class' which is known as 'Chamars (Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia)'. The Mazhabis adopted Sikhism to get rid of this caste system and untouchability created by the Hindu religion. Despite establishing their own identity, they face the same issues in Sikhism.

Sikhs in Punjab practice the purity-pollution concept, even though they claim to be egalitarian and separate themselves from the Hindu religion and Varna system. In Punjab, the caste system emerged when a large number of jats converted to Sikhism at the time of the sixth Guru. Generally, they were wealthy and powerful landowners. On the other side, affluent Jat landowners captured lower caste lands and began to dominate, particularly in Punjab's rural districts. Maharaja Ranjit Singh organized the Sikh misals along caste lines, but the misals were equal under Brahmanical principles. The caste system has not yet affected the Sikhs. After the Sikhs came to power, the Mazhabis' social status decreased. At this time, the jats remained at the top of the hierarchy of Punjab. Sikhism transformed the dominant paradigm of the conflict between manual and non-manual labour, causing significant shifts in social relations. The arguments above should not be taken to imply that Sikhism changed the caste system into a moral egalitarian Sikh society. Sikhism remained a caste-based society. Most of the Sikh population belonged to the dalit castes. Among them are the "Jats, Mehtons, Sainis, Ramgarhias, and Ahluwalias" (see jodhka, 2004; Ram,2017; Judge, 2010).

Sikhism was the dominant religion in the state, both in terms of society and theology. Hindus mostly lived in urban areas. The Sikhs, who constituted the second-largest population in the area, mostly worked in the military but also engaged in land agriculture. Most of them were prosperous agriculturalists. The dalits were divided into so many castes with different traditions, cultures, languages and historical background. The SCs in Punjab, like those elsewhere, are not a homogeneous group. The classes among Sikhs have a specific status and position in a hierarchy based on the status given to jobs, levels of education, or money. Castes and social classes coexist within the Sikh community and have become their social identity. The most significant aspect of the caste system is how castes are classified within a village and its surrounding area.

Due to the dynamic nature of caste behaviour, status and ritual purity laws are closely maintained in day-to-day interactions. In a village, there is limited social interaction between people from various social classes. The ability to provide food for others rather than receiving it from lower caste groups represents high status. The landowner caste is widely considered as the top caste in a village. The residential segregation of the scheduled castes in rural areas is a clear manifestation of the concepts of ritual purity and pollution. Most of their homes are situated on property that belongs to the caste of landowners who employ them as bonded agricultural workers. They are not allowed to use the shared cremation grounds. Among the

Sikhs, caste is closely linked with the agricultural system, and jaimani relations (patron/client) are fundamental models of behavior in Punjabi society.

Discussing the nature of the caste system in India, Nihharranjan Ray writes that "...Jati was thus not merely a socio-religious system, but also a system of production and hence an economic system. The Jati system thus regulated and conditioned the economic order of the society as well, a fact which is often missed by historians and sociologists. In 1900, the Punjab government passed the Land Alienation Act which declared all non-Jat caste groups as non-agriculturists and deprived them of buying agricultural land. The Tarkhan (carpenter) biradari's were the first to form their own caste organisation and fight against this unjust legislation. According to the Punjab Alienation of Property Act, Dalits, on the other hand, were denied land ownership. They had no option but to work on the Jat Sikhs' property for a living because there were no other employment options. In contrast, the Dalits and Jats have a conflict relationship because they are both landless agricultural labourers and landowners. Both communities are engaged in a power struggle" (Ray, 1975:78).

The Ad-Dharmis are now a powerful and autonomous community as a result of their increased social mobility and aspirations. In addition, they have become more influential at the local level. About five years ago, the traditionally dominant Jats refused to accommodate them when they asked for representation on the management committee. The Ad-Dharmis decided to file a legal challenge in 1999 questioning how elections for the management committee were held after obtaining no positive outcome from the Jats. The court did not issue a clear decision, but it did order that a small number of Ad-Dharmi observers be permitted to attend the yearly elections for the committee (Jodhka, 2004:167).

In Punjab, Dalits have begun to assert their social position due to improved economic conditions as well as an increasing awareness of social issues. This has also probably led them to other religious bodies promising dignity and social equality. In the process, they also challenged the dominant caste and its claims to represent true Sikhism. The jat Sikhs, however, interpreted it as a challenge to the Sikh-Khalsa identity, which further deepened the existing contradictions between them and the dalits. The most recent example is the conflict between the Akalis and the Dera Sacha Sauda's. These conflicts between dalits and jat Sikhs appear to be more about identity politics than a conflict over religion. They do not represent communalism in the state in any manner.

However, given the religious milieu of Punjab's social context, they frequently take a communal stance. In reality, they are manifestations of a developing dalit assertion against social exclusion, which, if left unresolved, has the potential to develop into violent conflicts. The Chamars were never treated equally at the gurdwara; instead, they constantly faced discrimination. Despite the presence of a prominent Chamar trustee, the Chamar community did not have a representative on the gurdwara management committee. In the 1970s, the Chamars began to organize their own biradari. They called a meeting of the representatives of all Chamar households at which they decided to form their own association called the Ravidassia Sabha. They also agreed to collect funds for setting up their own biradari gurdwara. It was the first step towards asserting their separate "Ravidasi" identity. It has provided the Chamars with an identity which is distinctive yet related to both the Hindu and the Sikh traditions. The "Ravidasi" identity is manifested through their symbolic behaviour, i.e., the nature of their worship, the interior decoration of their gurdwara, their nishan sahib (flag), their personal names, the names of their gurdwara and their constitution.

There are two distinctive features of the nishan sahib ceremony among the Ravidasis. First, the symbol of Sikh insignia has been replaced with the word soham which is the sacred-word of the Ad-Dharm movement; secondly, at the culmination of ardas two slogans are recited - one symbolizes their "Ravidasi" identity whilst the other Indicates their membership of the Sikh panth. What we have argued so far is that caste hierarchy does exist within the panth. Mazhabis and ramdasias are continuing to face discrimination on grounds of caste. Although social mobility among the caste constituency of the panth was one of the greatest achievements of the newly developed religion, it also facilitated some of the shudra castes to acquire the status of dominant castes in the state. It was not the only objective of the panth of Nanak and his nine predecessors. They provided a clear vision and also worked meticulously for the formation of an egalitarian social order completely free from the structures of caste and caste hierarchy. One of the main aspects of the elimination of the caste system is the prevalence of intermarriages. In this regard, Sikh society has failed miserably, particularly in regards to the Dalit Sikhs (Ram, 2004:55).

Over the past 20 years, there have been some changes to the rural political economy and caste structure. Additionally, the democratic election system has significantly changed the village's power structure. "Power" has changed significantly, and appears to be largely determined by caste and land. To put it another way, it appears that the "individual" and the "individual

family" have been losing influence on local politics in the Malwa region. The Sarpanch, for instance, belonged to the Rors caste, whose lands accounted for approximately 6 acres in village II (Moga), in spite of the fact that the Jats owned the majority of land. Sangrur became a significant village (Bal, 2005:45). Sarpanches today primarily come from different castes, Jats or Brahmins, who are mainly small and middle-sized landowners who are ambitious and prepared to strive for a political career because of their identities.   What caused this change in identity politics at a local level? What exactly is the nature of the village's new power structure? What are the implications for regional or state-level politics? While caste has never been a political discourse in Punjab, it has played a key role in state and local politics, unlike in some parts of India.

Until recently, the dominant landowning caste of Jats was the only one who could successfully play caste politics. Dalit groups, too, have begun to express themselves in the political realm. This new paradigm is clearly evident in Talhan's examples. What, therefore, has been the source of their newly discovered political entity? Analyzing the dynamics of social and economic transformation in rural Punjab might be one approach to answering this issue. During the post-1960 Punjab green revolution, the division between dalits and jats got further exacerbated. Through the green revolution, agriculture transformed from a subsistence practice to a commercial one. The market-oriented agriculture favoured the landowners and further marginalised the Dalits (Gill, 2004: 225). Interestingly, it was also during this phase that a newly emerging middle class of educated dalits emerged in Punjab. In fact, it was during this phase of transition in Punjab's agrarian economy that dalit immigration to Europe, North America, and the Gulf gained importance. However, it must be emphasized that the emergence of dalit immigration from Punjab coincided with the wave of migrant labour from Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh.

 The state's political power structure has played a significant role in agricultural transformation. During the post-partition period, political power shifted steadily from urban to rural elites. As a result, the relationship between the peasant community and the upper class was affected by the tendency toward economic modernization of agriculture. As Hamik Deol noted, "The green revolution made farmers extremely dependent on conditions over which they had no control." By the end of the 1970s, a significant percentage of the Sikh peasants had become restless due to the encroachment of commercial agriculture, and political unrest appeared to be imminent. But because the Sikh peasantry adhered to the same religion (Sikhism) and caste (Jat Sikh) as

the landed elite castes, any potential hostility between the landed upper classes and the peasant population was moderated. The political positions of the capitalist farmers in the Anandpur Shahib Resolution (ASR), for instance, made it quite clear that the main conflict involved agriculture and industry.

However, it revealed the urban petty bourgeoisie's contradictions. Finally, the socio-economic aspects ignored the contradiction between capitalist farmers and landless labourers in the countryside. The widespread disintegration of the "village community" is perhaps the most critical factor in this transformation. We saw processes of "separation, alienation, and a loss of freedom" in the Punjab villages as discussed earlier. How do the village communities empower themselves at the grassroots level or do they believe they have political power? As mentioned in the above paragraphs, the ancient hierarchical structures have disintegrated, giving them a sense of understanding, and they are aware of their political rights. At the regional level, they interact and take part in the broader world of caste and community politics. They are, nonetheless, acutely aware of the vulnerabilities associated with poverty and marginalization. At the village level, politics is now intertwined with regional politics and the governmental system, and it has been affected for a variety of reasons. In the changing political landscape, there is a new class of "political entrepreneurs" who are not necessarily wealthy, but generally from upper or dominant castes. It is necessary for them to coordinate with local politicians and community members.

In the next section, we must find the growing focus on anti-Hindu Sikh identity in the study of contemporary political economy and how kulaks politics played a significant role. Over the past three decades, the green revolution's gains and failures have changed Punjab's political economy. There is an identity problem and its politics among the Sikh-Dalit community due to caste-class and rural-urban cleavages. Caste-based economic inequalities are also prominent. In this context, Punjab, which is one of the agriculturally successful and progress states with the highest share of SCs population provides a conducive platform to examine the inter-caste inequality in access to agricultural land at state vis-a-vis district levels.

4.3 Politics after Green Revolution

The focus of this section is on the Punjabi agricultural economy's declining competitiveness in the context of globalisation processes. We examine the new difficulties that are emerging and the ruling class's failure to deal with them. The caste system forms the basis of social structures because the Sikh community dominates Punjab state. It raised social consciousness and increased involvement in the political process. Politics among farmers is no longer limited to elections for village Panchayats. They were the dominant power at the state and local levels. The successive state governments along with the central government, however, have not adequately responded to such concerns. The centre has still been pursuing the same agricultural policies as was under the state-centric development-planning model. Despite the marked shift in the policy making in the post-1991 period, there has not been much concern for the agrarian economy of the state. Sikhism has become an ideological weapon of the Kulaks to build a 'common' bond among Sikhs of all classes and to bring them under their command. It is a vital part of the Kulak strategy to fight commercial and industrial bourgeois interests in order to maintain their hegemony.

4.3.1 Emerging of Kulaks Politics and Identity Consciousness in the Peasantry

The transition to capitalism in Punjab agriculture has created a significant concentration of land and agricultural assets in the hands of a minority. Due to the loss of their primary source of income—the land—the majority of small and large farmers are now forced to work for free. The class to benefit from the increased production and wealth as a result of this development is the capitalist farmers (the Kulaks). The conflict between the Kulaks and the rural landless peasants has become more prominent as a result of the differentiation of the peasantry. Another research on Punjab's political leadership in 1991 found that "the legislative leadership of the Akali Dal is dominated by agriculturalists and the legislature belonging to the Congress party comes primarily from non-professions." These Kulak-led organisations have helped spread a belief among Sikhs that they belong to a single group (panth) who are discriminated by the Indian government, sometimes known as the "Hindu government," and that this oppression comes from the central government (Singh, 1976:67).

The earlier urban petty-bourgeois Sikh reformers had supported the Khalsa identity to create a distinct non-Hindu Sikh identity, whereas the Kulaks had advocated an anti-Hindu Sikh

identity (to hide contradiction between the haves and have-nots, as well as to protect its interests against the big bourgeoisie). In Sikhism, various social forces, particularly the producing classes, have continued to oppose the Kulaks' dominance by maintaining independent centers independent of SGPC. Under the new agricultural policy, there was an increase in agricultural production, investment, and consumption. As a result, farmers were more dependent on the market and financial institutions to provide the necessary financing. Political pressure began to play a vital role in obtaining the required inputs, such as fuel, chemical fertilizers, and seeds of new High-yield varities. During the Green Revolution, farmers were more reliant on learning and the sale of their goods. They had to sell some of their products to buy agricultural supplies and other necessities. Agriculture did become a profitable industry in the first stages of the Green Revolution. However, the prices of farm goods and inputs have occasionally been a significant cause of worry for all peasantry groups. It was challenging to obtain remunerative market pricing for agricultural commodities until farmers were politically aware of their rights (Kaur, 1982:271).

Small farmers have also become aware of their rights. They are increasingly taking part in the political process to protect their political and fiscal interests. Agriculture has raised the demands of all sectors of Punjab's rural community. It was difficult for local workers, but emigrant labour began to demand more significant salaries over time. Even though agricultural labour is an unorganized industry, they fight for better wages at the village level. The rising prices of essential commodities increased Punjabis' political awareness. The considerable influence of agricultural labourers was a major draw for political parties and the shifting electoral landscape. They were the primary constituency for the political parties, and in exchange for their votes, money was distributed. Some political parties have expressed a desire to organize small farmers and landless agricultural workers. Various organizations, like the Punjab Khetibari Zamindar Union, Khet Mazdoor Sabha, Kisan Sabha, Dehati Mazdoor Sabha, and Zamindari Union, demonstrate an increase in political awareness among farmers and landless workers. Kisan groups have been fighting on behalf of the landless on various problems in various parts of the state. The CPI-SFI, AISF, PSU, and DYFI youth and student wings are likewise striving to establish a presence among the landless and marginalized peasants. From 1972 to 1975, farmers and agricultural labourers worked together in anti-price rise protests (Gill, 1999:360).

4.3.2 The Political Parties and Agrarian politics

 The Akali Dal's leadership came to lie in the hands of the middle and prosperous peasantry, as well as the urban petty bourgeoisie. It continued its anti-colonial ideology by supporting self-rule in strong alliance with the Congress party. Both the Akali Dal and Central Sikh League supported giving Sikhs special status in legislatures and governments. The Central Sikh League and the Akali Dal asked that one-third of the seats be set aside for Sikhs due to the Sikhs' significant land revenue payment paid by the Sikh community. The demand was never granted, but none of these organisations responded to the call for equality with Dalits and Hindus. Unlike the left's revolutionary parties, which used their socialistic policies to win over the working class by fighting against feudalism and capitalism. The parties of the wealthy land owners did not have a political platform other than using religious claims to win over the masses of voters. As a result, the interests of the Sikh community's economically powerful segments were supported by the development of a distinct exclusionary non-Hindu identity. It did not, however, prevent aristocratic interests from forming alliances with other landed interests from different communities to protect their shared class interests.

The Green Revolution has established new middle-class and upper-middle-class landowners in rural areas. Punjab's rural culture has largely been dominated by the Green Revolution's beneficiaries. This affluent peasantry not only maintains power over the Panchayati Raj, cooperative institutions, and the State Legislative Assembly but also uses advantage of the government apparatus to achieve its goals. In the Punjab during the post–1960s, the already-existing gap between the Jats and Dalits widened. The process of the green revolution transformed the traditional subsistence character of agriculture into commercial farming. The Dalits were further marginalized by market-oriented agriculture, which favoured landlords. It is interesting to note that in Punjab during this time, a new middle class of educated Dalits arose. The emergence of this new Dalit class and the expansion of the Ambedkarite movement in the area contributed to the development of Dalit awareness in the state. In Punjab's rural areas, particularly in its Doaba sub-region, the rise of Dalit awareness led Dalit agricultural labourers to demand higher salaries. The Dalit community sometimes used the coercive pressure practice of refusing to work unless the landlords raised their salaries (Gill, 2004:225).

Hindus dominated all the urban areas of Punjab. With the Hindu petty bourgeoisie dominating the majority of the markets in Punjab, the Sikh urban petty bourgeoisie found itself in a position of relative inferiority. The feudal aristocracy of Punjab were attracted to the Unionist Party,

which was established in 1923, from all different religious sects. The Muslim aristocracy was the largest component in this collaboration. The Muslim elite fiercely opposed the Sikhs' demand for one-third of the legislature's seats with special status, but the Hindu aristocracy kept silent since they were seen by Muslims as being a part of the larger Hindu society. The Muslim League, the Unionist Party, the Akali Dal, and the Congress were the major political parties in Punjab pre- independence. At this time, the Congress Party was seen as a party of urban interests, whilst the Unionist Party asserted that it was the "only supporter" of the countryside. In the years leading up to partition, Sir Chhotu Ram was regarded as the "peasant savior" for getting the Punjab Assembly to approve the legislation known as the "golden laws." The peasantry who was in debt had benefited from this law (Brar, 1989:87).

The rural land elites dominated major sectors including agriculture, health, education, law enforcement, and local government. The rural bourgeoisie had a strong interest in all of these territories. The Punjab's Sikh and Hindu land elites were happy with the central government's decision to reorganize the states according to their respective linguistic groups. These divisions were used to hide the conflict between commodities, especially irrigation. The affluent Hindu small bourgeoisie supported the rural Hindu interests and was able to take advantage of the conflict among the rural interests. In comparison with equivalent agrarian areas, urban interests would have been divided along linguistic lines. Despite the growing economic bourgeoisie, the urban petty bourgeoisie in undivided Punjab remained a powerful force. Thus, a strong challenge was prepared against the state's cultural division.

During the era of electoral politics before the 1940s, however, Punjabi land elites' rivalry did not adversely affect political interests. The landed elites were connected to the colonial state in a way that maintained their continued support for the regime. Many people began to consider Congress as an alternative. The Congress, too, established a national mainstream by accepting and merging major social groups that could influence voters. Additionally, after 1950, Congress passed several laws and initiatives to promote agriculture, including land consolidation, increased irrigation and the development of a favourable competitive market, and support for farming systems (Pettigrew; 1980:43). The Kulaks found that the newly formed federal government would benefit them, and that their interests lay with Congress rather than the Akali Dal. In 1948, the Akali Dal faction controlled by the Kulaks supported its alliance with the Congress party. The petty bourgeois were represented by Master Tara Singh, who represented their political uncertainty. All sections of Punjabi society were called upon to

support the Akali agitation for a Punjabi state by Sant Fateh Singh. This was the beginning of agricultural capital's hegemony claim over the linguistically defined home market. As a result, the new state tried to control other sectors of the economy, including the urban petty bourgeoisie. Some significant agrarian groups in the non-green revolution states were agitated by the central government's change in agriculture policy.

The Kulaks fought any attempts to challenge their hegemony as Indira Gandhi sought to resolve the conflicts and economic crisis. Congress suffered from these difficulties due to a division within the party. In the Congress, Indira Gandhi started recruiting minorities and Dalits to replace the Kulak-based leadership. A few Kulak leaders turned to regional groups to challenge Indira Gandhi's monopoly of political power. As a result, the Congress lost a number of states and returned to the center with a reduced majority. Congress won only 48 seats out of a total of 104 seats in the newly formed Punjab, falling short of an absolute majority. The Akali Dal won 24 seats, the Jan Sangh won 9, the Communist parties won 8, and different independents and smaller parties got 13 seats. Under the leadership of Punjab Chief Minister Gurnam Singh, the first non-Congress administration was established. In the elections, rural Sikhs mainly supported the Congress. The urban Sikhs preferred minority parties, and a few voted for the Jan Sangh. In both urban and rural regions, Hindus supported the Jan Sangh. The Communist Party and the Scheduled Caste Federation were supported by the scheduled castes. Due to the previous Congress's agricultural policy, they decided not to vote in the general election. Rural areas also provided a significant number of votes for the Communist Party, particularly from small farmers and migrant workers (Narang, 1986:30).

In PEPSU, the Communist Party, which had strongly supported a powerful anti-tenancy movement, had achieved significant progress among the landless and small peasantry. According to an analysis of the Communist Party in Punjab, the party's popularity grew sharply between 1956 and 1958. There was particularly strong support among the small and marginal peasants. This helped the party reduce its membership among the middle and rich peasants from 84 percent to 50.6 percent. In the same period, the number of poor peasants and workers without land who supported it significantly increased. The urban petty bourgeoisie had become outraged at the Congress party's efforts to forge a wide alliance of lower castes in the Punjab. The Congress party supported one faction of the Akali Dal to break this Kulaks-led coalition. A faction of Akali peasants led by Lachrnan Singh Gill and Dr. Jagjit Singh Chohan formed a new government with support from the Congress at the end of November 1967. Kulaks realized that a majority Sikh state did not translate into exclusive control of state power through

the electoral coalitions and temporary alliances of various forces. The contradiction between the haves and have-nots had sharpened to the level of open rebellion. The Akali Dal and the Jan Sungh coalition was formed in response by the wealthy rural and urban classes, but it was ultimately defeated due to internal conflicts.

The industrial crises and their attempted solution through liberalization with license-permit raj had sharpened the contradiction between agriculture and industry. On a political level, it arose in the arena of center-state relations. The Green Revolution had the greatest impact on dalit communities in the region. Sikh identity and solidarity have always been highly valued by the Akali Dal urban leadership. The leadership of rural Jat farmers, who now controlled the Akali party, supported peasant class policies. The Congress' land reform, land ceiling, and food zone policies upset the affluent farmers. An alternative leadership emerged to oppose these policies. Changes in the state's socio-political conflict can be correlated with it. It sought public funding for capital investments in the expansion of agriculture. This contributed to the absence of communal politics as well, with Punjab's various religious organizations interacting on a secular level under the Unionist umbrella, despite their communal alliance (Jalal 1981:45).

The state supported the alliance of class factions which constituted the rural population group most strongly associated with the feudal quest. By considering the Punjabi landed classes as a homogeneous group connected by a shared desire for agrarian wealth and accumulation, it has been achieved. This was done by defining precisely what an "agriculturalist group or class" in Punjab was using the Land Alienation Act. The state claimed to be concerned about the prosperity of the zamindars and agriculturalists as reason for intervening to help its supporters. In the dispute between these two groups, one of the major issues was the agriculture sector's tax-free status. A new coalition of minorities and Dalits led by Indira Gandhi posed the greatest obstacle. It was formed to resolve contradictions between the ruling classes and the working classes. She maneuvered to defend the overall interests of the ruling classes- the capitalist farmers and the industrial bourgeoisie. It was in 1972 that the trade terms began to shift in favor of industry and against agriculture. The new class of wealthy farmers was becoming a politically dominant class. They also became market-oriented and price-conscious. Now, they were influencing state policies on the product, input prices, and grain procurement because they were not only producing for family consumption, but they were also producing surpluses and were investing in the non-agriculture sector. The enormous subsidies on fertilizers, power, irrigation, and credit were also helping in the emergence of farmers (Verma, 1986:80).

Despite organizational divisions, state repression, an agricultural crisis, and a wave of suicides, the farmers of Punjab have never forgotten their struggle over the last more than 100 years. Such as:

- 1907 Pagri Sambhal Jatta movement against Colonial-era laws
- 1948-52 PEPSU Tenants' Struggle led by Lal Party for giving land ownership to landless tillers
- 1958-59 Anti-Betterment Levy agitation against costs of irrigation
- 1978-84 The agitation was for higher procurement prices for crops
- 2015 Struggle for adequate compensation for the pest-hit cotton

Peasants have struggled for centuries in Punjab, including during colonial rule and independent India. The farmer protests in 2020 against recently enacted farm laws are like those of 1907. In 1907, the 'Pagri Sambhal Jatta'[38] movement began against the Punjab Land Alienation Act, 1900; the Punjab Land Colonization Act, 1906; and the Doab Bari Act. Later, an agitation for higher procurement prices for wheat and paddy led by Bharti Kisan Union was led mainly by rich peasants. While the BSP's victory in the 1970s and 1980s undoubtedly opened up the political space because the party received considerable support from the urban and rural poor. The election results showed nothing more than a marginal change in power towards the traditional landed aristocracy and rich peasantry. Due to a restricted membership, only large landowners were permitted to vote.

In the decades afterwards, the scope of elected representatives was gradually expanded. The regime, however, established institutional limits to maintain the political dominance of its land supporters. Further, Kumar argues that the "BSP's ideological discourse on purity/pollution has only found limited resonance in a society where Brahminical values have never been particularly dominant" (Kumar, 2007:2043). As a result, manufacturing employment increased significantly in rural areas during the 1970s and 1980s. Punjab was one of just four states (the others being Haryana, Kerala, and West Bengal) in 1993–1994 where the majority of rural and urban people worked primarily in non-farm jobs. This was a result of the decreased labor-absorptive capability of agriculture as well as the introduction of new rural industrial facilities (Sinha, 2021: 704). Despite Punjab's political gains, it was not able to gain a position in socio-

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[38] Ajit Singh Sandhu spearheaded a movement against the anti-farm laws enacted by the British in 1907. This was later called the Pagri Sambhal Jatta movement.

economic status due to a lack of leadership and identity issues among communities and parties. Partly, this is seen as a consequence of government neglect. Chadha (1986) claimed that there has been a rural bias in the political system that has caused resources to be disproportionately directed toward agriculture.

According to Murali (2017), Punjab's political structure is defined by "wide-capitalist coalitions and competitive populism," which is blamed for the state's poor economic growth. This argument is more socially based. Both of the major parties/party coalitions in the state, the Bharatiya Janta Party-Shiromani Akali Dal coalition and the Indian National Congress party, rely on a variety of supporters to win elections. Although entrepreneurial castes are included, their size is far smaller than that of the agricultural castes. Because of this, governments are forced to adopt populist policies that favour farmers at the expense of industry. Therefore, a combination of socio-economic and political factors restricted the transformation of agrarian capital into industrial capital in Punjab.

Nevertheless, neither the Bahujan Samaj Group (BSP) nor any other SC political party maintains considerable power at the state level. Politics in Punjab are controlled by the Congress Party and the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), which are supported by the farming and trading communities. The SCs in Punjab tended to support the Congress until around 1980 because, unlike the Jat Sikh-dominated Akali Dal, it was ostensibly committed to secularism, the abolition of untouchability, and the implementation of pro-poor policies. As the Congress began catering to the 'middle classes' in the 1980s, a section of this power bloc moved to form a political organization with dalits as its sole constituency. This dalit-based power bloc of the urban petty bourgeoisie has shifted alliances and political stands to ensure its political survival. The agricultural and industrial bourgeoisie dominates the governing SAD and Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) coalition in power since 2007, but it has also reserved government seats for the Hindu urban bourgeoisie historically affiliated with the Congress (Kalsi, 1989: 201).

The elite take ethnic group values and cultural practices in their quest for power and economic advantages. According to Brass, that the consciousness arising from such symbolism is "built more upon the selection and manipulation of symbols from the past than the persistence of real political structure into the present." The 'elite' in competition for economic and political power appear extremely intelligent in the 'selection' and 'manipulation of symbols from the past to construct identities and communal consciousness. In the Malwa region, the ongoing debate is

focused on the mode of production, which is based on class and caste identities. It sought to explain how the religious manifestation leading castes in two communities- Hindus and Sikhs-invoked the loyalty of their co-religionists to safeguard their interests.

In the past decade, Akali leaders and party workers were more focused on their party's electoral success, a result of increasing attention to the SC vote. This involved creating various schemes such as the Atta Dal scheme, which provided 400 units rather than 200 units of electricity for SCs. Furthermore, there is the Shagun scheme for poor brides from all communities, and old age pensions ranging from Rs 250 to Rs 400 per month. Additionally, SCs in Punjab have received funding from Akali politicians to construct gurdwaras, cremation sites, and upgrade the roads and drains in their neighbourhoods (Government of Punjab, 2015). In general, these various schemes are empowering the Ravidassia Dalits on the ground in rural areas. An influential Congress Party worker from the Jat Sikh farming community in Moga District even claimed that the Ravidassia Dalits were becoming so demanding and assertive that he foresaw a revolution. Male labourers under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act received a daily wage of Rs 250; female labourers received a daily wage of Rs 184. (MGNREGA).

Additionally, it has become a possibility for them to get money from other jobs. For the majority of Jat farmers, class division is becoming more apparent, especially during times when better-paying jobs are not available. Some claim that although many small farmers have seen declining social mobility and rising debt, individuals who hold land larger than four acres have thrived by establishing commission agent firms, retail stores, and real estate agencies. While their farm revenues may be stagnant, they still hold a significant amount of wealth due to the absurdly high land prices—up to Rs 4,00,000 per acre. They also get the most from free canal water and electricity used to power irrigation tube wells. It estimates that 94% of state agriculture subsidies are given to these farmers (Martin, 2015: 43).

It is relevant to note here that the state's infrastructural power was premised on the relationship the government had with its land allies. Throughout their time in Punjab, the British themselves formed an extremely small part of the actual machinery of the government. This was due to increasing amounts of administrative responsibility passed to Punjabis, they drew most of whom were from the landed classes. At the local level, it accomplished this through the empowerment of prominent peasant proprietors and leaders. This was done through a continuation of the jajmani system that characterized the Sikh revenue administration.

However, even Jat farmers, who have fared considerably better than most Ravidassia in large part due to state policies and connections, believe that Ravidassia now dominate Punjab. Nonetheless, it is evident that Jats no longer have control over labour and are having difficulty obtaining both temporary and permanent workers. The farmers were dissatisfied with growing wages and labour shortages, with many blaming the MGNREGA program. A growing number of farmers with land larger than 10 acres complain about finding reliable workers and the rising cost of farming. It is no longer possible for them to hire farm servants.

The caste hierarchy as it exists has become highly functional for those castes which seem to have stake in maintaining the continuity of the caste hierarchy. As such, the caste hierarchy does not seem to have disappeared. This form of class cohesion did not develop in Punjab because of its politics. Instead, rivalry for power and patronage became a leading cause of unrest. This left various factions of the land elite vulnerable to manipulation by an establishment aiming to preserve and further its own interests. At the local level, land politicians replaced state patronage and power with votes and influence. These politicians relied on their traditional sources of power as well as their economic strength and connections to the state, to keep their hold on the countryside. The propertied classes are also united in their common aim to maintain the hegemony of the lower classes. Nevertheless, they may be engaged in actual conflicts of interest between land and capital or between urban and rural areas.

4.4. Role of traditional (dalit & non-dalit) Panchayats

In villages and regional levels, political power was inevitably associated with land control, and that was reinforced by kin groups' pride and loyalty when controlling land. Due to their social status, the traditional caste panchayats still have influence on local governance. It frequently works either in conjunction with the elected panchayats or, in certain situations, completely ignores them in order to enforce its cultural codes. There are numerous instances of traditional caste panchayats preventing local self-governance organizations from operating effectively. In panchayat elections everywhere, caste has been used to polarize people in a struggle for power at the grassroots level. Money and liquor flow freely. The traditional power structures, which are supported by Panchayat Secretaries and other government officials, often manipulate the constitutional mandate and rule by proxy. The dominant caste leaders in villages, in order to control panchayati raj institutions, tend to control remotely the Dalit political representatives who are dependent on them due to various compulsions. The elected Dalit candidates are both

men and women. In the event of defiance or assertion of rights by a Dalit sarpanch, the panchayat is effectively dissolved by unique methods. Elected members from the higher caste would strategically avoid officially meetings, which would therefore be unable to take place due to a lack of the needed majority.

According to media reports, Dalit sapanches, particularly women, have frequently been the victims of public humiliation and even physical intimidation. The dynamics of the SC group in the village are diverse. Due to their sense of insecurity in the village, SCs lack the confidence, lack of public support and lack of organized structure to participate in panchayats. For example, there would be no mixing of the castes Sikhs and Chamar. The effects of this fragmentation may be observed when a Dalit elected representative finds it difficult to speak out on issues which affect the community. According to a Dalit Mukti Morcha activist, "The panchayat has two major means of discrimination. One is to keep Dalits away from panchayat proceedings and development work; the other is to target Dalits whenever they are in power and to declare their posts null and void after a period of time". This has barred many Dalits from exercising their rights in the panchayat institutions. Those who survive are usually those who work according to the dictates of the caste identity or by applying corrupt politics (Tandon, 2008: 172).

The political power of a biradari is based on its representatives' capacity to bring biradari members together during times of rivalry and conflict with competitors. In Panchayat elections, zamindar biradaris show unity by determining how and when to run for office or support a candidate in local or general elections. If one zamindar biradari supports a candidate, their opponent will almost certainly oppose that candidate. The Jat community, for instance, participates in faction politics in rural constituencies due to rivalries between local zamindar. In Local Bodies' Election 2002-03, the quota of seats was reserved for Dalits (peasants and women). The respondents mentioned that a few men and women from the Dalit community contested this election and won their seats. However, this political shift benefited socio-economic status rather than empowering individuals. Traditionally, Jat Sikhs nominated representatives to run for peasant seats so that they could grab the votes of their biradari members for important seats so that Landlords were challenged. Bathinda (2.1 percent); Ludhiana (8.31 percent); Mansa (2.32 percent); Moga (2.30 percent). It shows that communities used the traditional panchayat system to choose their leaders based on identities.

The state believed that members of these classes, such as Jats, could maintain peace and stability in the rural areas through panchayat dominance (Gupta, 2006: 10).

In spite of caste associations, membership in various groups and political parties facilitating their entry into politics, these forms of civil society did not support their independence. The study on dalit leadership in panchayats points out that political parties have not helped dalits at the village level particularly when upper caste groups confronted them (Kumar & Rai: 2006). In fact, political parties have coopted them for their vested interests and created in them the feelings of being obliged to them for their positions. For example, the newly formed SAD-BJP government headed by Parkash Singh Badal announced the Zila Parishad elections in Punjab. Political parties released their manifestos prior to the 2007 election in order to attract voters. After issuing the election notice, the SAD-BJP alliance and BSP selected their candidates. Other political parties that were also involved in the Zila Parishad elections were the CPI and CPM, but their influence was not very significant because the main fight was between the Congress and SAD-BJP alliance to capture power. Akalis won a landslide victory in the elections for the positions of Chairman of Panchayat Samiti and Vice-Chairman of Zila Parishad.

Through structural changes, it was expected that the new leadership would be different from traditional leadership. This is because it would not represent just the dominant strata of society, as has been the case so far. According to studies of grassroots leadership, Dalits were very few in Panchayati Raj institutions before the 73rd constitutional amendment act. One or two Dalits were either co-opted or nominated. People of upper castes and political influential families dominated positions reserved for Scheduled Castes in PRIs. The Panchayat election of 1994 has brought a major change in the character and composition of Panchayati Raj institutions. A large number of people from the underprivileged section of society have not only been elected to various positions. However, they have also come to occupy significant positions like chairman of Panchayat Samiti and president of Zila Parishad. As Scheduled Castes are obstructing opportunities, reservation may be the only way to ensure their presence in PRIs, given the traditions and cultural customs of rural areas, the patriarchal nature of family, a lack of education and access to information and media, and poor exposure to outside influences.

The influence of caste on the politics of Punjab is evident. One has seen that the person who occupies the top position socially, economically and educationally is the one who actually dominates the politics of Punjab. In reality, it is not the people of all categories who control the

politics of this state but it is guided by a limited category of people. As far as leadership at the grassroots level is concerned the village scene reflects the tradition of leadership role of the landed class. The basic fact is that a handful of the landed elite have been dominating the Gram Panchayat and the other two Panchayati Raj Institutions. The poor and marginal farmers are not allowed to have any effective say in village affairs. Elite among the Dalits have been recognized as leaders of their castes and communities. In some areas where they were numerically or economically dominant, leadership role was assumed by them at the district, sub-division or village level. Furthermore, many people believe that corruption, intimidation, and violence are on the increase and Punjab was ruled by the "goonda raj." According to Gill's, this view is based on substantial changes. He claims that governmental oppression in Punjab during the counter-insurgency period destroyed farmer and labour organizations, reducing politics to the exercise of brute power via the use of money and muscular strength. He explains how the governing SAD has tried to safeguard both political controls, defending goondas, and threatening and harassing opponents (Gill, 2013:16).

The role of panchayat also reveals that ruling SAD politicians use harassment and intimidation to keep their party's dominance on certain panchayats or to delegate responsibility to a single local leader. A panchayat is split equally between Congress and Akali panches and lacks the requisite majority to make decisions. As a result, several studies assert and provide strong evidence that incumbent Akali politicians coerce opposition panchayat members who cannot afford to buy. This approach is most often employed on SC opposition panches who lack the requisite party and police ties and the financial resources to defend themselves. In one village, a Jat sarpanch and the local Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) had first tried to persuade a Mazbhi Sikh panchayat member to join his faction with a bribe. And that if this did not work, he would either threaten him with fake police charges or get him roughed up by some local goondas (Martin, 2015:40).

All the above shows that local governance is political and based on identities. It is quite possible for local leaders to develop significant power and influence in the parliamentary democracy we have. This provides them with the means to pressure the district administrator to approve irregularities such as persecuting a particular political party, engaging in corrupt activities, misallocating governmental assets and funds, and so on. Social hierarchy within higher castes and between higher and lower castes is losing its grip whereas within lower castes

it is gaining more value. The role of local bodies like village panchayats and other community groups has been examined in the above section and will continue further.

4.5 Village Panchayats Common Lands (Shamlat Land)

In India, CPRs (common property resources) include a wide variety of resources, such as village grasslands, common thrashing grounds, drainage village ponds, tanks, rivers, among other things (Jodha,1986). In most of the states, customary laws have traditionally governed these resources, in accordance with geographical, economic and social specificities, cultural nuances and requirements of local communities. It should be noted that, despite the fact that CPRs make an invaluable contribution to the rural economy, particularly for the poorer and economically marginalized sections, by ensuring rural equity in terms of availability, distribution, and access, there is no official estimate of their enormity, substance, and difference. In reality, panchayats and local communities are frequently the most reliable and dependable sources of information. This is because most communities in India had access to all types of commons by tradition.

In Punjab, there were extensive common lands, known as banjar kadim, held collectively by the malikan-deh[39], which is known as the village proprietary body. There were also other categories of uncultivated land held in common, such as the abadi-deh[40] or the residential area, the catchment area or johads, the area around the village site or the gora deh[41]. In the case of agriculturally prosperous states like Haryana and Punjab, common lands have come under severe strain and there has been a stark decline due to multiple reasons like urbanization, commercialization, impact of the green revolution, illegal encroachment by dominant castes, lack of proper management by village panchayats, breakdown of community institutions etc. In fact, with the passage of time, ownership, usage and access to these resources have become sources of conflict and contestations among and within communities.

In Malwa region, land became the primary source of power. Though Punjab has the highest proportion of Scheduled Castes of any state in the Indian Union, only a small number of them own or cultivate agricultural land. However, in Punjab, just 4.8% of them were farmers in 1991. They are mostly found in the Punjabi areas of Majha and Malwa, where they actively struggle

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[39] The term means owners of the village.

[40] Village abadi deh includes streets, play areas, schools, drinking wells and ponds, and dharamshalas.

[41] It is a vacant space adjoining the village site. It is reserved for the extension of the village dwellings.

for ownership of the common agricultural lands used by panchayats for self-cultivation. In 2011, the majority (52.2%) of people still worked in low-paying agricultural jobs. In the Malwa region, Siri[42] still exists. Additionally, SCs have a higher prevalence of landlessness. According to statistics from the Agriculture Census of India in 1990-1991, around 77% of SCs were landless and 87% of SCs who owned land were small and marginal farmers. Approximately 55% of families lack access to land, compared to 38% of all households nationwide (Annual Report of National Commission for Scheduled Castes 2015-16) (Mondal, 2019:2). Iyengar (1998) argues that rural economies declined due to modernization, which destroyed local institutions and practices.

Another significant reason behind degradation of common property resources is privatization. Perhaps the single most visible feature and proof of caste in rural Punjab is the distribution of agricultural land, the most significant productive asset in any agrarian economy. Punjab has also been the only state in India where the share of the Dalits in the agricultural land is the lowest (2.34 per cent). As per available data, less than 5 per cent of all Dalits are cultivators and primarily work on the ground as labourers or do menial jobs. During 1990-91, there were 11 16, 951 operating holdings on 40, 33,000 hectares of land. Out of these holdings[43], the Scheduled Caste holdings were 54,000, accounting for 4.8 per cent of total holding and 2.4 per cent of the cultivable area. On the other hand, the upper classes own and operate almost the entire area under cultivation (Sethi 2011: 46). They also control common property resources such as shamlat land, Panchayati land and places of worship. The property regimes are divided into private, state, common, and open access resources based on the system of laws and regulations established to control any specific resource. The properties that the state owns and controls are known as state-owned properties. In the case of private property, ownership of the resource clearly belongs to a person or a group of people.

However, there is a lack of clarity on who controls what and who has the authority to use shared resources or properties. According to Jodha (2000) "50 to 80 percent of the privatized common land were given to people who already had relative more land. Government policies to redistribute land among different socio-economic groups for purposes of housing and cultivation also failed. Conflict poses a serious challenge in governing the commons. It may be

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[42] "Siris" system (labourers connected to a landlord, receiving advance payments and, in certain cases, collecting interest on the deposit and other debts).
[43] According to Punjab's statistical abstract for 2011, the Scheduled Caste's holdings declined from 4.8 percent to 0.2 percent (2005-2006).

mentioned here that commons, such as land and forests, exhibit specific characteristics that give rise to unavoidable conflicts". These characteristics include multiple actor groups, complex institutional arrangements, and significant material and cultural values. Conflict, in fact is a part of the day-to-day aspect of resource management. The problem arises because the State tends to retain most, if not all, ownership of land and this is supported by legislations (de jure) that can often be traced back to colonial periods. Simultaneously, local people possess customary rights reflecting their de facto management of natural resources for decades, if not centuries. This conflict of interest between local and resource-dependent people (communities) as well as between developers and governments exhibits a serious power imbalance.

In this context, caste is an influential marker of political, social and economic relations and this is also reflected over access and use of common resources. In India, despite guaranteeing equality to all citizens and zero tolerance to discrimination of any kind by the constitution, the practice of untouchability and discrimination is still widespread all over the country against the marginal communities (especially dalits). It may be mentioned here that generally people from these communities are socially and economically disadvantaged. They continue to face discrimination, brutal atrocities and exclusion on the basis of caste especially while using common resources. In the current political arena, caste inequality, assertion, and conflict over common resources are contentious issues in the state.

Dalits and landowners from upper castes have fought for the use of lands for cultivation and common grazing in the villages. Singh (2011) highlights that when dalits attempt to claim their rights to possess or use common resources, upper castes would violently react against them, particularly against dalit women. This is especially true when women attempt to access forestry or other resources on landholdings. After the village community transformed into a traditional family system with the passage of time, land began to be owned by families instead of the entire community. Despite such changes, certain portions of land remained communal property for common use, known as village common land, which is substantial in many villages even today though its extent varies across the state. Kessinger's study (1974) provides historical evidence about the strong control maintained by the village proprietary body over land use in rural Punjab. This meant a radical change not only in land use but also in the community's relationship with land. This increase occurred at the expense of common land in Punjab. So due to this the rights of marginal communities were weakened and their rights to common property resources were also undermined.

The issue has become even more complicated due to factors like debt, low resource base, upper caste violence, and social boycott in recent years. In addition to these, there are increasing incidences of conflict between the rich and the poor, particularly between the upper and lower castes. This conflict is about access, struggle, or bargaining over distribution of these resources. It is predicted that in the coming years factors like agricultural development, commodification of the economy, population pressure will further result in the encroachment of poor rights over commons. Jodhka (2004) based on his study in rural Punjab reveals how dominant castes discriminate the scheduled caste communities in the region over common resources resulting in severe conflicts over such resources. Moreover, untouchability was practiced around common water sources, in some form or the other, which was seen in a little less than half the surveyed village. Dalits were denied access to cremation or burial grounds and access to irrigation infrastructure. It has also been seen in several areas that communities belonging to the dominant caste tend to encroach on dalit cremation or burial places. In the examined villages, dalit communities' self-assertion against this discrimination over common resources was countered with upper-caste violence.

In Punjab, however, shamlat-deh and abadi-deh lands continued to be governed by the Punjab Land Revenue Act 1887, the Punjab Land Administration Manual and shamlat law. In the late 1940s, the Punjab government realised that many communities in Punjab lacked common land. As a result, the Punjab government passed the East Punjab (Consolidation and Prevention of Fragmentation of Holdings) Act 1949, which provided for common land in certain villages. The state became more involved in communal management of common lands. It passed the Punjab Occupancy Tenants Act in 1952, as well as the Pepsu Occupancy Tenants (Vesting of Proprietary Rights) Act in 1953. Tenants had not only proprietary rights over their own land but also over village common lands owned by the proprietors. Since the Land Reform Act 1954 was passed, the entire village has been transformed. A community of residents gained control as against the group of landowners or malikan Deh. Punjab Village Common Land (Regulation) Act 1961 consolidated ail rights and enactments regulating village common land. The 1961 act (amended further in 1964 and 1976) changed this Position. Though the rights of village people over common land remained intact, the Act gave all powers regarding the management of common land to the village Panchayat. This included the right to alienate common land. In essence, the panchayats superseded the village proprietary body.

Another significant feature of the act was the use of the shamlat deh to settle landless tenants, weaker Sections, and other evicted tenants and distribute land among small landowners. Common lands have become a significant source of income for the panchayat. However, Ravidassia Dalits have been denied their rights to common property in Punjab as Upper-caste landowners collude with police; mafia-official Nexus has seized Panchayati land through fraud and forgery. The media has repeatedly reported on how powerful people and politicians (either grabbing or giving common land to private companies) have encroached on common land, leading to the decline of these resources. As an example, the government gave panchayat land at village Ahwan (Amritsar) to Azure power for the construction of a solar power plant, which was objected by the panchayat and various organizations (Tribune,31 July, 2009). The conflict has many dimensions, but conflict over common land is a new phenomenon. The dominant castes wish to retain their control over the commons and deny weaker sections (Scheduled Castes) their legitimate right over these resources. In the past, due to the lack of land, high land prices, and lack of material resources, Dalits have been demanding their share in the common. This has led to increasingly violent clashes between castes.

In this emerging situation, local Dalits are asserting their rights and gaining a share of the resources which belong to the village as a whole. These resources had so far been the exclusive property of the Jats. Their assertions however are being actively resisted by Jats and this results in conflicts over these resources. The scarcity of land and the pauperization of Dalit labourers reached such a flashpoint that in the villages of Sangrur, Mansa, and Bathinda districts, Dalit labourers took possession of vacant common land. For a long time, these Dalits were demanding plots from the common land as per the existing state policy (the state promised allotting plots to them 26 months back) but were vehemently opposed by landlords. The Government tried to make some favourable conditions for Dalit's access to agricultural land, bypassing the Punjab Village Common Land (Regulation) Act in 1961 and reserved 33% or 1/3rd share of Dalits in Panchayati Land for cultivation and fodder of their animals. But the reality at ground level is different. The Dalits, due to their economic inability, are not able to get their 1/3rd share of land (Punjab Kesari, 2016).

Therefore, several movements have been organized till now, fighting for the land rights of the landless Dalits in Punjab. At present, one movement in the form of the Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee (ZPSC) is playing an important role in this direction which was started in 2009 by the left wing. After challenging the power structure, the landless are now seeking

political power. Thirty ZPSC members contested as independent candidates in the December 2018 panchayat elections. The campaign has moved to the next stage in Tolewal village, where they won the seats of sarpanch and two panchayat members. Some gram sabhas are controlled by landowning castes, and they are trying to remove SCs from all lands reserved for them. The panchayats of the Sangrur district's Tolewal, Thandiwal, and Mulowal villages have decided to sell off Shamlat lands reserved for Dalits and demand high lease payments from them. This makes it difficult for Dalits to retain ownership of these lands. On June 6, 2019, the gram sabha of Tolewal passed a resolution to grant a 33-year lease for the reserved village common land to Dalit families. The existing legislation must be amended to the extent necessary to allow Dalits clear ownership of Shamlat lands. Chief Minister Amarinder Singh should take personal interest in this and get this done. If all political parties, in power and out of power, take up this matter out of a sense of patriotic and constitutional duty to Dalits, the most oppressed class of people, along with S. Ts, this matter can be solved.

 The Dalits' desperate measures and the dominant castes' opposition to their legal rights to common land sometimes became violent. When they objected to Dalit households in Sambalpur village, Batala district, constructing a pond on common land they claimed had been allocated to them by the government for the building of housing units, Dalits' homes were trashed, and eight people were injured (The Tribune, July 16, 2009) When a Dalit sarpanch opposed the illegal takeover of a community hall by an influential Akali leader in Pamkot village, Mansa district, officials remained powerless. Various news sources point out that one of the administration's concerns is its political stance. It would come into action if there was a case of Dalits encroaching on common land. When such encroachment concerned prominent castes, it was reported, but it was regarded with indifference and immobility.

 Individuals in several communities paid less than Rs 8,000 per year. However, rental costs for irrigated agricultural land in parts of Malwa have already hit an all-time high of Rs 40,000. It also discovered an illegal market called shamlaat Zameen in at least one settlement. Because formal ownership of Shamlaat Zameen was difficult to obtain, they swapped it at prices far lower than the market cost for private land. These things might happen because panchayats, in collaboration with panchayat secretaries, never arrange the open auctions (kulli boli) required by the Panchayati Raj Act to lease common village lands (government of Punjab, 2015). It also learned that sarpanches were breaking the law by conducting auctions in their homes without informing everyone in the village. It also discovered that sarpanches often employed proxies

to outbid other villages at open auctions and then farmed the property while paying rent significantly below the original bid. They could get away with it because they had control over the village finances and few people bothered to check through them and maybe antagonize the sarpanch.

The Khem village case showed how such people successfully benefited from the ruling SAD's initiative of removing encroachers from common lands in order to boost village and state income. Throughout my research, they had only used this technique in a few communities. After adopting it, land rents in Fatehpur increased from Rs 8,000 per acre to Rs 40,000 per acre. This resulted in Rs 4,80,000, which Khem used to fix all village drainage and pave its lanes with cement bricks. Nonetheless, both opponents and supporters questioned how he was able to seize 10 acres of public land. Several Ravidassia in Khem's village face caste-based discrimination. For example, if the Jats allowed them to share common village grounds, renting them would have become unreasonably costly. However, in other villages where the government has not cleared common village lands, people complain that even if they do get some, they will lack the agricultural equipment and skills needed to develop them. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that they were denied a potentially colossal income increase. (Martin, 2015:40) Bhagwant Mann categorically ordered everyone possessing government or panchayat land illegally to hand it over by May 31st, 2022.

The change in access to the agricultural land of Dalits over the decades is insignificant. In addition to that, results also confirm wide spatial variations in the disparity of access to agricultural lands across the districts of Punjab. This clearly shows the inequality and concentration of agricultural land in the hands of the most dominant social group. In 2020, over the last several days, various organizations in Punjab have been protesting against a revised land policy relating to common village land, known as 'shamlat' land. The state Cabinet recently approved an amendment to the Village Common Land (Regulation) Rules, 1964, allowing panchayats to sell shamlat land to industrial houses, entrepreneurs, business people, and companies to set up micro, small and medium industrial enterprises units. For instance, in the Sangrur district, around 4,000 Dalit families are cultivating shamlat land. They are earning from the crop, but approximately 15% of these families running small dairies benefit from growing their own fodder on this land," said Mukesh Malaudh, ZPSC president.

According to the Rural Development and Panchayat Department, Punjab has 1,70,033 acres (68,839 hectares) of shamlat land in around 8,000 of the state's 13,000 villages. The one-third reserved for Dalits (who represent one-third of the population) comes to approximately 56,677 acres (22,946 hectares). According to a response to an RTI query by ZPSC in January 2018, over half of Punjab's shamlat land is concentrated in the six districts of Patiala (highest at 15.5%), Gurdaspur, Ludhiana, Kapurthala, Fatehgarh Sahib, and Amritsar. The average rent is Rs 20,000 per acre in the reserved category (Dalits) and around Rs 28,000 in general. In comparison, lease rates to private persons (farmers) are Rs 60,000 per acre annually in the Malwa region and Rs 25,000-45,000 in the other areas (chaba, 2020:1).

The land rights movement is also linked to other concerns, including social biases, caste-based discrimination, and numerous government development initiatives that do not reach the poor Dalits. They still are at the bottom of human development as compared to non-SCs. The democratization of local political institutions has made a significant impact on Dalits. It has given them a feeling of dignity as well as the ability to negotiate. The universal adult franchise has compelled upper/dominant castes to realize the importance of Dalit votes. Members of the higher castes were obliged to rethink their relationship with them because of their ability to be chosen as sarpanches. Dalits have become a key ally for everyone in the village's factional politics (Jodhka, 2004: 122). It has been called the world's largest farmers' protest. Hundreds of thousands of Indian farmers have participated in an ongoing protest against three changes in regulations since September 2020.

According to many analysts, the protest has developed into the most significant challenge to India's increasingly authoritarian BJP leadership. Farmers have sworn to continue fighting until the rules are abolished in enormous Mahasabhas across north, east, and central India. The ruling BJP never imagined that farmers, particularly Jat farmers, would become a significant issue. Most Sikh farmers from Punjab started the protests, making the movement vulnerable to accusations that it was restricted to well-off farmers from a particular religious group. That image could no longer be maintained when the Jats came in large numbers. The strength of their struggle took the powers that were unaware. It should not have been, though. The Jats, rightly or wrongly, perceive the agricultural rules as a direct threat to their ability to be independent farmers. The laws' passage without consultation with farmers, such as themselves, has questioned the Jats' perception of their position in society. Like many other farmers, they have traditionally seen themselves as fundamental to India's identity. In January, the

humiliation of Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait, a prominent Jat figure, was at a protest camp near the Delhi border as the government prepared to evict farmers beginning of the end.

It showed them that farmers, particularly Jat farmers, could be crushed by a government that, in their opinion, listened to big money instead of the sons of the soil. The government's humiliation of the Jat farmers is enough for them. However, this successful divide and rule strategy masked economic discontent. Farmers have been dissatisfied with their economic situation for a long time. Agriculture has become less profitable, and most farmers can no longer support themselves only through farming. 86 per cent of farming households had less than two hectares of land in 2015-16, and 68 per cent of all farmers had less than one hectare (Ministry of Agriculture &Farmer Welfare, Govt, Of India 2019). Almost all farmers are forced to combine farming with non-agricultural labour. To make matters worse, despite India's economic development beginning in the 1990s, suitable employment in non-agricultural areas remains rare. The economy has become more informal, and the number of jobs in India has fallen for the first time in recent years. Farmers' income would be doubled by 2022-23 compared to 2016-17, according to the BJP government. It implemented cash transfers to farmers just before the 2019 general election. However, the farmers have seen almost none of the promised benefits, prompting protests. Despite this, farmers in northern India voted for the BJP.

Although they welcome support from others in the protest, they are fundamentally caste-based and openly use caste structures to mobilise both the communities- Jats Sikhs and Dalits. In protest of agricultural laws, farmers have begun a social boycott of BJP politicians. Caste and class are closely linked with each other. This allows for strong resistance to government laws and external authority and strong dominance over others, such as Dalit labourers. The Jats have maintained their dominance over various groups, including their former Dalit Jatav farmhands, at the village level, in often violent methods. In many Jat-dominated villages in western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, the village Jat panchayat would take matters into its own hands and utilize social boycotts and penalties to assert its power and dominance over all castes. More often than not, oppression and exploitation followed caste-class lines.

4.6 Summing Up

This chapter has analysed the concept, nature, and dynamics of caste identity, role of Biradari, state-power, and the role of local-level institutions like the village panchayat and their governance in an agricultural centric state like Punjab. Identity-based politics characterises the current phase of cultural assertion among the Dalit Ravidassia in the Malwa region. The state has seen an upsurge in communal violence due to social exclusion, a lack of long-term economic growth, and the political marginalisation of the Ravidassia community. It also discusses the nature of conflicts caused by overlapping identities and how caste inequalities and assertion are conceptualized in everyday life among the Ravidassia community in the region. There have been a few notable findings. For instance, the conflicts in the region were caused by the Green Revolution and common land (shamlat land), which were based on caste and class identities, along with the division of resources between the upper caste (landowner caste) and Dalits. It explains that in rural Malwa region of Punjab, caste and class hierarchy overlap considerably, so many of these studies have also found that successful non-agricultural diversification is related to caste position.

According to Harriss-White (2003), caste, religion, kinship, and political networks constitute "social systems of accumulation" in Punjab. The political parties had to capture the agricultural economy while retaining its power based on their caste identities. However, land ownership allowed landholders to consolidate their power in economic and political terms, which bolstered their position. However, green revolution technologies had an inherent bias against the small and marginal peasants since they helped the rich in multiple ways. The study of the economic base, the primary activity of an individual, is vital in understanding the context in which various identities take shape and culture is influenced. Through the study, we will be able to understand how the dalit-Sikh identity has evolved over time, and why certain aspects of this identity have become dominant. On the other hand, it examines the importance of the biradari system at grassroot level politics in the Malwa region of Punjab. The Jat Sikh caste dominates the social structure of rural Punjab.

The dominance of Jat Sikhs in legislative assembly and parliamentary elections is another manifestation of their power in rural Punjab. Due to Dalits' small percentage of land, it appears to be the primary cause of their difficulties and social marginalization. It also provides a reflection of how historically their rights have been denied. The Green Revolution and the reorganisation of the Punjab state in 1966 increased the Jat Sikhs' social and political hegemony. Even though Punjab became a Sikh majority state, Sikhism grew widespread due

to the elitism of the Jat landowning caste. At the same time, caste-based relations in rural Punjab have transformed as a result of democratic political processes. The widespread phenomenon of landlessness among Dalits in Punjab and the Jats' complete control on agricultural land has influenced the dalit community's current phase of cultural assertion. The Jat Sikhs who owned land grew economically during the Green Revolution in the 1960s and maintained their control over state politics.

Over the last twenty years, Dalits have consciously dissociated themselves from their traditional occupations and regular interactions with the agrarian economy. Since the Jat community controlled the agrarian economy and gained power.   There has been an emergence of conflict in rural regions due to the separation of Dalits from their traditional patrons and identities. Even though the hierarchical structure has almost disappeared. As a result, rural Dalits have begun to assert equal rights and a share of the resources. However, the Jats strongly oppose these claims, resulting in conflicts over these resources. There have been several land conflicts in the region, which has led to the implementation of land reforms as well as cultural resistance. It has been a long-standing conflict between the Jat Sikhs and Dalit farm laborers in the Mansa, Bathinda, Sangrur, and Ludhiana districts. Additionally, Dalits asserted themselves through the elections. In the 1970s and 1980s, Dalits who were unable to benefit from the green revolution began migrating to western countries to find employment.

The panchayats in the state have been given responsibility for managing and governing common land. However, panchayats still face a variety of challenges, including upper caste dominance and interference from politicians and bureaucrats. The local institutions obtain votes from various groups in the village based on the problem of common land. As a result of the state's growing urbanisation and the unequal distribution of land for such development, shamlat land has turned into a vote-winning strategy for parties in panchayat elections. The rural areas in Malwa are the most "backward" because they have not gained a large share of local power. However, all major political parties are actively seeking support from various SCs groups.   In 1980, the SCs in Punjab tended to favour the Congress party because it supported the removal of untouchability, and the implementation of pro-poor policies. Jats, however, supported the Akali Dal party. The BSP's subsequent rise in the Doaba region, on the other hand, weakened SC support for the Congress Party. This support was reduced when the Akali Dal, through an alliance with the BSP, gained a percentage of the SC vote. In this alliance, the agenda turned more toward community concerns and socioeconomic concerns.

In the context of this paradigm, we can understand the caste dilemma. Although caste is not as rigidly defined ideologically, it continues to thrive as a source of identity. The combination of caste and farmer identity is strength of agrarian society and farmers use their identities in politics. As an example, they boycotted the BJP and protested against farm laws. Caste and class are inextricably linked. As such, it allows a strong opposition to government proclamations and outside powers. At the village level, the Jats have maintained their control over Dalit groups, often in violent ways. A conflict of interest has existed between dalit rural labourers and their dominant employers from the agricultural caste. In 2020, during COVID-19, farmers often tried to save money by reducing labor costs or using machinery instead of workers, which caused workers to suffer. Caste-class divisions exist beyond the agriculture sector. Landowning is more likely to be associated with higher castes and dominant agricultural castes. Presently, the major problem for Scheduled Castes is that they lack political power. Caste and power structures in rural society have changed. The local power structure has changed significantly as a result of the separation, distancing, and autonomy processes. In contemporary Punjab, the hierarchical structure of the caste system has collapsed to some extent. Caste identity, however, has grown rather than diminishing in the context of identity politics. We will discuss identity, community status, the role of governments and political parties, and identity politics in the next chapter.

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Chapter 5

State and Identity Politics: Status of Ravidassia Community in Malwa Region of Punjab

5.1 Introduction

The main objective of this chapter is to understand and analyze the socio-economic status and political mobilization of the Ravidassia community in Malwa region. The data has been analyzed and interpreted based on different variables related to the empowerment of the community in the region. A number of variables are taken into consideration, including gender, age, caste, religion, education, marriage status, occupation, social mobility, impact of the state's welfare schemes, religious conversion, and political assertion. Although the government has introduced many policies for their betterment of Dalits, still they suffer from deprivation and discrimination.

Identity politics is an indicator of the health of a democracy. This is because it means that marginalized sections are actively seeking a share of power. Identity politics has serious fundamental causes and effects. Economic forces have the power to damage the political system. It occurs when identity politics emerge between majorities and minorities and have a major impact on certain cultural groups. Therefore, economic gains are unfairly distributed among different groups. On the other hand, political conflicts based on cultural differences become more numerous and new ones are created which leads to social divisions within the region. Identity politics, by and large, is influenced by several variables. Hence, it is necessary to study the multiple implications of identity politics through research.

In India, the notion of identity politics is rooted in the violent history of Partition and the demand for separate electorates for religious and caste identities. Since then, whenever a marginalized community has demanded space in politics, it has largely been seen as divisive. In other words, it threatens the unity and equality of the nation. It is not simply a matter of asserting a caste, religion, or regional identity by itself. In other words, identity is used as an instrument for achieving political goals at local and state levels. The Malwa area is known for its diverse ethnic groups and significant conflict within groups. Each group seeks to form its own identity based on culture, tradition, and social identity in order to gain political power. On the other hand, they function as political actors who take on a variety of identities and work in different roles. The chapter will focus on the three major aspects of identity politics among

the Ravidassia community in the region. First, we will examine how social identities have been formed and transformed into the new identity. Second, we examine how identity politics changed through time and how it affected state politics. And third, analysis of the political mobilization of identity politics can be understood by its huge impact on the Dalit communities.

5.2 Political parties, marginalized communities and Identity -based Quota

The Indian Punjab has experienced political upheaval in recent years, due to the impact of the religion based mobilization in the State. Dalits are not as poor or as deprived as their counterparts elsewhere in the country. Over the last 60 years or more, its social and political landscape has changed dramatically. There are significant political, economic, and social divides between rural and urban Sikhs, as well as between various political parties, regions, religions, and castes/classes in the state. In identity politics, these cleavages are subject to numerous articulation and mobilization strategies. As discussed in the previous chapters, the post-partition politics of Punjab illustrated how these factors interacted in a complex manner. It is critical to consider the problematic of distinctness as a part of their perceived identity. In Punjab, for instance, the Sikh community demands its own state (Punjabi Suba), as they were a divided and continuous minority, with significant historical, cultural, and even religious ties to Hindus.   On the other hand, they focused on questions of representation.

The various political parties in the country and state strive to cater to the interests of the various groups. This has provided the marginalized sections of the population an opportunity to assert their identity through electoral politics. Social and political mobilization is therefore essential in the Indian scenario as far as fortunes of parties in elections are concerned. This process of organization and mobilization is neither top-down or static in its approach, but both interrelation as well as dynamic. As argued by Pushpendra, the decline of the 'Congress system' witnessed Scheduled Castes entering a 'new phase in their political consciousness' wherein Congress was no longer seen as a natural ally (Pushpendra, 2001). A competitive party system and the emergence of a 'Bahujan discourse' (Guru, 2001) paved the way for Scheduled Castes to assert themselves politically.

Politics has a paradoxical role to play in managing the competing interests of different groups (Weiner, 1997: 251). On the one hand, asserting group rights could worsen relations between groups. On the other hand, politics provides a credible, non-violent path for a group to improve its social status and economic well-being by means of political assertion of its identity.   Therefore, effective state leadership and local politics are vital for preserving

minorities' rights and empowering them within a democratic framework. The complexity created by the overlapping nature of these social identities has often proven to be a deterrent to 'Dalit' becoming a united political force.

The division along sub-caste and religious lines has led to different groups rallying behind different parties for different causes. Thus, Ram points out that Dalits in Punjab have never been able to translate 'extraordinary numerical strength in the electoral performance of their own political parties like Scheduled Castes Federation/Republican Party of India/Bahujan Samaj' (Ram, 2017: 54). It further claims that the lack of Brahman dominance in the state could not foster a vibrant SC leadership to mould its own party and most of the SC sub-groups have been accommodated in one or the other mainstream party. Increased voting by the scheduled castes, shifts in their party preference and a complex pattern of voting, their general support for the left and left-of-Centre parties, rise of BSP, efforts to emerge as a political bloc despite the internal class differentiation, and increase in the level of legitimacy given to democratic institutions are some of the most significant expressions/ symbols of the political assertion of the scheduled castes. Despite this assertion, the BSP has become their first preference. In the absence of the BSP, the left front and regional parties have taken over as the preferred choice due to their dominance.

As previously mentioned, even after the Akali Dal entered the political arena in post-independence India, Congress continued to receive support from the Sikh community, especially from among the marginalized castes, urban traders, and the "backward" and "Dalit" groups. As a political strategy, the classification of these communities as a means of entitling them to the quota would have been unpopular with the other major clusters of Dalits in Punjab. However, the proportion of Sikhs among the latter was relatively small and so the danger of them allying with the communitarian politics of Akalis was limited. Hence, the policy of sub-quotas appeared to be a viable strategy for the Congress. There is thus no doubt that the Dalits within the Sikh community are relatively marginalized.

Although they have been beneficiaries of the affirmative action programmes mandated by the Constitution, it is primarily the socially mobilized groups that have received the benefits. Their position has improved, but there are other groups within the marginalized sections of the Dalit community that are much more disadvantaged. When development is used as the criterion to examine the capacity of a group of people to access available resources, group cohesiveness breaks down. While in religious terms the Sikhs are a minority, within that community there is

a specific section that is more disadvantaged than others. This is due to all the indicators of development. Within this marginalized section there are also significant internal disparities, which can offer alternate axes of mobilization and policy formulation (Mahajan, 2009:53).

In Punjab, political parties focused exclusively on the conditions of the disadvantaged communities. However, competitive electoral politics has created a peculiar situation whereby the interests of these marginalized groups become significant political concerns that parties take up. The story of Punjab shows that religious consolidation has been challenged by initiating policies that benefit some marginalized sections within that religious community: since the Akali Dal was dominated by the Jat Sikhs, the Congress initiated policies to benefit the many disadvantaged Mazbahi Sikhs. There has been a significant change in cultural and social mobility in the region. During Post-independence, the Indian Constitution gave rights to Dalits for their upliftment in three areas: political representation, employment opportunities, and educational opportunities. Dr Ambedkar had previously demanded separate electorates for the "Depressed Classes"; however, Mahatma Gandhi's fast unto death led to the change from separate electorates to reservations. Due to this, Dalits are entitled to political reservations that allow them to enter the political arena and become powerful leaders.

The use of caste as a political identity to mobilize under has been seen as divisive since the time Kanshi Ram used it as an ideology to found the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). Over the years, the accusation of "identity politics" has resurfaced whenever the matter of caste-based reservations has come up, most noticeably in relation to the Mandal Commission recommendations. In Punjab, affirmative action policy has been implemented through a system of reservations, which includes representation in political spheres, higher education institutions, and other government and semi-government employment positions for those groups who have suffered from discrimination and social exclusion. In the policy, all subgroups were encouraged to increase their representation in the state. Congress, on the other hand, characterized it as a political agenda to gain votes from marginalized communities. This could pose a challenge to the politics of the Akali Dal, which represented Sikhs.

Meanwhile, the Punjab government announced a 20% quota and 2% seats for members of backward classes, scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes in educational, technical, and professional institutions in 1964. In 1965, the Punjab government established a committee led by Shri Brish Bhan to examine the benefits granted to disadvantaged groups. However, these laws were altered in 1974 when the state government increased the quota by 5%. As a result,

scheduled caste members received 25% and backward classes received 5%. The majority of Dalits in the state were Mazhabis Sikhs, who constituted less than 1% of the population compared to approximately 32% of Punjab's SCs. There were more Mazhabis passionate about the Sikh religion and Akali politics than the Chamar caste group, and this gave the Akalis an advantage over the Congress party (Singh, 2022:2).

Similarly, the Balmikis with a substantial presence in rural and urban Punjab support the BJP's 'Hindu' politics and its ideology. As a result, the Congress party introduced sub-quotas within the reserved seats for SCs under the Indian constitution. There are two largest SC communities - Addharmis/Ravidsia and Mazhabis Sikhs/Balmikis. Furthermore, they remain divided on the 12.5% reservation for Mazhabi Sikhs/ Balmikis within the reservation. Even now, the Balmikis and Mazhabis see former Chief minister Giani Zail Singh as a messiah. In 1975, Giani Zail Singh granted them 50% of the SC quota (Mahajan, 2009:55). In Punjab, categorizing Dalits based on quotas would remain contentious and cause political turmoil.

In 2006, the Punjab and Haryana high court scrapped a notification issued in 1975 by the Congress government led by Giani Zail Singh to provide this reservation. The Punjab government later passed legislation to ensure that this reservation gets approval from the state assembly. However, the Chamar Mahan Sabha opposed this provision and moved to the supreme court, claiming that reservation within reservation is unconstitutional and should be scrapped (Singh, 2022 :4). Mazhabi Sikhs and Balmikis constituted 12.6% of Punjab's overall population, while Addharmi/Ravidasia/RamdasiaSikhs constituted 11% population. Addharmis is a major subgroup of the SC caste. As a result, their social and political domains are more influential. As an example, Dera Sachkhand Ballan is the most influential dera in the SC community. Although Mazhabi Sikhs/Balmikis are more in number, they don't have any such single institution that can leverage power to such an extent. Many of them are Buddhists from the Ad-dharmi community, whose numbers are low and they do not have a place in society or political leadership. The Buddhist author Lahori Ram Balley, an Ambedkarite, asserted that Balmikis and Mazhabis are more divided among themselves. When Balmikis are the most deprived section, even Mazhabi Sikhs are much weaker as compared to Ad-dharmis/Ravidasias in education and financially. Therefore they are dominating socially and politically.

Therefore, both communities demanded the restoration of 5 to 10% reservations in government positions and educational institutions for them. Punjab is unlikely to be affected by the Bill

approved by Parliament that offers a 10% quota for disadvantage groups. Only 7% of the job quota is shared in the organised sector (private and public). The present law mandates a 14% promotion quota for SCs in groups A and B and a 20% quota in groups C and D for state government jobs. The administrative departments of the Punjab government have failed to satisfy the demands of the government. The reserved seats of SCs are divided in all job categories- 19.7% in group A, 19.34% in group B, 27.47% in group C, and 31.78 per cent in group D respectively (Mahajan, 2009:75).

On the other hand, Balmikis and Mazhabis called a conference at Kapurthala in response to the increasing reservation in all sectors. A 25% job quota should be divided among them, including Chamars, since Balmikis-Mazhabis constitute a large SC population in Punjab, but are not receiving their fair share of jobs. As a result, Balmiki and Mazhabi Sikhs (BMS) only obtained 1% of the total number of seats filled in positions, out of 13%. Therefore, they decided to reserve 12.12% of the 25% reserved seats for Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs, with the remaining half allocated to other SC groups, including Chamars. Therefore, the 50-50% quota system should be applied so that BMS get their due share of jobs. As a result, several Balmikis were appointed to various organizations such as the Punjab Khadi and Industries Board (PKVIB), the Education Board, and the Transport Board. There were more Balmiki and Mazhabis Sikhs appointed to Municipal Corporations by the government. Ravidasis/Ravidassia, however, were opposed to the government's choice (Pasricha,2006:5).

Later, Babu Jagjivan Ram, who belonged to the Ravidassia caste and was a powerful minister in the Government at the time, called for the Government to reverse its decision. As a result of his efforts, the Government agreed to a 7% reservation benefit in exchange for a 14 percent promotion to the BMS category. The BMS had a negative impact on recruiting for classes I and II positions. After that, selection boards were abolished, and selection committees were established. Ravidasi officials became members of these committees through the schedule caste quota. These members either did not notify other members about the 50 per cent quota because Balmiki and Mazhbais Sikhs were not in class I and II jobs. A conflict arose between the Balmiki and Mazhabi Sikhs (BMS) and Ravidassia candidates for new positions (Kumar,2010:15). In the Social Department, the proportion of SCs out of the filled posts is higher in all the years studied as compared to the General and Economic Departments. The proportion of filled seats by the SCs in Group D is found to decline in General and in the Social

Services Department. For example, 33.9 percent in 2011 to 33.3 percent in 2013 in the General, 41.2 percent to 39.2 percent from 2011 to 2013 in the Social Department (Dutta, 2015: 12).

Punjab imposes requirements for SC, BC, and BPL groups' access to electricity subsidies. One of the key electoral promises made by the Aam Aadmi Party during the Punjab assembly elections was to provide 300 units of free power. In June of last year, the party's national leader Arvind Kejriwal offered the state free power for up to 300 units. In Punjab, Dalit voters shifted their support to other parties because of fear that, if the Narendra Modi government wins back power, the BJP would abolish the quota system. The Punjab government announced on Wednesday that it will dedicate at least 30% of all public funding to the state's Scheduled Castes (SC) community's development. Dr. BR Ambedkar celebrated his 130th birthday this year. Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh paid respect by launching a number of initiatives and measures to support the Dalit community (Government of Punjab, 2017).

 A Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Institute of Training in Jalandhar will be established by the Punjab government to prepare students for competitive tests, such as the civil services. It is suggested that the GGRK mission be established, and 50% of the seats would be reserved for applicants for SC families. For the financial year 2022, there is also a specific plan to build Rural Link Roads worth 500 crore. This will provide road connectivity to the poorer sections of society and to the SCs. The Amrinder Singh government provides 30 percent reservation for SC applicants in the village under the 'Har Ghar Pakki Chhat' scheme. It also has an affordable housing program for the EWS category.   On February 2, 2006, the system was launched in Punjab, and at first, it only included Hoshiarpur district. The Indian government decided to expand MNREGS to three additional districts—Amritsar, Nawanshahar, and Jalandhar— during the fiscal year 2007–2008. Since it is a demand-driven scheme, the targets under this scheme are not specified.

Such a practice of reverse tenancy has kept the average size of operational holdings relatively large in the state. Punjab had only 33% of its operational holdings in the small and marginal categories and they operated only 9% of the total cultivated area in the state, as per the Agricultural Census of 2015-16. In comparison, 86% of all the operational holdings in India were small (less than two hectares) and marginal (less than one hectare). Together, these small and marginal farmers cultivated 47% of all of India's cultivated area. Nationally, only 5% of all the operational holdings were over 4 hectares, making up 29% of the total area under cultivation (Economic Survey Punjab 2018-19; 63-64). In Punjab though, as much as 33% of

the operational holdings in Punjab were classed as medium (4 to 10 hectares) and large (above 10 hectares), and together made up two-thirds of the total agricultural area. (The remaining 34% of the holdings were 'semi medium' sized, with 2 to 4 hectares of land, with 25% of the land cultivated.) (Jodhka, 2021: 2).

What is equally interesting is that in Punjab these policies have been initiated from the top, by the political party in power. This is in the hope of consolidating its vote before an election. Although groups subsequently mobilized in favour of the policies, particularly when the Court withdrew them, in the initial stages these benefits were introduced despite the absence of significant mobilization on the ground among the marginalized sections of the Scheduled Castes. The contest for votes prompted the Congress to initiate policies that are not envisaged in the Constitution and that are specific to this region. It is, therefore, not surprising that when other states began to initiate similar measures by offering sub-quotas, the matter has been taken up to the Supreme Court and the validity of the policies challenged. This is the peculiar paradox of what have come to be called 'populist' measures in Indian democracy.

5.3 Presentation of Field Data

The Malwa region has a remarkable history and a rich heritage. In the Malwa area, several religions evolved along with the memories of their religious gurus and their practices. These religions usually have strong ties to the Malwa community. This region comprises between 60 and 70 percent of the Punjab state. People living in this region are commonly called "Malwai." Particularly, the Malwa region makes up a large portion of the present Punjabi-speaking state. The Malwa region has divided into two parts- Eastern and Western. The districts in the state's eastern part are Rupnagar, SAS Nagar, Fatehgarh Sahib, and Patiala. Bathinda is centrally located, along with Ludhiana, Sangrur, Barnala, Mansa, Moga, and Barnala. Western districts include Firozpur, Faridkot, Fazilka, and Muktsar. Malwai is a Punjabi dialect spoken in the Malwa region of Punjab. There is a strong similarity between Malawi Punjabi and Punjabi writing. There are Malwa Sikhs in Firozpur, Ludhiana, Patiala, Jind, and Malerkotla, showing that they also became prominent in these places. In reality, Ad-dharmis, Ramdasia, and Ravidasia are names of the same caste, namely the Chamar Caste. First, it noted that caste nomenclature arose from their occupation affiliations. The second reason is that many caste groups have different names based on their religious affiliations. For instances, Hindus, Bhangi is known as Valmiki, while for Sikhs, it is known as Mazbabi. Similarly, Punjabi Chamars are known as Ramdasias as Sikhs; even recently, they have begun claiming a separate religion called Ravidasias/Ravidassia. Changing their names did not improve their status within

the caste system. On the other hand, Chuhras constituted a substantial proportion of the Christians population in Punjab and are often associated with churches. Christianity gives them a new name, Massih. The present demand of Christian groups in Punjab is for a 2% quota in government positions and the establishment of a state minority commission.

List of Scheduled Castes in Punjab

S. No.	Name of caste	S. No.	Name of caste
1	Ad Dharmis	21	Kori, koli
2	Balmiki, chura, Bhangi	22	Marija, Marecha
3	Bangali	23	Mazhabi. Mazhabi Sikh
4	Barar, Burar, Berar	24	Megh
5	Batwal, Barwala	25	Nat
6	Bauria, Bawaria	26	Od
7	Bazigar	27	Pasi
8	Bhanjra	28	Perna
9	Chamar, Jatia Chamar, Rehgar, Raigar, Ramdasi, Ravidasi, Ramdasia, Ramdasia Sikh,	29	Pherera
10	Chanal	30	Sanhai
11	Dagi	31	Sanhal
12	Darain	32	Sansi, Bhedkut, Manesh
13	Deha, Dhaya, Dhea	33	Sansoi
14	Dhanak	34	Sapela
15	Dhogri, Dhangri, Siggi	35	Sarera
16	Dumna, Mahasha, Doom	36	Sikligar
17	Gagra	37	Sirkiband.
18	Gandhila, Gandil, Gondola	38	Mochi
19	Kabirpanthi, julah	39	Mahatma, Rai Sikh
20	Khatik		

Source: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2013.

I

Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents

Gender

Indian society is still dominated by a patriarchal mentality, which leads to a gender hierarchy within the social structure in terms of power, wealth and other resources. Genders have not been discriminated by nature, but patriarchal norms have certainly separated them. Gender identity is a social construct. It specifies and distinguishes men's and women's roles, rights, responsibilities, and obligations. The fundamental biological distinctions between males and females are the basis for social norms that define appropriate behaviours for men and women and influence women's and men's disparities in social, economic, and political power (United Nations, 2005).

In today's male-dominated Indian society, particularly in Punjabi society, women are subjugated in a number of ways. There are several significant domains where gender disparity can be clearly examined. These are socio-economic disparities, educational inequalities, political, health, and survival inequalities. It is critical to understand a gender's biological basis and natural skills while recognizing how gender is complicated. Although the state's sex ratio increased from 854 in 1961 to 895 in 2011, it still remained below the national average, which was 941 in 1961 and 943 in 2011. The ratio of Punjab's Scheduled Caste population (both male and female) between 1961 and 2011. In 1961, there were 22.27 % males and 22.40 % females. In 1971, there were 24.82 per cent male and 24.58 per cent females. In 1981, there were 27.03 per cent male and 26.69 per cent females. In 1991, there were 28.42 per cent male and 28.17 per cent female. In 2001, there were 28.60 per cent male and 29.14 per cent females. In 2011, there were 32.21 percent women and 31.69% males.

Table 5.1

Gender wise Distribution

Caste/subcaste	Number of respondents		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**
AD-Dharmis/Ravidassia	80(54.05%)	68(45.94%)	148 (100)
Others	71(55.46%)	57(44.53%)	128 (100)
Total	151(54.71%)	125(45.28%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher (Figures in parentheses indicate column-wise percentage)

The table 5.1 shows that 54.05 percent of Ad-dharmis/ Ravidassia respondents were males and 45.94 percent were females. In contrast, other groups (Balmiki-Mazhabis) were 55.46 percent males, and 44.53 percent were females. The Malwa region is largely dominated by men. Punjab has a very low participation of women compared to its male counterparts and it varies from region to region. However, the higher level of economic development did not improve the economic and social status of women in Punjab. There is no equality for Dalit women in terms of learning, earning, and living comfortably in terms of owning a house. Due to gender roles, women have duties and responsibilities towards their male counterparts. It also shows that rural women have a very low level of education. Among all social groups, scheduled caste women are at the margins. In rural areas, poverty in the family and a lack of schools have been identified as major causes of the educational deprivation of rural women. Over the centuries, women have been oppressed and dominated by patriarchal social structures and have been deprived of opportunities for growth and development. It relates to male dominance which is still prevalent in society and can widely be seen as a factor which affects Dalit women's socio-economic and political mobility.

Age

The age factor is of universal concern. It is important to find out the age distribution of the respondents. The complete sample was divided into four broad categories—respondents between the ages of 21 to 30, those between the ages of 31 to 40, those between the ages of 41 to 50 and those older than 50—in order to provide a clear picture. Age and experience are strongly intertwined. It is always preferable to have a balance between young and senior

individuals. While the seniors have personal and political experience, the youth have the enthusiasm and creative thinking to deal with the challenges.

Table 5.2

Age group wise distribution

Caste/sub-caste	Number of Respondents				
	21-30	**31-40**	**41-50**	**50 Above**	**Total**
Ad-Dharmis/Ravidassia	30(20.27%)	42(28.37%)	35(23.64%)	41(27.70%)	148 (100)
Others	29(22.65%)	31(24.21%)	32(25%)	36(28.12%)	128 (100)
Total	59(21.37%)	73(26.44%)	67(24.27%)	77(27.89%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher (Figures in parentheses indicate column-wise percentage)

In Table 5.2, 28.37 percent of Ad-Dharmis/Ravidassia respondents were between the ages of 31 and 40, while only 20.27 percent were between the ages of 21 and 30. However, 27.70 percent of those aged 50 and above were marginally higher than 23.64 percent of those aged 41 – 50. In contrast, Balmiki-Mazhabis respondents made up 28.12% more of the population aged 41- 50 than the national average. 24.21 percent of adults were between the ages of 31-40, as compared to 22.65% of youngsters. Since more than three-fourths of respondents were both young and older, they were in a better position to express their feelings and share their knowledge and understanding. It was observed that young and middle-aged respondents are emerging in leadership positions at the grassroots level. There is a lack of experience or a lack of interest among the young. In villages, older people were traditionally given the privilege of holding prominent positions due to their age. It can be concluded that most of the senior respondents have retired from jobs and have later joined politics. Interestingly, younger respondents have less interest in politics and are looking for jobs.

Marital status

Marriage is a fundamental institution of Indian society. Exogamy is the favoured or required practice of getting married outside one's own family, the family boundaries being established by social identity. In addition to the gotra exogamy rules, which prohibit marriage within the same village, are strictly followed in Punjab. Marian M Smith has described the Punjabi village as an exogamous unit. This means every marriage involves one village with another, and all affinities transcend village boundaries. Endogamy is a term used to describe mate-selection

practices that urge people to marry within their own group and restrict marriage outside of one's community. The choice of a bride and groom is influenced by several intra-group factors, with caste being the most significant of them. Punjabi wedding traditions and rituals are traditionally practiced throughout Punjab and are a significant symbol of the Punjabi culture, even if religious marriage ceremonies for Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims may differ.

Table 5.3

Marital status Wise Distribution

Caste/sub-caste	Number of Respondents			
	Married	**Unmarried**	**Widows/divorced**	**Total**
Ad-Dharmis/Ravidassia	65(43.91%)	52(35.13%)	31(20.94%)	148 (100)
Others	70(54.68%)	28(21.87%)	30(23.43%)	128 (100)
Total	135(48.91%)	80(28.98%)	61(22.10%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher (Figures in parentheses indicate column-wise percentage)

Table 5.3 shows that, 43.90 percent of respondents from Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia were married. 54.68 percent of respondents (Balmiki and Mazhabis) were married. The respondents stated they were married at a young age. Their early marriage was caused by financial difficulties, dropping out of school, social pressures, and other factors. It is emphasized that early marriage is a barrier to respondents' growth in several areas, including education and employment. 20.94 percent of respondents from Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia and whereas, 23.43 percent of respondents from others (Balmiki-Mazhabis Sikhs) were widowed or divorced. The rising divorce ratio in marriages has been a cause for concern since it directly impacts social integrity. The Jat community is highly concerned about their caste in Punjabi society. When choosing a mate, the respondents were asked if they considered the gotras into consideration. All the respondents were found to adhere closely to the gotra exogamy norm.

Nowadays rural and urban people are mostly educated, and with the changing scenario their thinking and mindset are also undergoing major changes. Getting married after divorce is a result of westernization and urbanization. However, few respondents stated that widowed women are equally respected by their families, but they are kept away from wedding ceremonies and are not invited to participate in festivities. In Punjab, the divorce rate is lowest, but the breakup affects the institution of marriage by causing extramarital affairs, and domestic

violence 35.13 percent of Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia respondents were unmarried, whereas 21.87 percent of others (Balimki-Mazhabais) were unmarried because they were at school or college and did not want to marry. All the respondents gave a negative response when asked if they allow their children to marry outside of their caste group. They claimed that they only allowed their children to marry within their caste group.

Education

Today, education is recognized as a significant factor. Thus, education has an impact on the Dalit community's social position. For centuries, Dalits have been denied access to education due to caste-based discrimination. Now education is the only hope for their upliftment. Therefore, it is vital to know the educational qualifications of respondents in this study. It is rightly said that education plays a crucial role in separating caste and occupation. Although Dalits' educational levels have increased, their occupations have not improved. Based on their educational qualifications, few of them can obtain respectable positions. Chamars and Ad-Dharmis have been able to succeed in society by giving up their traditional jobs. Social discrimination cannot be removed through education and the percentage of SC students enrolled in higher education cannot increase. At the same time, Mazhabi has the greatest literacy rate at the lowest levels of education (primary and below), whereas Ad-dharmi/Chamar/Ravidasia has a more substantial number of literates at the highest levels of education (graduate and above). Due to the high growth rate, the literacy rate has steadily increased throughout the decades. Punjab's literacy rate grew from 16.12% in 1971 to 64.81% in 2011. The respondents' educational background merits in-depth analysis because this variable alone significantly influences their political participation, either directly or indirectly.

Table 5.4

Educational Status wise Distribution

Caste/sub-caste	Number of respondents				
	Illiterate	Primary	Higher secondary	Graduation and above	Total
Ad-Dharmis/Ravidassia	23(15.54%)	32(21.62%)	37(25%)	56 (37.83%)	148 (100)
Others	19(14.84%)	28(21.87%)	46(35.93%)	35(27.34%)	128 (100)
Total	42(15.21%)	60(21.73%)	83(30.07%)	91(23.97%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher (Figures in parentheses indicate column-wise percentage)

The data presented in table 5.4 shows that 37.83 percent of Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia respondents and 27.34 percent of others (Balmiki-Mazhabi) respondents were successful at the post-graduate level of education. People who live in cities and villages have a positive view on education. However, only 25% of respondents from Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia had finished higher secondary school, which represents low proportion but moved to pursue college studies compared to the 35.93% of Balmiki-Mazbhabis respondents who had finished higher secondary school but did not continue to pursue college studies. Only 14.84 percent of respondents from both castes were illiterate, and only 21.87 percent had studied up to the primary level.

As a result, Ad-Dharmis/Ravidassia Dalits are more aware of the importance of education for the improvement and empowerment of the entire community and the nation. Among the scheduled caste population, it reflects their constant efforts to become more educated and uplift themselves in every field. On the other hand, Balmiki-Mazhabis, the lack of education among these children is since their parents keep them busy with family activities. However, many of them suffer from discrimination in educational institutions. It was also noted during the field work that respondents with higher education were more aware of their rights and safeguards against discrimination.

These (Balmiki-Mazhabis) people are still unable to take advantage of the reservation policy and remain impoverished since illiteracy is a major drawback among them and for the state. It is relevant to note that most of the respondents who lived below the poverty line were illiterates. Hoshiarpur has the highest scheduled caste literacy rate at 82.49% among all the three regions of Punjab. This is also more than the average scheduled caste literacy rate of the state. Shri Muktsar Saheb recorded the lowest scheduled caste literacy rate among all the districts of Punjab. Several factors contributed to the differences in literacy rates in the Malwa region.

Religion

A religion is a matter of belief and devotion towards God. It is deeply embedded in Indian culture and society. There is a strong tradition of devotion in Punjab because the state has a strong religious zeal. While focusing on Punjab, this region shows great devotion to religion. Sufism, Islam, the Bhakti movement, and Sikhism have significantly impacted Punjab. Due to the rise of Sikhism, many caste-based communities converted to Sikhism and expressed their

faith in "Guru Granth Sahib," Sikhism's sacred book. Dalit communities have faced discrimination when they visited Sikh Gurudwaras. They have also faced conflicts with upper castes, and other issues that have led them to adopt distinct religious boundaries, such as constructing separate Gurudwaras for themselves. This has also led to the rise of Deraism in Punjab. Dalit community established their own dera known as "Dera Sachkhan Ballan" which is in the Jalandhar district of Punjab. Dalit communities follow the dera in large numbers.

This study also examines the religious beliefs of the respondents. Sikhism is the main religion in Punjab, followed by Hinduism. According to the census report of 2011, Hindus constitute only 38.49% of the population. In Punjab, Sikhs constitute 57.69% of the population, Muslim 1.93%, Christian 1.26 %, Buddhist 0.12 %, Jain 0.16 %, and other religion, not stated0.04%. The religion-wise distribution of the population of Punjab can be seen in the table.

Table 5.5

Religion wise Distribution

Caste/subcaste	Number of Respondents			
	Ravidassia	**Sikhism**	**Others**	**Total**
Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia	69(46.62%)	65(43.91%)	14(9.45%)	148 (100)
Others	48(37.5%)	63(49.21%)	17(13.28%)	128 (100)
Total	117(42.39%)	128(46.37%)	31(11.23%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher (Figures in parentheses indicate column-wise percentage)

Table 5.5 shows that 46.62 percent of Ad-Dharmis/ Ravidassia established a new religious identity due to caste-based discrimination. The Ravidassia religion has developed a new holy book-, Amritbani Guru Ravidass Ji. They worship their own holy Book, rather than the sacred book of the Sikhs, the Guru Granth Sahib. As respondents stated, it is our true Dharm (religion) and caste identity. As a result of the table, it can be concluded that the Dalits of Punjab have begun to assert their new religious identity. This gives them freedom from all miseries of life caused by their caste. However, other respondents (Balmiki-Mazhabis) preferred Sikhism by 49.21 percent. Sometimes, Dalits face more discrimination since their caste never changes despite changing their religion. The percentage of Buddhists was 9.45 percent, while the percentage of Muslims and Christians was 13.28 percent. The majority of respondents said

they did not want to change their religion. Most of the reformist movements took place in Punjab such as the Hindu reform movement, Arya Samaj, Singh Sabha movement and so on.

Punjab is a highly Sikh-dominated state, but the hierarchical difference among castes is also present in Sikhism. Politics is influenced by religion. Scheduled Castes are found in all five major religions of Punjab, including Ravidassia, Sikhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism. Most respondents belonged to the Ravidassia religions and others (Balmiki/Mazhabis). Around one-third of the respondents were Sikhs. The respondents belonging to Buddhism and Christianity constitute only a minor section of the respondents.

Occupation

Occupation is the primary factor for determining the socio-economic status of a family. Man's lives in society and fulfils his necessities by earning a living. Thus, we need a source of income based on skills and knowledge, and the ability to work. There are some occupations that require a high level of education. Due to their lack of education, Dalits are forced to perform their traditional work. Due to the fact that those individuals are educated, the government has given them employment reservations, giving them equal opportunities for work. They faced discrimination in the workplace and could not find a respectable working environment. 24.16% of Scheduled Caste people worked in the government sector. 17.03% are employed in Group A, 17.52% are employed in Group B, 22.40% work in Group C, and the highest number of scheduled caste employed is in Group D, i.e., 34.14% (Government of Punjab, Chandigarh. Employee-Statistics-Punjab-2011).

Table 5.6

Occupation Wise Distribution

Caste/ sub-caste	Number of Respondents					
	Landowners	**Agriculture labor**	**Cultivator**	**Govt. services**	**Business**	**Total**
Ad-Dharmis/ Ravidassia	27(18.24%)	32(21.62%)	19(12.83%)	36(24.32%)	34(22.97%)	148 (100)
Others	18(14.06%)	56(43.75%)	30(23.43%)	10(7.81%)	14(10.93%)	128 (100)
Total	45(16.30%)	88(31.88%)	49(17.75%)	46(16.66%)	48(17.39%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher (Figures in parentheses indicate column-wise percentage)

Based on Table 5.6, 18.24 percent of Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia and 14.06 percent (balmiki-mazhabis) respondents owned their own land. In contrast, 21.62 percent of Adharmis/Ravidassia and 43.75 percent of others work in agriculture. In addition, 12.83 percent of Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia and 23.43 percent of other respondents work as cultivators, while 24.32 percent of Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia and 7.81 percent of respondents are government employees.

According to many respondents, the Ad Dharmis/Ravidassia caste has become a dominant caste among dalits as compared to other dalit castes such as Balmikis/Mazhabis. As a result, the upper caste wants to develop a relationship with them. But from economic aspects, these castes are entirely dependent on the upper castes because the Jats control the land. The rural Mazhabi Sikhs are landless, uneducated, or have less education. In villages, agricultural work is the only source of livelihood, so those who work on a daily wage or on sharecropping are at the mercy of the upper castes. On the other hand, in cities, occupational rigidity is different. Urbanization reduces social discrimination in some ways. Mazhabi Sikhs have organized themselves for a variety of social activities. it can be concluded that respondents hold a variety of occupations. Some of them are economically well off; however, most of them live in poor conditions. Boys and girls from Scheduled Caste groups become earning members of their families at a young age. The largest percentages of SC employees are employed in government and semi-government organizations, the Municipal Corporation, and Nagar Panchayats.

Income

In political research, income is frequently regarded as one of the most significant socioeconomic status factors. Income can come from a variety of sources, including salary, benefits, pensions, tax returns, and savings interests. Social status is also influenced by income. It describes how a person's status changes throughout time. Political opinions are significantly influenced by an individual's income. The respondents are divided into four income categories depending on their yearly income: High, Upper Middle, Lower Middle, Low, and Very Low. According to the 2011 census, it shows that 28.88% of the scheduled caste population works as manual and casual labour in the state. 1.62% work in agriculture, 1.12% as domestic servants, 0.23% own a business, and 4.77% work in other organised sectors. This socioeconomic data shows the source of income for scheduled caste households in rural Punjab.

Table 5.7

Income Wise Distribution

Caste/sub-caste	Income (k=Thousands) (Number of Respondents)				
	10-15k	15-20k	20-25k	25k and above	Total
Ad-Dharmis/Ravidassia	30(20.27%)	33(22.29%)	48(32.43%)	37(25%)	148 (100)
Others	72(56.25%)	21(16.40%)	15(11.71%)	20(15.62%)	128 (100)
Total	102(36.95%)	54(19.56%)	63(22.82%)	57(20.65%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher (Figures in parentheses indicate column-wise percentage)

Table 5.7, shows that, 25 percent of respondents were Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia, whereas 15.62 percent of respondents were other (Balmiki-Mazhabis) worked in government sector. 20.27 percent and 56.25 percent of respondents earned 10,000-15,000 rupees per month, respectively because they were labourers. Thus, the majority of respondents have a poor financial situation. Due to their ownership of land, 32.43 percent of respondents and 11.47 percent of them earned between 20,000 and 25,000 rupees every month. The vast majority of respondent households were in a healthy financial condition. Because they worked in organized sectors, nearly 22.29 percent of respondents and 16.40 percent of respondents earned between 15,000 and 20,000 rupees each month. Most respondents belonging to the Chamar caste earn up to 4 lacs per annum. When compared to Balmikis-Mazhabis, Chamars have more than double the income. The fundamental cause for Balmikis-Mazhabis' backwardness in all fields is economic disparity. The vast majority of them support their families by working as farm labourers or in low-paying jobs. Due to a lack of alternative options for earning money, landlessness forced them to depend on the landowner community. They are subordinate to the landowner community because of the rural economy's unequal agricultural structure.

It is crucial to understand how the Ravidassia have changed their traditional caste status based on their economic opportunities and diversity. In contrast to a few decades ago when the Ravidassia lived in poverty, illiteracy, and ignorance, today their life pattern shows signs of progress and upward mobility. In the more developed areas of Malwa-the industrial areas in and near the cities-the economic conditions of the rural areas are often better, although this is

not uniformly so. In some cases, the economically improved Ravidassia maintain a distinctive sense of self-identity in developing cities, particularly the middle class. The Ravidassia in this region are comparatively more mobilized at political level and better organized and due to Ad-dharm movement and other reform movements among Dalits in the region moving away from traditional occupations was a strategic decision by the members of the community.

<center>II</center>

<center>**Analysis of Pattern of Identity Formation of Ravidassia community**</center>

This section analyses the pattern of identity formation and the success achieved by the Scheduled Caste population of the state in Malwa region. The aim is to identify the causes and consequences that led to the development of distinct identities within SCs. The tables are divided in various ways.   First, it discusses the sub-variables of castes among dalits in the Punjab, especially in the Malwa region. Second, it discusses the issue of identity transformation into political identity and the politicization of castes within the community. Third, it examines the process of mobilization how and to what extent groups are mobilised politically or electorally in a democratic political system. In the following tables, I examined the data from the fieldwork to better understand how identity has developed and how effective it has been in distinguishing from other religions. Furthermore, it examines communities' recognition of the culture and traditions of the region, the influence of reservations on SCs on the recognition of specific identities, and other relevant issues. It also affected other communities in the state.

Identity

In the context of Dalit identity, the concept of identity has played a significant role in Punjab. At present, identity is a complex and difficult concept that has been examined in various ways, including social, economic, and political aspects. Individual identities have been divided by society based on cultural norms, causing an identity crisis. During the Dalit movement in Punjab, new socio-religious spaces and identities formed.

 In Punjab, Sikhism emerged in the sixteenth century at the same time when lower castes were culturally mobilized. Different communities were given distinct identities by the newly constructed Sikh culture and its religious symbols, rituals, and traditions. On the other hand, the Brahmanical discourse, which was based on hierarchy, exploitation, and oppressive norms and practices, was opposed by the egalitarian ideology of Sikhism. The concept of "cultural

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selfhood" gives rise to a wide variety of liberated alternatives. Cultural assertion allows Dalits of Punjab to improve their social mobility. They were encouraged to follow the various religions before forging their distinct socio-cultural spheres, which ideologically promised them equality, social justice, and dignity.

Table 5.8

Basis of Identity

Castes	Responses			
	Religion	**Culture**	**Caste**	**Total**
Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia	76(51.35%)	41(27.70%)	30(20.27%)	148 (100)
Others	35(27.34%)	29(22.65%)	64(50%)	128 (100)
Total	111(86.71%)	70(25.36%)	94(34.05%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher (Figures in parentheses indicate column-wise percentage)

Table 5.8 shows that 51.35 percent of Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia respondents identify primarily through their religion. The Dalits of Punjab also tried to establish their own identity apart from Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. In the Doaba region, the Chamars have been effectively mobilised by the AD-Dharm movement, which also significantly transformed their social status and identity. However, some Dalit individuals who identify as Ad Dharmis continue to practise Hinduism. Now, it has been classified as a caste of Dalits, i.e., the Chamars. In contrast to other communities (Balmiki and Mazhabis), 22.65% of respondents claimed their community was making less effort to establish a distinctive cultural identity. They have been separated into a few religious groups. Both Balmikis and Mazhabis identify as either Sikh or Hindu. As a result, Balmikis-Mazhabis are less aware of identity issues than Chamars. Identity formation is a challenging process through which individuals establish a distinctive perception of themselves and it is characterised by continuity and internal unity. Due to this, it is closely related to concepts such as self and self-concept. Within Sikhism, the caste structure is preserved by endogamy and social exclusion, with certain constraints on social interactions. The caste system in Sikhism is based on social power, whereas the caste system in Hinduism is strongly rooted on ideology. The social scientific study of religion, which has relied on secularization theory - the notion that religion declines as a society modernizes - neglects to acknowledge the complexity of modern expressions of religion. Such is the case of the Ravidassia of Punjab,

whose assertion of a separate, distinct, and autonomous religion is not exclusively theological, but secured onto the notions of secular and egalitarian society.

The Chamars (Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia) have been successful in creating a religious and cultural space. They have constructed their own Ravidas Deras, Gurudwaras and mandirs where they enjoy a sense of pride and equality. In the cultural field the Chamars have emerged as a distinct religious community, who only profess Guru Ravidas. They have their own cultural values and rituals. The cultural values of the Mazhabis are almost the same as those of Jats, because they used to work historically as siris in the houses of Jat landlords under the 'Jajmani system'. Siris lived in the house of Jat for a full day. So, they adopted the same cultural values and some of them even adopted 'gotras' like Jats i.e. – Sidhu, Sahota, Hans, Gill, Dhaliwal etc. Meanwhile, the cultural values of Balmikis are almost the same as those of Hindus as they follow the Hindu religion. Marriages are performed according to Hindu rituals. There is, however, a growing tendency among Dalits to accommodate themselves within more syncretic definitions of Hinduism. Dalit identity has either been asserted in contradiction to, or in conformity with the syncretic Hindu identity.

Currently, the Balmikis are trying to build up their own cultural identity by encouraging people to worship only their Guru Maharishi Valmiki and not to visit mandirs. Being at the lowest rung of the social hierarchy, Balmikis-Mazhabis are considered as inferior amongst the major dalit castes in Punjab. Chamars (Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia) are considered superior to all dalit castes in Punjab. Most of them are business class and more educated. The field study reveals that maximum number of respondents including the Chamars (Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia) said that they are the most transformed dalit caste in Punjab and Balmikis-Mazhabis are the most backward major dalit caste despite being large in population of the state. The dalits in Punjab tried to solve their social problems by changing their religion. A change of religion or declaring their own religion gave dalits a new identity. Separate identity and social mobility are interrelated with each other. Because continuity with the old oppressive religion does not allow the dalits to create their own identity in which they can feel a sense of equality and freedom. As a result, they reject Hindu culture and religion and create their own through social and cultural revolutions.

Preservation of identity

Identity preservation is significantly influenced by culture. Culture is characterized as a society or a group of people's interrelated collective symbols, practices, and beliefs. Being a part of a distinct or recognized culture, it develops a group identity while simultaneously maintaining aspects of individual identity. Identity preservation is primarily a relational process in which individuals define and negotiate their relationships with their families, communities, religions, and other entities. Identity is flexible, dynamic, and performative in nature, showing how identity preservation changes between everyday life and developing cultural norms. Identity can be preserved in a number of ways due to the complex interplay between circumstances and self. Additionally, it implies that some facets of a group's identity can be weakened by other influences. For example, the change in Sikh culture affected not only religious practice but also persistent social norms. It establishes a relationship between the state and local institutions within social groups. Culture preserves identity through dress, language, clothing, names, and group exercise.

Table 5.9

Preservation of Identity

Castes /sub-caste	Responses		
	To some extent	To greater extent	Total
Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia	61(41.21%)	87(58.78%)	148 (100)
Others	70(54.68%)	58(45.31%)	128 (100)
Total	131(47.46%)	145(52.53%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher

Table 5.9 shows that 58.78percent of Ad-dharmis/Ravidassa take a significant effort to preserve their identity. And this table shows how the Ravidassias largely preserved their identity despite being a significant socio-political change within the Sikh community and politics. While 54.68 percent of respondents (including Balmiki and Mazhabis) keep their identity to some extent. Through the socio-religious movement of the Dalit community, we saw that the Chamars (Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia) underwent more socio-cultural transformation than the Balmikis and Mazhabis. Based on the analysis of the data and responses provided by

the respondents, the study has concluded that the Chamars have achieved the highest success in constructing a distinct identity within the SCs community. They have also established their own distinct religious texts, symbols, slogans, etc., which help define their identity.

In Punjab, the Dalits community preserved their identity through the establishment of Ravidass Deras as compared to other Dalit lower castes (Balmiki-Mazhabis). Since the entire gamut of activities in Ravidass Deras revolves around the teachings of Guru Ravidass, he emerges as a central figure in the premises of the Deras as well as in the minds of their followers. The idols of Guru Ravidass are placed in the sanctum sanctorum of almost all the Ravidass Deras in Punjab and elsewhere in India as well as abroad. It has generated a sense of confidence in them and provided an opportunity to exhibit their hitherto eclipsed Dalit identity. But Balmikis-Mazhabis are still struggling for their identity. The Balmikis-Mazhabis converted to the Sikh religion because they believed that this religion could protect us. Few respondents believe that every religion is the same, no religion can improve their status. Balmik Sabhas were established to strengthen the community. They were established so that they could become aware of their rights, as well as to obtain political, economic, and social benefits.

Religious and cultural festivals are celebrated by the Balmiki-Mazhabis like other Sikhs. Balmikis celebrate religious festivals similar to Hindus. Mazhabis are followers of the Sikh religion. Mazhabis are not even considered Sikhs by the upper caste Sikhs. The main aim of the Ad Dharam Movement was to establish a distinct identity from Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims and this aim was fulfilled by the Chamar caste. So only the Chamars (Ad-dharm/Ravidassia) could benefit from the movement by gaining a separate religious and cultural identity from Hindus and Sikhs. Balmikis, a major dalit group of Punjab, registered themselves as Ad Dharamis, but later, as a result of the rift between them and the dominance of the Chamars on the Movement, the Balmikis reverted to their own organization, Balmik Sabha, and Hindu religion. Though they adopted Maharishi Valmiki, Adi Kavi as their guru, they have never followed the teachings of their guru. They always had weak leaders, and many of them converted to other religions that never helped them maintain their identities.

<u>**Distinct and Separate Identity**</u>

Over the past several decades, the Ravidassia, the most prominent Dalit community, have been asserting their separate identity and establishing their own Ravidassia Sabhas and Gurdwaras. These are distinct from the mainstream Sikh organisations and Gurdwaras across the world. In terms of the census, Ravidassia are also included in Chamars as Hindus. However, in terms of sociology, they are a distinct community and different from both caste Hindus and Sikhs. The factors responsible for their separate identity include castes, religion conversions, socio-political movements, cultural identities, the emergence of Deras and socio-economic status. On 30 January 2010, the Dalit community established its own religion, known as "Ravidassia Dharm" which allowed equality and freedom in the society.

Table 5.10

Factors responsible for distinct and separate identity for community

Caste/sub-caste	Responses		
	Socio-religious movement	Caste/cultural identity	Total
Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia	89(60.13%)	59(39.86%)	148 (100)
Others	55(42.96%)	73(57.03%)	128 (100)
Total	144(52.17%)	132(47.82%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher

According to Table 5.10, 60.13 percent of respondents from Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia said that the socio-religious movement of Dalits had a big impact on how they formed their identities. Clearly, the Chamars are more conscious of the movement than the Balmikis-Mazhabis. Both the Chamars and the Balmikis founded and managed the movement. Mazhabis were not connected with the movement because its major centre was in the Doaba region. Some Balmiki-Mazhbais respondents claimed that the movement was dominated by one caste, namely, the Chamars and they were the first to become aware of it. The Ad-Dharmi is a Dalit caste in the state of Punjab in India and recognised as a Scheduled Caste. Ad Dharmis are 14.9% of the total Dalit population in Punjab. In the Doaba region, the people who belong to the Chamar caste still refer to themselves as Ad Dharmis. During the 1931 Census, they were listed as Ad Dharmis. Now a days, the Chamars are again attempting to convince their people to choose "Ad Dharam" as their religion.

In contrast, 57.03 percent of the Balmiki-Mazhabis respondents said caste identity has played an influential role. Their community's members are encouraged to worship only their Guru Maharishi Valmiki rather than visiting Gurudwaras, strengthening their distinct cultural identity. Still, they must deal with the stigma of being Dalits. Both communities are working hard to keep their separate identities within society. Hence, the Balmikis-Mazhabis suffer dual discrimination: one from upper caste and the other from the Dalit elite classes that have emerged within the Dalit community. As a result, respondents stated that their group makes little effort to maintain a distinct identity in society. Due to their menial jobs, they suffer more caste-based discrimination, poverty and humiliation. These factors led the study to identify the reasons for identity crisis among Dalits, and not all SCs castes have improved their status. . Social mobility and separate identities have a close relationship in Punjabi culture. Despite establishing their separate identity, they still faced discrimination due to continuity with the old oppressive religion.

Biradari

In literature, the term "biradari" is problematic and has been used in several ways. According to some research, the phrases "biradari," "zat," and "quom" can all be used in the same context (Ahmed 2007). Castes are further divided into sub-castes (zat in Punjab), which represent the most significant aspects of people's daily lives. The roles and relevance of biradari are widely recognised at all socio-cultural levels in Punjab. No one can deny the significance of biradari, for example, between classes, rural and urban regions.

In Punjab, rural culture has been characterized by the Biradari system throughout its history. The cultural, socio-economic, and political life of rural communities is highly influenced by the Biradari system. In rural areas, the Biradari system is known as "Parya" and "Panchayat". The panchayat played a crucial role in resolving socio-cultural conflicts at the local level. A birdari/community panchayat system was established by Sikhs for resolving disputes, and maintaining autonomy in the society. The Jat Sikh community always controls panchayats. It is interesting that Ravidassisa only appeals to the statutory panchayat or judicial courts to settle disputes with non-Dalits.

Table 5.11

Birdari(community) Panchayat and Settlement of Disputes

Caste/sub-caste	Responses		
	Biradari panchayat	**Statutory panchayat/ Judicial courts**	**Total**
Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia	59(39.86%)	89(60.13%)	148 (100)
Others	80(62.5%)	48(37.5%)	128 (100)
Total	139(50.36%)	137(49.63%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher

As shown in Table 5.11, 60.13 percent of Ad-Dharmis/Ravidassia respondents believe that the Statutory Panchayat/Judicial courts system is operational and gives a clear resolution to disputes, inter-caste problems, and land disputes without any discrimination. Meanwhile, Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia assert their rights. In contrast, other Balmikis-Mazhabis, 62.5 percent of respondents, supported the Biradari-based panchayats. They were helpful in resolving the intergroup conflicts. For example, they struggled for their share of common land, but could not fight against the upper caste. As respondents (Ravidassia/Ad-dharmis) said that Panchayati land is not given to the scheduled castes. A statutory panchayat and the government's attempts to redistribute land among the SCs under the Village Common Land Regulation Act have failed disastrously due to the Sikh hegemony in the region.

According to Balmiki-Mazhabi respondents from Mansa village, stated that due to the lack of sufficient economic resources, it prevented them from receiving their fair share of Panchayati land. The results showed that the majority of other (Balmiki-Mazhabis) respondents favored the Biradari panchayat as compared to Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia respondents. The respondents agreed that biradari panchayat is different from statutory panchayat in the sense that statutory panchayat is constituted in accordance with the law. It can get its decisions implemented with the backing of the state should warring communities disagree with its decision. When there is no statutory or community panchayat, judicial intervention is sought to settle inter-community disputes if the members disagree with the decision. As far as the caste dynamics underlying the functioning of the panchayat it concerned, particularly relating to common land, it was observed that there were underlying tensions.

The role of the government and the state bureaucracy in connection with the working of the panchayat regarding common land seems to be unsatisfactory. One, the level and range of exploitation associated with common resources like shamalat land and two, the corruption associated with such exploitations. Additionally, it also reflects the failure of local institutions including the panchayat, the Block development office and other state machinery. Caste conflict, again from the field it is evident that the biradari panchayat is a bone of contention between the higher and lower castes. The biradari system is one of the most significant characteristics of rural areas even in the 21st century in Punjab. Biradari/caste have a great deal of influence on the socioeconomic, political, and cultural patterns of Punjab, especially in the absence of state-provided social benefits. Members of the SC community (Balmiki-Mazhabis) spoke out against the denial of equal seating in panchayat meetings. They are forced to sit on the floor due to their Biradari/caste identity. Traditional power structures, with the support of Panchayat Secretaries and other government officials, often manipulate the constitutional mandate and rule by proxy. It was also a response to the rising demand to create an institution to bring about the 'inclusion' of marginalised communities and groups based on identities.

Impact of Biradari system on politics

The study of Biradari-influenced politics is necessary to understand and reform India's democratic system, as ethnic politics undermine the culture of party politics based on ideologies and causes. The Baradari institution contrasts traditional roles with contemporary political institutions such as political parties, elections, and parliamentary dominance. A biradari's political power comes from its representatives' capacity to unite biradari members in situations of rivalry and conflict with competitors (Eglar, 1960). Although universal franchise was not implemented during the British rule, the biradari system played a significant role in Punjab politics. The dynamics of biradarism and caste hierarchy are crucial variables in rural Punjab that influence electoral politics and impact communities' voting behaviour. It also discussed how various parties have used the Patron Client relationship to gain political support and votes from these non-members of Biradaris. The distribution of land ownership in rural Punjab was based on this factor, and that's why local feudal elites dominate there.

Table 5.12

Impact of Biradarism on Community and State Politics

Caste/sub-caste	Responses		
	Yes	**No**	**Total**
Ad-Dharmis/Ravidassia	70(47.29%)	78(52.70%)	148 (100)
Others	66(51.56%)	62(48.43%)	128 (100)
Total	136 (49.27%)	140(50.72%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher

Table 5.12 shows that 52.70 percent respondents said that Biradari has no significant impact on local and state politics. Today, most respondents believe dalit voters are more aware and awakened to cast their votes because of education, social media, and better economic conditions. In addition, parties do not discriminate based on their caste/Biradari. All categories are equally considered, and those who meet the criteria and nominated. The active participation of SCs and incorporation of their perspectives in all levels of decision making was essential to meet the goals of equality, justice and development. Decentralization was the only mechanism through which public goods and services could be distributed effectively and efficiently. While others (balmiki-Mazhabis) 51.56 percent respondents said significant impact. The local Biradari chiefs enjoy numerical strength of voters, which plays a vital role in the success of any political party in general elections. The political parties appear to be divided by local groups and Biradaris rather than by ideologies. Political parties give tickets to the candidates according to the popularity of Biradari in certain constituencies.

In rural Punjab, the roles of political leadership and patronage are held by the members of zamindar biradaris. It has been noticed that political parties have always influenced the working of panchayats. Panchayati Raj institutions are responsible for managing local public affairs. During the election campaign, candidates interact with voters through their biradari affiliations. In order to obtain the votes of zamindar biradaris, they contact their representatives. However, the interference of political parties has diverted their attention and is also causing their behavior to become partial. These parties create conflict between villagers. As respondents shared, in the scenario of the Punjab political system the biradari/zat system is extremely effective and plays its cultural role. This is from community level to national level politics. However, only 48.43 percent of respondents believed that political culture, caste, and

kinship (Biradari) have a lesser effect due to being politically aware. This table illustrates how local identities become the substance of electoral politics in rural Punjab. In rural areas, caste has a greater impact than in urban areas. Moreover, in rural society, the spirit of casteism has deep roots among rural people of Malwa region especially in the district of Sangrur.

Caste wise Sects

A group of individuals who adhere to the same religious beliefs is known as a sect. A religious sect is a form of a well-known religion that shares the original faith's principles and establishes its own distinct beliefs and practices. Sects have been trying to established their spiritual and intellectual roots and assert their self-confidence. In consequence, a dera may reject mainstream religion's norms and replace them with its own practices. Based on interview schedules, explanations were developed. Based on identity, deras have been divided among communities.

Table 5.13
Caste wise Sects(dera) following

Caste / sub-caste	Responses				Total
	Dera sachkhand ballan	Dera sacha sauda	Nirankari Dera	Radhasoami Dera Beas	
Ad dharmis/Ravidassia	66(44.59%)	55(37.16%)	15(10.13%)	12(8.10%)	148 (100)
Others	42(32.81%	56(43.75%)	16(12.5%)	14(10.93%)	128 (100)
Total	122(44.20%	97(35.14%)	31(11.23%)	26 (9.42%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher

According to Table 5.13, respondents from each sect were distributed based on their caste. Based on the responses, 44.59 percent of Adharmis/Ravidassia follow Dera SachKhand Ballan in the Malwa region because of less population as compared to the Doaba region. According to respondents, the importance of a living guru for the Dera Sachkhand Ballan sect is vital. The dera considers the living guru to be the real guru because they value him more than any holy book or teaching/principle. So, they had to travel to the Doaba region. The Ravidass Deras play a significant role in providing political, educational and health guidance to the Chamars. Also, Dera teaches people how to live an honorable and dignified life.

Deras such as SachKhand Ballan offer education to Dalit children through their educational institutions. The Ravidas Deras make people aware of their historical background such as the teachings of Guru Ravidass and their separate religious-cultural identities and the role of Ambedkar's ideology to empower the community. Several respondents stated that they felt proud to be Chamars because the community has developed in all fields. The community is more assertive (also referred to as Putt Chamara De). On the other hand, Balmiki Deras is inactive in creating awareness among the community regarding Maharishi Valmiki, his teachings, and their historical importance. The respondents said that the NRIs provide financial support to the Deras. Deras used this financial support for the construction of separate Mandirs and Gurudwaras, schools, hospitality, or arranging religious and cultural programs. Thus, they help to preserve their distinct identity both at home and abroad.

However, 43.75 percent of respondents (Balmiki-Mazhabis) supported and followed the Dera Sacha Sauda sect. In Malwa, Dera SachaSauda is popular among lower castes. There were many Balmiki-Mazhabis who flocked to the Dera Sachkhand Ballan as well. Both Deras provided religious spaces. Apart from the Dera Sacha Sauda, they follow the Nirankari Dera and Radhaswami Dera of Beas. Because, deras being controlled by elite groups, the community was unable to obtain equality and dignity. Only 12.75 percent of the (Bamlmiki-Mazhabi) respondents follow Nirankari Dera. Jats, become the head of these Deras. The respondents mentioned that Bhaini, Ludhiana, has a significant Dera of Kukas. Even though the majority of Kukas came from the Ramgharia, Jat, Cobbler, and Mazhabi lower classes. The largest Dera of the Balmikis- Dera Baba Lal Nath Ji Bhagwan Valmik Yog Ashram, Rahimpur, Uggi, located on the Nakodar to Kalasangia route, Jalandhar (Doaba region), is remarkably inactive in all domains. Currently, Baba Pargat Nath is the gaddi nashin.

The rise of these Deras to seat of power was primarily because Sikh religion in its modern form didn't accept Sikhs of lower castes. The ever-increasing number of Deras in the Doaba, Majha, and Malwa regions of Punjab is widely attributed to the denial of a respectable place to Dalits and backward caste people in religious places and Sikh Panths. Some of the respondents stated that, Although the Deras in Punjab have an egalitarian ideology, they have played an important part in the formation of Dalits consciousness and a significant role in the socio-economic progress of the state. They are creating an awareness among the people of Punjab regarding various social issues such as female- feticide , drug - addiction , environment pollution, dowry, evils related to women etc .

Apart from this some of the Deras have opened charitable hospitals and educational institutions for the poor. Thus, they play an important role in the fields of healthcare and education. Baring a few of these, all the Deras have remained non - controversial since their birth. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to completely rule out the impact of these Deras on the socio–economic-political life of the people of the Punjab. Deras like Sant Sarwan Dass, Ballan, have become a symbol of Dalit consciousness. As a result, large numbers of Dalits in Punjab and especially in Doaba have acquired non-agricultural occupations and settled abroad as well. The Deras in Punjab have mobilized people on caste lines, though some have been exceptions to this.

Assertion of sects-based Identity

In Punjab, the caste structure and religion are interrelated. Punjab has the highest population of scheduled castes (31.94 percent as per the 2011 census). Casteism is also quite prevalent in Punjab and it appears to be one of the main elements supporting the development of the dera culture. The importance of sect symbols in the followers' lives and their responses to being classified as sect members and their opinion about the mainstream religion are also considered in the study.

Even though these deras attract individuals from all aspects of life, most of their followers have seemed to come from the poor and middle classes. The emergence of a separate Dalit socio-cultural and religious identity has been significantly assisted by Ravidass Deras. It gained recognition during the Ad Dharm movement. During the Ambedkarite movement and the early years of the Bahujan Samaj Party, Dalit culture developed through poetry, music, autographs, and novels and played a significant role. The emergence of educated, socially conscious, and politically active Dalits raised a challenge against mainstream literature that denied their identity and self-respect.

Table 5.14

Asserting Sect Identity

Caste/ sub group	Responses		
	Greater Extent	**Some Extent**	**Total**
Ad dharmis/Ravidassia	108(72.97%)	40(27.02%)	148 (100)
Others	38(29.68%)	90(70.31%)	128 (100)
Total	146(52.89%)	130(47.10%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher

According to Table 5.14, 72.97% of Ad-Dharmis/ Ravidassia respondents claimed they asserted their sect identity to a greater extent. Sect symbols are unique characteristics for the sect's followers. While 70.31 percent of those who identify as Balmiki-Mazhabis claim they keep their sect identity to some extent. This again shows the prevalence of identity assertion among the Ravidassias as compared to the Others. This is because there is more than twice the percentage of respondents who think sect identity plays a greater role than it does to some extent. All sects have a connection with the dominant religion, Sikhism. Balmikis-Mazhabis claim that our deras have not made enough effort in this area. Thus, we have not made a significant contribution to the development of Dalit identity.

The emerging Dalit jathera[44] culture clearly opposes mainstream culture. When jathera festivals are organized on the same days as mainstream cultural festivals, it establishes distinct boundaries. This depicts cultural assertion and contestation vis-à-vis the conventional dominant culture. Multiple forces are working behind this rising Dalit jathera cultural heritage. Besides cultural factors, political forces are also participating in this process. For the sake of their own personal and political interests, political actors and agents support these shrines, both financially and politically. It also shows that transnational flows of culture capital have further helped the Ad Dharmi/Chamar community in their construction of jathera cultural heritage.

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[44] Jathera worship is a popular devotional practice in Punjab in which obeisance is paid to the ancestors of the got/gotra. For example, in Faridkot, there is a jathera known as Baba Kala Mehar Sandhu.

The construction of shrines and the reinvention of Dalit cultural heritage in Punjab, then, has two main implications. Firstly, it treats shrines as a way of performing culturally specific religious activities. Second, the process of shrine construction is traditionally seen as an assertion of legitimacy and respectable roots. The process of jathera cultural heritage formation provides two types of identity, self-identity, and collective identity, strengthening self-confidence among Dalits, while at the same time also nurturing feelings of 'we' and 'they'.

However, these spiritual Deras from different sects have been playing an active role in Punjab politics as well. Deras in Punjab influence their followers to support a specific political party or candidate. As a result, political parties such as Shiromani Akali Dal and Congress remained closed and associated with various Deras in order to gain the vote from their devotees. In Punjab, all the Sikh political leaders are affiliating themselves with Deras in order to obtain many committed votes from the Dera followers. For example, the Dera Sacha Sauda played a crucial role in Punjab politics, especially in the Malwa region.

III

Identity politics, Political Parties and Political Mobilization Among the Community

In this section, it shall be discussed how the emergence of identity politics, political parties, and political mobilization have been profoundly affected by discourses of identity. The term Identity politics refers to political positions based on the interests and perspectives of individuals who belong to specific social groups and share their experiences of injustice. The rise of low castes, religious identities and linguistic groups has contributed to the significance of identity politics in Punjab. Thus, identity politics aims to gain empowerment, representation, and recognition for specific social groups by asserting what distinguished and differentiated them from others. These fundamental features represent an assertion of selfhood and identity based on individual differences rather than equality. Political mobilization is a very common term in any democratic political system. It is the process by which groups and social units are organized for political purposes.

Rise of identity politics

In identity politics, separateness and difference are emphasized in order to emphasize one's distinct identity. It is the process by which individuals come together to assert their State and

social rights based on their shared culture, language, race, ethnicity, caste, religion and social movements. In the context of identity politics, two types of movements emerged for dalits in Punjab; the socio-religious and political movement. The first one is the Ad-Dharm movement and the second, the formation of Bahujan Samaj Party which is also considered a movement. It is a phenomenon that arose out of the shared experiences of injustice and marginalization of certain sections of society. This occurs when certain ethnic groups or social minorities experience oppression, marginalization, and feel that their distinctiveness and uniqueness are being compromised as a result of the dominance of the majority group. In the process of mobilization driven by identity politics, marginalized groups or minorities are not demanded for inclusion into the fold of the majority because of their common attributes, nor are they demanded to receive an equal share and respect regardless of their differences. Identity politics also implies maintaining a hierarchy between 'us' and 'them', and this is a distinction between identity politics and inclusive politics.

Table 5.15

Factors Responsible for the Rise of Identity Politics

Castes/sub-castes	Responses		
	Dalit movements	Caste/ethnic conflicts	Total
Ad dharmis/Ravidassia	75(50.67%)	73(49.32%)	148 (100)
Others	60(46.87%)	68(53.12%)	128 (100)
Total	135(48.91%)	141(51.08%)	276 (100)

Source: field data collected by a researcher

According to Table 5.15, 50.67 percent of Ad-Dharmis/Ravidassia respondents agreed that the dalit political groups and their movement have played a significant role in the emergence of identity politics. On the other hand, 46.87 percent respondents agreed that the Ad Dharm (Dalit movement) played the most significant role in carving out a separate identity for the dalits of Punjab particularly the Chamars. In the electoral arena, the foundations of identity politics—caste, religion, gender, ethnicity, region, individual, real, or perceived—assume different and often overlapping forms in terms of Dalit movements. At times, religious identity may triumph over caste, with the sequence overturned in the next election; in some instances, different caste groups come under a broad secular umbrella, in others religion becomes the umbrella; and sometimes, regionalism may triumph over all other factors—and there are also political parties

that identify themselves with just one individual. This fluid expression of identities makes electoral politics both unpredictable and treacherous. For example, the Ad- Dharam Movement made a significant impact on the Dalits of Punjab in the context of identity politics. Dalits and Sikhs are two communities that compete based on caste and religion. These communities are concerned more with their own sense of identity than with questions of power and dominance.

According to 53.12 percent of respondents (Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia) and 49.32 percent of respondents (Balmiki-Mazhabis) stated that identity politics from an economic perspective gives rise to caste identities and ethnic conflicts in the region. If the economy is affected, then competition arises or scarcity of resources leads directly to conflict among groups and individuals in society. On the other hand, Balmiki-Mazhabsi were not active in any movement because of their low caste identity. Some respondents stated that most villages were dominated by two powerful communities-the Jat (Sikh) and the Ravidassia (chamar) who were mainly peasants who cultivated crops for a living. A significant portion of land around the villages is controlled by these two caste-based segments of society due to their caste/ethnic identities. On the other hand, Balmiki-Mazhabis respondents stated that Politics' still means power relations among persons and groups within the village or circle of villages."

Most of the respondents said the rise of identity politics has been influenced by social movements, caste conflicts, and ethnic conflicts. This problem is generally more prevalent in the multiple identities' community due to identity polarization, which is either caused by a lack of tolerance for cultural diversity, social benefits, and opportunities between distinct ethnic groups, or by a political exclusion of certain ethnic groups from the framework of the state. The phenomenon of identity politics in Punjab was not only a post-colonial product of identity contestation and conflict, but also developed during the British rule of the country. For example, contestation for identity between Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims based on religion. Historically, identity politics in Punjab has been characterized by the rise of dalit politics, especially the BSP and backward class politics following the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report; the linguistic organisation of Indian states since the 1950s, the rise of the Akali Dal, and the involvement of organizations such as the BJP; and ethnic conflict, insurrection, and autonomy movements in several parts of the country. The emergence of regional and state major political parties in many states is largely due to identity politics.

Political parties and Electoral politics

A Dalit assertion in the political realm can be described as a demand for electoral power or the right to participate in politics. The different movements have brought awareness to the Dalits of Punjab. Dalits in Punjab have gained political influence through either the two main traditional political parties (Congress and Akali Dal) or the BSP, which claims to be their representation. Punjab politics fluctuated between religio-caste identity and secular identity based on electoral and political considerations. Political parties with conflicting support bases have occasionally joined or formed alliances with other political parties that represent distinct and opposing social groups. The three historical dimensions that provided contextual articulation to these alliances were shaped and maintained by political, economic, and demographic factors. The three dimensions are: first, identity assertions; second, majority-minority issues and third, intermeshed religio-caste and class articulations. The Shiromani Akali Dal and the Congress's political base among Dalits. Even though caste has traditionally been a major factor in Punjabi politics, the BSP aims to relate to the Dalit community's struggle. The SAD, the Sikhs' party in state politics, has long dominated Punjab politics under Parkash Singh Badal's leadership, giving Congress a serious challenge.

Table 5.16

Responses towards Support to Political Parties in the Elections

Caste/sub-castes	Responses					
	Congress	**Akali Dal**	**BJP**	**BSP**	**AAP**	**Total**
Ad-Dharmis/ Ravidassia	45(30.40%)	25(16.89%)	20(13.51%)	17(11.48%)	41(27.70%)	148 (100)
Others	35(27.34%)	47(36.71%)	17(13.28%)	9(7.03%)	20(15.62%)	128 (100)
Total	80(28.98%)	72(26.08%)	37(13.40%)	26(9.42%)	61(22.10%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher

Table 5.16 reveals that 30.40 percent of respondents from Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia said they were members of a particular party, and during interaction in the fieldwork, they said that this

party worked for the welfare of Dalits. For example, they have allegiance to the Congress party because Congress has done a lot of work for the welfare of the Dalits. Congress is responsible for implementing the reservation policy. Congress gave land and houses to the Dalits. The Dalits were not allowed to have land, and the Congress gave us this right. According to them, they have allegiance to several political parties, including the Congress, Akali Dal, BJP, BSP, and AAP. The Mazhabis have also chosen the name of the panth among the Dalit Sikhs. While making an alliance with the Hindu party BJP, it aims to establish Hindu-Sikh harmony while abandoning its religious or panth agenda.

Among the others (Balmiki-Mazhbais), 36.71 percent of the respondents said they supported Akali Dal because it provided Atta-Dal, saying it was better since it had contributed to their welfare. They were against the Congress because of the suspension of old age pensions. There were 7.03 percent of Balmikis-Mazhabis and 11.48 percent of Ravidassia-Ad-dharmis (Chamars) who favored BSP because it is a Dalit party. Only a few respondents believe that BSP can understand their problems and can work for the welfare of Dalits in the state. The non-Dalit parties only pretend to be the well-wishers of the lower castes. These parties are dominated by the upper castes who do not think it necessary to work for the welfare of the downtrodden. Some respondents from Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia claimed that during the 80s, BSP was a Chamar-dominated party. 13.51perecent of the Ravidassia/Adharmis and 13.28percent of Balmikis-Mazhabis stated that they prefer the BJP.

After demonetization, Dalit youth showed their allegiance to BJP due to Modi's influence. 15.62 percent of Balmikis-Mazhabis and 27.70 percent of Chamars like AAP party in the state. Primarily young people said that they liked AAP because it had done good work in Delhi. They are hoping that it can do good work in Punjab too. Individuals have chosen a cultural path in quest for a respectable social identity for themselves that relates to their economic status due to their dissatisfaction with the three major political parties—the SAD, Congress, and BSP. The construction of separate gurudwaras, joining other Deras, and supporting the vani of their own gurus have all emerged as effective ways for communities to express their dissatisfaction and the gap created by political forces. The table shows that if we examine the identity politics of BSP and the fact that BSP receives support from Ravidassias, it becomes evident that Ravidassias are more loyal than Mazahbis since the assertion of identity is more explicit among earlier groups. There is caste-wise division within the Dalits in the region.

<u>**Voting Behaviors**</u>

This section examines how scheduled castes play a role in state politics. A study of the political behavior of the Dalit communities in electoral politics identifies three distinct phases of electoral politics. These phases help to understand the phenomenon of political marginalization of scheduled castes. They have been witnesses to phases of integration and separation from the dominant political formations and the societal groups they represent. Voting behaviour, like any other facet of human behaviour, takes place in a specific socio-cultural context. It is influenced by social structure, economic development, and historical factors. In terms of voting behaviors, these factors have an impact on the key mechanism of majority in a democratic society. Voting behavior is influenced by some determinants, such as family, kinship, caste, religion and groups. This is true when the BSP party has been established. Dalit politics gained popularity when the BSP came to power. It grabbed Congress' and other parties' Dalit vote bank. It developed itself as a national party by using caste to win the support of Dalits in northern India.

Table 5.17

Factors influencing voting behaviour in the elections

Caste/sub-caste	Responses			
	Caste	**Religion**	**Role of local leaders/ Party candidate**	**Total**
Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia	68(45.94%)	45(30.40%)	35(23.64%)	148 (100)
Others	42(32.81%)	60(46.87%)	26(20.31%)	128 (100)
Total	110(39.85%)	105(38.04%)	61(22.10%)	276 (100)

Source: field data collected by Researcher

Table 5.17 shows that 45.94% of Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia respondents believe that caste plays a significant role in influencing voting behaviour. Whereas among the others this figure is for religion as a factor. It gets reversed when it comes to the issue of caste among the Mahzhabi Sikhs. Non-Dalit parties also used caste to achieve their political goals, just as Congress had done before independence. Caste-based political mobilization has been an aim of political parties and leaders. Some respondents said the major changes came when caste in social shifted to political in the post-independence period. In Punjab, the Unionist Party maintained its position at marginal levels because it belonged to the landowner class and represented their

interests in rural areas. However, 46.87 percent of respondents observed that religion has always affected voting behaviour.

Some respondents claimed that after independence, the Sikh population grew significantly. It shifted the trend of political power in the hands of the Jat Sikh peasantry. Even now, no one is challenging this position of dominance. However, it has been observed that the Malwa region's political leadership consistently maintained a control on the state's political power. As a result, in the name of 'panth' SAD has always been successful in influencing the voting behavior of both communities. According to 23.64 percent Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia and 20.31 percent of Balmikis-Mazhabis respondents, the role of the party candidate is another factor. Factions are a key variable in influencing the voting pattern of the electorates in Punjab.

The factional leaders take influence among their local supporters and play an influential role in moulding the voting behaviour of the voters of their respective regions. The Congress, on the other hand, recognizing the fact that Mazhabhis have been far more enthusiastic about Sikh religion and politics, worked out strategies to gather Mazhabhi support. According to Ravidassia and Balmiki-Mazhabis the ruling alliance government worked to develop rural areas but ignored urban areas. So the performance of the government also affects the voting pattern. The voting behaviour of rural people has been considerably influenced by local leaders-such as village sarpanchs, members of village Panchayats, members of Panchayat Samities and Zila Parishads. Many of these local leaders stay in touch with their voters in different ways. They continue to participate actively in social occasions like religious and cultural festivals. Thus, the majority of the parties approach these village leaders, who serve as "vote banks" for various parties. There are several local leaders who are not strongly affiliated with any particular party.

The influence of caste on the politics of Punjab is evident. As a few respondents pointed out, we have seen that the person who holds the top position socially, economically, and educationally is the one who controls Punjab's politics. It is not the people of all categories who control the politics of this state but it is guided by a limited category of people. An equally significant aspect was the interaction of caste with politics within the broad boundary conditions reformulated by religious reform movements. Punjab has been known for its liberal ritualistic religious practices in relation to caste. Both Sikhism and the Arya Samaj liberated the Dalits from stringent purity-pollution based behavioural patterns. The religious, caste and class dimensions are intermeshed, but the dominant formations are in exclusive demographic

spaces. For example, the Sikh-Jat-Peasant identity is predominantly in rural areas and the Hindu-Khatri-Trader identity is dominated in urban areas.

Domination of a particular Dalit caste in politics

The dominance of a caste does not always depend on the place of caste in the social hierarchy. What matters is the numerical strength of the caste coupled with its economic independence, political consciousness and political consolidation in a particular locality or the area/region. This will determine the dominance and subordination of a caste. All castes have not experienced change in their conditions uniformly, but political mobilization is not a corollary to the economic transformation in every case. Therefore, political implications of changing caste hierarchy in Punjab are not characterised by a major shift in party politics. It is among the dalits that the caste associations are assertive and aim at influencing the political process of the state. All these concepts underwent a radical irrelevance in the 1990s when religion remained significant, but politics of identity began to surface in a big way. The earlier developments had already laid the foundation for identity politics. Caste politics in terms of the dynamics of caste associations as pressure groups and political parties as actors competing for power and the interface between the two. Except for the Republican Party of India which became active in Punjab in the 1960s and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in the 1990s, the obvious and direct connection between political party and caste has not been institutionalized in Punjab.

Table 5.18

Domination of one dalit caste on Punjab politics

Caste/sub-caste	Responses		
	Yes	No	Total
Ad-Dharmis/Ravidassia	92(62.16%)	56(37.83%)	148 (100)
Others	51(39.84%)	77(60.15%)	128 (100)
Total	143(51.81%)	133(48.18%)	276 (100)

Source: field data collected by Researcher

Table 5.18 shows that 62.16 percent of Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia respondents and 39.84 percent respondents agreed that there is the hegemony of a particular dalit caste within political parties.

They are more aware of political mobilization and defining their identity in a political context. Further it shows that 37.83 percent of Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia respondents and 60.15 percent of the Balmikis-Mazhabis respondents said that they are not aware of it. It reveals that the Ravidassia/Ad-dharmis are more aware of their organizations and political identity than the Balmikis-Mazhabis. The Chamars have more influence in the political field due to their assertive nature. They are educated and aware as compared to the other dalit categories. Their economic condition is much better than the other Dalits. That is why the parties give them more importance. They have more unity as a community.

The Ravidas Bhaichara (community) is ahead in the political field. Their leaders are very active in providing benefits to their community. But on the other hand, the leaders of the Chamar community act confidently. Ravidassia/ Ad-dharmis respondents said that political participation has increased due to the awareness of vote power among the Dalits. It has been caused due to increase in education and party politics. That is why they dominate in Punjab politics. The initial success of the BSP is history. Whatever was left of the party is slowly coming to an end through splits and mergers with any of the main political parties of the state specifically, the SAD and the Congress party. One may conclude that what is left of any consequence in caste politics in Punjab is pressure politics through caste associations.

The emergence of political mobilization

Democratic political systems often refer to political mobilization. During the early 20th century, various reform movements mobilized the scheduled castes of Punjab, making them very aware of their political rights. For instance, the scheduled castes' opposition to the Akali demand for a separate Punjabi Suba shows their level of political awareness. Scheduled castes in Punjab had their first autonomous political formation in the form of Ad-Dharm, which later merged with the Ambedkar Scheduled Caste Front and became the Republican Party of India attempted to mobilize the support of these groups. The emergence of deras in Punjab was one such repercussion of Dalit consciousness. Dalit followers are increasing in the deras throughout the state and around the world, a trend that is unique to democratic politics in India.

Table 5.19

Reasons behind the emergence of political mobilization

Caste/sub-caste	Responses		
	Dalit organization/ movements	Influence of deras	Total
Ad-Dharmis/Ravidassia	85(57.43%)	63(42.56%)	148 (100)
Others	61(47.65%)	67(52.34%)	128 (100)
Total	146(52.89%)	130(47.10%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher

The table 5.19 shows that 57.43 percent of Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia and 47.65 percent of the others respondents do agree that the dalit organisations and their movements had played an influential role in the emergence of political assertion/mobilization. According to Chamar respondents, a specific caste has been successful in asserting its political assertions. According to the Bamiki-Mazhabi respondents, the Chamar caste has greater control over political parties than any other dalit caste. This is because, in comparison to other sub-caste groups of dalits, Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia are more economically stable, have higher levels of education, and are aware of their rights. The emergence of BSP in Punjab has also played an influential role in providing political education to them and making them aware. Furthermore, it has given them political space in Punjab politics. BSP is the only dalit party in the country that has become a national party. Punjabi dalits are well-represented in this organization, which fights for their rights. The BSP has opened a path for them in Punjab politics as many strong leaders belonging to the Chamar caste have been established in big non-dalit parties through the BSP.

The Chamars are more aware of organizations and that is why they are more organized than Balmikis-Mazhabis. They are organized into various occupational and religious/cultural organizations that support their rights. 42.56 percent and 52. 34 percent of the respondents thought Deras influenced a crucial part of political mobilization in the state. Most of the studies on Dera politics have revealed that the Deras influenced their followers to vote in favour of a particular party. The Ravidasi Deras like Dera Sachkhand Ballan and Dera Bhaniarawala of Piara Singh have also been contributing to the political support base of the parties. The Ravidas

Deras have been supporters of the BSP, a Chamar-dominated party. And this again adversely affected the Congress dalit votes in the state.

In conclusion, it can be said that both Ad-Dharm and BSP have a significant impact in north India, especially in Punjab. As a result, they have succeeded in changing the thinking and lifestyle of Dalits in Punjab and creating a new consciousness among them. Under the dynamic leadership of these two, Dalits organized struggle against the caste system and discrimination. Both movements achieved success, but were unable to sustain that success, especially in Punjab. In present time, Dalits are more conscious socially, religiously and to some extent politically. As a result, they understand their strengths and try to build new identities. The struggle for self-respect and dignity is especially strong in the community. Other organizations are also working for Dalits' betterment and self-respect, e.g. Dalit social organizations. The Dalit political party BSP also works for Dalit upliftment not only politically but also socially and economically.

Limitation of Political Mobilization

After analyzing the reasons behind the emergence of political mobilization in Punjab, the question arises what are the limitations of political mobilization and its effects on other communities? In this regard, the literature has highlighted the fact that there is a crisis of Dalit Political Leadership in Punjab. Though, to some extent, Dalits have managed to improve their socio-economic condition, they are still politically marginalized in Punjab. Ronki Ram (2007) has argued that Dalits of Punjab are economically marginalized, socially oppressed and politically neglected. Their socio-political exclusion has led them towards Deras where they hope to find a better future. As compared to their proportion in the population, they are deprived of sufficient political space. Some studies argued that there is a lack of unity in Dalits as they are divided into various segments like caste, sub-castes, religion etc. In this context, dynamic leadership is even more vital so that the community's aspirations are represented on various political fronts and discusses this significant issue that there is a crisis in Dalit political leadership in Punjab.

Table 5.20

Limitations for the political mobilization in region

Caste/sub-caste	Responses			
	Lack of unity within leaders	Dominance of upper castes leaders	Lack of ideological awakening	Total
Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia	75(50.67%)	50(33.78%)	23(15.54%)	148 (100)
Others	35(27.34%)	71(55.46%)	22(17.18%)	128 (100)
Total	110(39.85%)	121(43.84%)	45(16.30%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher

Table 5.20 shows that 50.67 percent and 27.34 percent of Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia respondents stated that the Dalits leaders do not have unity. They always fight with each other for supremacy. Dalit community leaders do not support each other on common issues or issues related to their respective communities. The parties are divided into different groups. 33.78 percent and 55.46 percent of respondents said As, in all the parties, there is the domination of upper caste leaders. They like to vote for candidates who are directly related to their caste during elections. There is a lack of ideological awakening in the political parties. 15.54 percent and 17.18 percent of respondents said Our leaders do work for their own benefit. They do not raise their voices for the welfare of their people or against the atrocities of Dalits. They must realize that they come into power because of people, so they should work for their interests. In Punjab state, the party does not participate with Dalit leaders since it is predominantly a Jat party with control over all walks of life.

The system of internal democracy within political parties is generally lacking, with major decisions generally taken by an individual or group of individuals within the party rather than through a democratic process. There was a weakening of party structures in Punjab during the 1950s. As a result of factionalism and internal disputes within parties, India's political parties have splintered and multiplied. A limitation of mobilization in Punjab is the connection between political parties, criminals, business, and corruption. In terms of decision-making, Dalit leaders are given less influence. It is the upper caste leaders who make the majority of decisions. Some respondents explained that lack of resources; less use of social media are major hurdles in creating political assertion among Dalits. For political activism, money is a

necessary source. We can start a movement with passion but at the end of the day, money matters a lot.

Dalit leadership's Increasing participation in politics

Another significant point in examining the nature of Dalit leadership in Punjab is to understand their views regarding their contribution to the welfare of the community, which comprises understanding their style of functioning to solve the problems of Dalits, their interaction with Dalits and how they mobilize the Dalit Community. It is crucial to understand how Dalits entered the political arena and have gained space in society such that they have established their own identity in politics. This study tries to find out the different factors responsible for the emergence of Dalit leadership in Punjab. The respondents agreed that social transformation is the most effective way to serve the community, and that political power plays a crucial role in achieving this goal.

Table 5.21

Factors increasing Dalit leadership's participation in politics

Caste/sub-caste	Responses		
	Interested in Politics and affiliated with BSP	Public Support and Family Link in Politics	Total
Ad-Dharmis/Ravidassia	83(56.08%)	65(43.91%)	148 (100)
Others	58(45.31%)	70(54.68%)	128 (100)
Total	141(51.08%)	135(48.91%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher

As shown in Table 5.21, 56.08 percent of Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia agree that they are interested in politics and want to work for the welfare of the people: We care about serving the public and solving their problems. There is a lot of work which must be done. We joined politics to serve society. According to 54.68 percent of respondents, their family connections are crucial to getting into politics and continuing their career. They enter politics because of their political family background. Secondly, they are interested in politics. They get tickets due to their family relations with the party or MLA. However, they do work for the public's benefit with the help of the leadership. In order to enter the political arena, public and party support is required. We should join politics, because it gives us knowledge and we can be more aware of our rights. It is necessary to understand and establish such thinking in order to enter politics. A few

respondents said they felt helpless because they have to work under the pressure of the upper castes. But they could not say anything because of their low position. They argued that leaders should join the political party that is currently in power. In order to enter politics, you need money, understanding and the right mindset. For such work you need the support of the ruling party. Without power we cannot do anything. They were elected only on the basis of reserved seats and could not have been elected on general seats.

Role of leadership

To analyze the nature of Dalit leadership in Punjab in the present time, one should know about the nature of Dalit leadership in the past. This is because Dalit leadership made efforts for Dalit" upliftment. Social leaders do better than political leaders. They are creating awareness in the community. Therefore, the situation is changing. People speak about their castes and do not hide them due to the awareness created by social leadership. In the past, caste was rigid, and most people would hide their identities. We can say that change has come with awareness and education. They are doing their bit for the Dalit community. They participate in movements; raise their voice against discrimination and atrocities against Dalits. But they have few resources. Other castes try to create differences among them. In Dalit communities, social organizations work to spread awareness of Dalit saints and social reformers.

Table 5.22

Satisfied with the Role of social leadership in protecting the interests of the community

Caste/sub-caste	Responses		
	Yes	No	Total
Ad-Dharmis/Ravidassia	90(60.81%)	58(39.18%)	148 (100)
Others	54(42.18%)	74(57.81%)	128 (100)
Total	144(52.17%)	132(47.82%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher

According to Table 5.22, 60.81 percent of Ad-dharmis/ Ravidassia respondents believe that social leaders play a significant role in protecting the interests of their communities. According to them they only know about saints and gurus like Guru Ravidas, Guru Nanak Dev and Soami Valmiki. Ambedkar was a real leader who worked for the community. Mangoo Ram, Kanshi Ram and Jagjivan Ram also emerged as leaders for the community. Social leaders do better than political leaders. They raised community awareness. Therefore, the situation is changing.

People speak about their castes and do not hide it due to the awareness created by social leadership. However, the majority of 57.81 respondents said that these leaders seek their own interests but do nothing for the community. Most of them work for their own reputation or fame, few work for the community. Some social leaders are working. Some respondents felt that upper castes think that Dalits can unite hands at any time and on any front. So, they lure social leaders into creating division among lower castes. There are only a few social leaders who work for the welfare of the poor, otherwise they mostly seek their own profit. It shows that all social leaders are different in their thoughts and actions. But the Dalit political leadership in Punjab is not successful in their mission for several reasons. Political parties use them for their benefit by giving them money to organize meetings against each other.

Reservation

 Reservations are still being debated. SCs are one of the most oppressed and backward communities in Indian society, and continue to suffer discrimination and social exclusion even in the present day. There is a complex history behind Dalit issues. The roots of India's untouchability problem recede beyond history as does the caste system that gave rise to it. Therefore, the Government of India uses the reservations policy to benefit the Scheduled Castes. It is an attempt to remove the "barrier to equal opportunity" and give every section of society an equal chance to participate fully in the governance of the community. It was developed to enable a significant persistent lack of representation of marginalized social groups. It has focused on issues such as reservation in employment and reserved seats in educational institutions. In this study the opinion of respondents is different on the issue of reservation. Several policies were implemented by the government during the post-independence period to improve Dalit welfare or status.

Table 5.23

Responses about reservation policy has changed the community status

Caste/sub-caste	Responses			
	Society	Private sector	Educational institutions	Total
Ad-Dharmis/Ravidassia	36(24.32%)	32(21.62%)	80(54.05%)	148 (100)
Others	25(19.53%)	55(42.96%)	48(37.5%)	128 (100)
Total	61(22.10%)	87(31.52%)	128(46.37%)	276 (100)

Source: Field data collected by Researcher

In Table 5.23, 54.05 percent of Ravidassia/Ad-dharmis respondents supported the reservation policy and explained that it had only been possible through the struggle of our leaders and they now can acquire high-quality education and upward mobility. Meanwhile, 42.96percent of respondents in other categories (Balmikis and Mazbhabis) believed that reservation policy should have benefited the private sector and raised their socioeconomic status in society. The policy of reservation was for all the Dalits and all jobs were reserved for them but Blamikis-Mazhabis chose the job of scavenging in Municipal Corporations and in other institutions. In the political field, the Chamars have enjoyed more reservation. The Punjab government implements a number of policies and schemes to improve the lives of people, but the Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, 1976 is not very effective. However, Bonded Labour has only been declared illegal through the intervention of the National Human Rights Commission. They are also in stable jobs and economically well off. They are getting education due to the reservation policy. Both the dalit categories have enjoyed reservation equally because reservation is for all the dalit categories.

Most respondents believe that government funds/schemes can improve socioeconomic conditions in a society through reservation. Moreover, during the ten years of rule of SAD, it has tried to woo Dalits by making schemes for the poor. This includes the Shagan scheme, Atta Dal scheme on Blue Cards, Bhagat Puran Singh scheme for providing them medical help etc. and the party had been successful to some extent. A few respondents believed that political reservation policies helped them improve their status. The government only manipulates the Dalit electorate in order to get their votes. Policies are not implemented correctly for other minorities. Despite these ruthless policies, the government should make policies for providing

equal and quality education to all the Dalits and providing them with jobs and work opportunities.

5.4 Field-based Observation: Ravidassia Experiences of Casteism in Malwa Region

The field work provided me the most valuable insights into the dynamics of caste and society. For the fieldwork the reseacher visited, in the rural Malwa region, in-depth interviews were conducted based on identity assertion, the role of the state and political parties and political mobilization among the Ravidassia community in their day-to-day life. The idea of 'Dalit consciousness' which symbolizes the collective aspiration of the different caste groups has been diminished due to internal differences among the communities Identity politics finds fertile ground in the Malwa region of Punjab, where there are numerous differences based on caste, religion, race, language, and community. Caste is one identity on the basis of which identity politics flourishes. There is caste-based oppression and discrimination in society, so those belonging to these communities and castes suffering oppression are mobilised based on their identity and perceived oppression. Dalit groups, OBC movements which sprang up on the question of reservations etc indulge in competitive politics for reservation, allocation of resources, against discrimination and so on.

Ravidassia Dalits are in a better position and are more assertive about their rights in Punjab due to Sikhism, teachings of gurus and saints and because of socio-religious movements as explained earlier. Still, caste continues to have an impact on people's lives. These are issues that need to be focused upon and how are these issues different from other sections of society? As discussed in earlier chapters, a number of Dalit leaders have emerged from time to time to resolve issues affecting Dalits and raise their concerns. Based on notes from the field, it is equally relevant to analyse the perceptions of contemporary Ravidassia and its political leaders in the region. This is regarding the vision, leadership skills, efforts made from time to time by different Dalit leaders for the upliftment of their community and other related issues.

Most respondents agreed that caste plays a significant role in their day-to-day lives. However, caste has a less significant impact in Punjab as compared to other parts of India. This change is only in Doaba region due to better economic conditions and the Diaspora effect. In Malwa they are poor and uneducated Dalits because the Jat community heavily dominates them. Even

today, the "Siri System"[45] is still in use. They perform manual works for Jats and are called "Siri". Few of the elected respondents argued that caste has no influence at present. In modern society, there is only one fundamental difference between rich and poor people. It depends on economic relations. Today, everyone suffers from the same problems, whether they are Dalits or upper-caste. The Sarb Dharma (a religion meant for all) should be adopted by everyone, and caste should not be mentioned. Give money and get the work done. But now they treat us well because they need us. Many Ravidassias believed that the only alternative was to worship separately. This was because upper caste Sikhs had not changed or even firmly refused to change their perspective toward Chamars, especially in the context of Malwa. Gurmeet Kaur, who belonged to the Ravidassia community, discussed discrimination in religious places. She said, "When I was fifteen or sixteen, I overheard a disrespectful remark at the first gurdwara (the general gurdwara before establishing the Ravidassia temple). I talked about it at home. My grandparents informed me that they still see us as inferior and ignorant—an attitude that comes from the family. However, the reality is that we dislike each other. Rivalry, lack of trust, and arrogance are all present. We are born with this mindset, and it cannot be changed" (Fieldwork interview, 2018).

The economic situations of the Ravidassia are usually much better in the more developed regions of Punjab—the industrial districts and close to the cities. There are some instances where Ravidassia individuals who have benefited economically have continued to assert their individual identities within the urban middle class. Even in the cities' growing middle class, Ravidassia members maintain their old caste identities and alliances. A stronger tendency toward distinct Ravidassia cultural symbols is characteristic of a higher level of economic progress and social mobility. The fact that all respondents agreed that there is discrimination within the Dalit community was one significant finding from the field that was chosen. There are 39 sub-castes of Dalits. Dalits are divided along caste and religious lines. They worship their Gurus, such as Chamars worship Guru Ravidas, Balmikis worship Swami Valmiki, and

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[45] In this system, the landowner leases out his land to another farmer in the village where the tenant must pay a fixed rent (annually) to the landowner. The siri or sharecroppers are those who do farming on a shared basis. They receive a share of the crops as their wages. When farmers don't spend much time in the field, they keep the siri. Sometimes, they give complete responsibility for farm operations to the siri. Land-owners and laborers have a traditional Jajmani type of payment system in which the relationship between them is significant. Besides siri, tenant farming is also very common nowadays.

other people follow various saints and Dera heads. These people, who come from different subcastes, do not practise their religion correctly and only have depictions as their cultural icons. They continue to engage in conflict with each other. There is a lack of awareness among them and others are taking advantage of this. Many Ravidassias are disappointed due to lack of caste equality, both in India and in the diaspora. Even though some mainstream Sikhs recognize that casteism has harmed Sikh unity and are devoted to a caste-free panth, Ravidassias still feel they are not entirely welcome.

 The Vienna attacks[46] played an influential role in the development of Chamar anger over their lack of equal status and dignity within Sikhism. This is represented culturally in the specific terms and concepts used to describe Dalit Sikhs but no other caste Sikhs. As other Ravidasias have pointed out, there would be no need for such terms in a truly egalitarian panth. Everyone would be Sikh, and there would be no need to confine culturally " particular " categories of Sikhs based on their caste identities. A critical mass of Ravidassia Chamars has come to believe that Sikhism not only could not offer them the social respect and status they wanted. It also hampered the progress and development of their community. They needed a separate identity and religion to regain their legitimate place in society and provide them with religious "wings". They are struggling to regain collective self-confidence and respect. The Vienna attacks caused a significant change in thinking, encouraging the Ravidassias to establish their own religious path in the quest for social equality.

The Ravidassia Gurdwara was divided between Sikhs and Dalits because of ideological differences. There has been conflict between these two communities because of Sikh attempts

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[46] Seen in this historical context, the street violence in Punjab following the Vienna attack on 24 May 2009 leading to the death of a senior Ravi Dasi religious leader would appear more like a case of assertion of the Ravi Dasis' political strength and assertion of their united identity than a case of caste conflict, as it has been popularly (mis)interpreted by the popular media. in India was quick to interpret it as yet another instance of caste conflict within Sikhism, viz, between dalit Sikhs and upper caste Sikhs. This was not only a wrong interpretation of the unfortunate incidents of violence in Vienna and Punjab, it also misrepresented the complex realities of caste and religious identity in contemporary Punjab. Though the Ravi Dasi dalits of Punjab treat the Sikh holy book GuruGranth with reverence and their temples are also often called Gurdwaras, a large majority of them do not identify with the Sikh religion. Ravi Dasis have emerged as a powerful and autonomous caste-religious community. Their emergence is the result of intense Dalit identity movements in Punjab over the past (more than) eight decades.

to control the gurdwara and impose their own theological beliefs. Moreover, the Akali government in the state is giving funds to the SCs to build gurdwaras, cremation sites, and improve roads and drains in their localities. There were many different answers to the topic of whether "Chamar identity was stigmatised among Ravidassia youths". The majority of people did not understand what stigma was. As a result, they did not respond to the question (although they often gave examples that showed the effects of caste stigma in response to other questions). Most youths who were aware of the term agreed that being Chamar meant having a stigmatized identity. Unlike Jats, the majority of Chamars do not identify with their identity. They also mentioned that Chamars are still associated with poverty, and economics plays a significant role in Chamar stigma. A young Ravidassia girl claimed that caste stigma exists throughout life, casting its shadow from school to the job, making the Chamar experience it directly in every situation.

 One significant claim made by several respondents was that upper castes continue to practice caste-based discrimination but do not express it. They agreed on improving Dalit conditions as well, but not in a reasonable way:

  "Caste has less of an impact practically, but emotionally, it still affects people's minds. The mentality of people has to change. The wealthy class believes that they are better than us and calls us second class. Older generations emphasize caste, whereas younger generations coexist in specific ways. They interact with us in a friendly manner, in order to benefit themselves. There is labour for landlords at the bottom level. The concept of equality does not exist. It may not be obvious, but it has affected the entire system. Whatever our identities, upper castes call us chamars. Upper castes are afraid of Dalits and would not recognize how they have gained power. As a result, caste and religious changes occur from time to time. Dalits convert to other religions and change their castes, but that does not work for them. However, discrimination attitudes will continue to exist. Even if a Dalit becomes a sarpanch, upper castes maintain distance and never share their political power with them. Dalit sarpanch has been invited to a celebration. Nobody cares about him because of his lower caste, which is a cause of misery" (Fieldwork Interview, 2018).

While several respondents believed that Dalit people from the creamy layer now live with greater awareness, they did not take any measures to improve their community:

"However, within the community those who are socially and economically uplifted simply show sympathy for lower caste Dalits. Nevertheless, they do not participate in any

movement. Our movement will develop if they join with us with the aim of achieving social change. They hide their identities, though. Generally, during elections at all levels, feelings of superiority and inferiority are rife among the people. In a village panchayat election, for example, a Ravidasia candidate contests against upper castes and never supports them" (Fieldwork Interview, 2018).

The majority of non-elected Dalits highlighted a number of Dalit difficulties, with an emphasis on economic challenges and landlessness in Dalits, and criticized Dalit leaders for their lack of awareness of these issues by claiming,

"We can still live a dignified life due to a lack of basic amenities. Despite our efforts, we are only able to make a small amount of progress and cannot fully benefit from them. Dalits may, in fact, improve in some way, although this seldom happens. We will not be able to get our rights traditionally. Dalit-reserved positions are currently empty. Even vacant positions (Group C and Group D jobs) can never be filled. The Dalit problem has never been brought up. Our problems are not resolved by Dalit leaders, who are unconcerned about us. Not a single Dalit leader has strongly objected to this. Due to their low percentage of land ownership, Dalits in Punjab are landless. Most Dalits are poor landless individuals, even though some of them are educated and employed. Due to a lack of finances, they are unable to provide Jajmani (the Jajmani system is the trade of commodities and services between members of various castes) in court" (Fieldwork Interview, 2018).

In the contemporary Punjabi Dalit periphery, the Dalit movement generally adopts a peaceful approach due to Ravidass' social and religious ideologies. Calendar and images of Ravidass are used as decorations in the majority of the homes within the boundaries, particularly those in the Ravidassia community (based on field notes). Numerous rituals are held to celebrate Ravidass Jayanti. It is frequently celebrated in athletic events, festivals, and street performances. As a result, they maintained a community space. There have been a number of temples which dedicate to Guru Ravidass. Due to the establishment of the Ravidassia dharm (religion), the turban is now considered as a Sikh symbol and has no place in the new Ravidassia identity. As they stated, if they wear a turban, it would raise doubts about whether they are Sikhs or not.

However, a large number of respondents expressed their belief in the teachings of different Bhakti movement devotees, socioreligious reformers, and primarily Sikh Gurus:

"Our samaj, the Bahujan samaj, which constitutes approximately 85% of the Indian population, has historically been divided into subgroups by upper castes due to our numbers. All Sikh Gurus, including Guru Ravidas, Saint Kabir, Mahatma Buddha, and Saint Kabir, fought to improve the conditions of Dalits. Mahatma Phule, Periyar, and Dr. Ambedkar were just a few of the pre-independence leaders who supported Dalits' rights and social transformation. They devoted considerable attention to the social issue" (Field work Interview, 2018).

A few respondents also highlighted the importance of various movements to eliminate the caste system in India:

"Numerous movements emerged in several states, but their impact was only seen regionally, specifically in Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. In Punjab, Mangoo Ram began the Ad-Dharm movement for the preservation of the Dalits, and other leaders like Mulla Singh and Ram Rattan joined it. BSP and Kanshi Ram came to prominence after independence and helped Dalits to develop a new identity- a political identity. Kanshi Ram and Mango Ram turned social issues into political agendas for Dalit empowerment. These movements could not make an impact on a national level. Due to caste, its effects have not yet been eliminated from society" (Fieldwork Interview, 2018).

I met Harman Singh, a Dalit activist and Buddhist Ambedarkite who supports the Valmiki caste's quest for religious autonomy. The Balmiki- Mazhabis are disadvantaged by being a small religious group and therefore have few chances of establishing alliances with other Dalit groups due to their exclusive focus on Ravidass rather than a larger syncretic religion. According to Ambedkarites, the Balmiki-Mazhabis identity does not have much power and will not lead to much progress in society. They are criticizing the Ravidassia identity for this (Fieldwork interview, 2018). Other social organizations, such as deras played a significant role in raising Dalit consciousness and encouraging people to speak out against discrimination. This helped people to find a place in society and live with dignity. Most people believe that Deras play a vital role in the upliftment of Dalits, which benefits the community at a socio-economic and political level. They have established several organisations in the name of Dalit saints and leaders. These organisations include the Guru Ravidas force, Guru Ravidas Sabha, Dr. Ambedkar Sena, Begumpura, and so on. These organisations aim to establish Dalit identity while simultaneously solving social issues. As a result, it is critical to understand the respondents' perspectives on the role of Deras.

According to several respondents, Deras are necessary because Dalits face discrimination in Sikh Gurudwaras as well:

> "We learn equality through Sikhism. The Sikh concept of ideology is valuable for other communities. But Sikh gurudwaras follow their own practices. In the Guru Granth Sahib, only those saints whose bani is listed are celebrated, not all Sikh gurus. In the name of all gurus and saints, we perform religious functions. Through Deras, we strive to improve ourselves. On the other hand, we are not allowed to visit gurudwaras because we are from the lower castes. However, Deras offers us places of worship, and gives us equality and dignity in society. As a result, their followers develop a sense of spiritual salvation and social liberation. Historically, Dera leaders are more effective than political leaders" (Fieldwork interview, 2018).

Others criticised Deras, claiming that it misleads people. History clearly proves that the cause of riots is always religious and not political. Everyone is including in politics. Political leaders go to Deras for votes. They all seek benefits and do nothing for the community. The majority of followers of these Deras is Dalits. People follow any Dera without giving it any thought. People flock to Deras and worship religious books. These religious books are followed by them and are more valuable than the Indian Constitution, which gives them rights which is totally unacceptable. Many respondents stated that only the Doaba region is affected by Deraism, while Majha and Malwa remain unaffected. Deras are wealthy and powerful in the Doaba region because Doaba's Dalits are more educated, wealthy, and have a strong diasporic influence. "Dera Ballan," which provides hospitals and schools, is the most well-known Dalit Dera. They are followed both socially and spiritually. As a platform, it helps Dalits. The impact of Deraism is less pronounced in Majha and Malwa, however, where Dalits are both economically underprivileged and less educated, and they also depend on their landlords (Zamindars) for survival.

Some Dalit social leaders do well for the community, whereas others are corrupt. Dalit social leaders are used by political parties for their own gain, and they are given money to hold meetings for each other. A few respondents also appreciated social leaders for their work, as they said:

> "Leaders in the social realm fare better than those in politics. In the community, they are spreading awareness. Consequently, the situation is transforming. Due to the awareness raised by social leadership, people discuss their castes openly and without shame. Caste was

rigid in the past, and most individuals tried to hide their identities. We can say that understanding and awareness have brought about change. The Dalit community benefits from what they are doing. They take part in protests and speak out against discrimination and atrocities against Dalits. But they do not have much assets. They attempt to differentiate themselves from other castes. The goal of social organizations is to raise Dalit consciousness of their saints and social reformers" (Fieldwork, 2018).

It is also critical to examine how people enter politics, as elections have become more and more valuable in recent years. Leaders do anything to get tickets from parties. Political parties use funds to win elections and gain power. Poor people are unable to participate in elections even at the grass roots level. It has been noticed that in Panchayat elections, political parties and leaders use many unfair methods to win elections. Even the Election Commission demands a report on the election budget from political parties.   So, it is important to collect responses from respondents on the role of individuals in entering politics. Many respondents stated that money is a significant factor in entering the political arena. The main argument of one of them is that money is everything in the present times: Today, money is the most significant factor in entering politics and not education. Nobody cares about the other people. In politics, there is no need to be concerned about money. Politics is a source of money. We can only say that politics is not for poor people. Poor people cannot even think about contesting elections. They even have difficulty fulfilling their fundamental demands.

Some respondents believe that there is no democracy in political parties at the moment. Nowadays, everyone seeks benefits, irrespective of political affiliation. There is no need for honest individuals. There has always been a lack of discipline in politics. There is a difference between reality and conceptual understanding. The reality is quite different. There is a significant difference between reality and imagination. The functioning of the party is determined by high leadership decisions. They give positions based on their own preferences rather than the individual's ability, knowledge, and experience. This is the incorrect method. A democracy needs elected leaders, but they are chosen by political parties. Tickets are also available. Rich individuals receive tickets, but qualified candidates who devote their lives to serving the people do not get tickets. Capability and social service are no longer valued, particularly in politics. According to one respondent, Dalit leaders' distance themselves from the community after gaining power and money. They create a space between themselves and their colleagues. In exchange for tickets, they represent themselves to the other party leaders

rather than the public. This is the root cause of the lack of dalit leadership in politics. This is the main reason behind Dalit backwardness.

A few respondents agreed that the BSP is the only party that gives Dalits a platform and works for their development. Dalits are well-represented in other parties because of the BSP and its leadership. In Punjab, the BSP could win if BCs, Sikhs, and SCs join together. Sikhism teaches the concept of equality, yet Jat Sikhs do not stand with Dalits and feel superior. The BSP represents oppressed and depressed people of all categories, including Dalits, peasants, and upper castes. It constantly works for the weaker section of society. There were some respondents who praised BSP's vision and explained why it failed in the state. The BSP is a progressive party that aims to improve the condition of Dalits. However, in Punjab, the BSP was unable to unify the Dalits and could not achieve strong results.

A few respondents said they still "appreciate BSP as a social reform movement, but it cannot become a political power. The BSP is the only party that fights for Dalits and protects their rights". The BSP is on a mission to achieve social equality and economic salvation. The cause behind BSP"s downfall is a change in the criterion for qualifying as a national party. Secondly, its downfall is due to a lack of strong organizational structure. Mayawati leads BSP's mission. Although leaders formulate policy and workers carry it out, BSP workers are unable to carry out their mission daily. They could not perform their duties properly. Although Mayawati does not want to form an alliance, Punjab BSP leadership pressurizes her to do so.

Governments implement a few policies and programmes for the welfare of the people, such as the Ata dal, Shagan, and MNREGA schemes. Several political parties use these policies to increase their voter base. In general, people demand that the government implement policies for their development and solve their problems. However, in this analysis, the majority of the respondents believed that these schemes were just rewards to get Dalit votes. Some of the respondents strongly disagreed with these policies. These are our community's major setbacks. It would be better if the government provided employment instead of these policies so that individuals would be able to meet their needs. Through such programmes, the government gives Dalits benefits and keeps them helpless. In this way, Dalits even begin to support the government. According to them, non-Dalit political parties seek Dalit votes, but do nothing to help Dalits. For instance, the BJP declared Vijay Sampla to be the President of Punjab. Congress parties celebrated Dr. Ambedkar Jayanti throughout the year, and the SAD

announced plans to construct a Begampura temple in Khuralgarh, Hoshiarpur. They do not, however, seek to provide Dalits equal rights.

The majority of respondents believed that reservations should be maintained. In their opinion, the government is not doing its job in implementing reservations effectively. The respondents were quite direct in describing the significance and effects of reservation. It is significant that Dalits can only contest elections on reserved seats. Dalits are not eligible for general entry tickets from non-Dalit political parties. This is how discrimination works. We cannot achieve power without a Reservation Policy. We have no respect in society. Reservation is the only reason we have any social position. Political parties are not in favour of Dalit candidates. There is an issue with reservations not being fully implemented. Only a few respondents made a strong argument in favor of reservations for all communities. Many communities presently desire reservation but no one opposes it, however in the case of Dalits, they have always demanded that quota for Dalits be abolished. It has not harmed the general castes. A second reality is that the Rai community has been added to the Scheduled Castes list, but the reserved seats have not been increased. If it is not halted, Dalits will face even more discrimination, and no one will care about them.

 Finally, it may be concluded that respondents have different perceptions regarding Dalit issues. The second part presents the data regarding respondents and their socio-economic background. Ad-Dharm/ Ravidassia movement and BSP have both had a significant impact on north India, particularly Punjab. In present time, Dalits are more conscious socially, religiously and to some extent politically. They recognize their strengths and attempt to build a new identity. As a result, they struggle for their self-respect and dignity within the community. Dalit social organizations and Dalit Deras are also working for Dalits' betterment and respect. The Dalit political party BSP also works for Dalit upliftment not only politically but also socially and economically. Both have succeeded in changing the life of Dalits of Punjab and creating a new consciousness among them.

Under the dynamic leadership of these two, Dalits organized struggle against the caste system and discrimination. The BSP party did not maintain its success, especially in Punjab, despite the success of both movements. More and more Ravidassia are taking part in politics. By increasing pressure on decision-making, they will participate in electoral activities to raise their own status and caste. They have a vital impact on Punjab politics. Several of them have achieved prominent positions in their respective political parties and state and national

governments. They have been using any means to stay in power. Nonetheless, some people have poor backgrounds, but they entered politics to gain political power.

5.5 Case Studies from the Field: Ravidassia of Malwa Region

In the context of the Ravidassia community a few case studies have been undertaken. It also describes the caste composition in the region and the role of religion, relationship between caste and occupation as well as the relationship of Dalits with other castes. In this study, we examine occupational mobility among Ravidassia. The extent of social mobility as a result of employment is analysed in terms of their social relations, changing attitudes and lifestyles. However, the Ravidassia community has been significantly impacted by modernization and globalisation. Among the scheduled castes in Punjab, AD-Dharmis and Chamars are the most educated. Most government posts are dominated by Ad-Dharmis and Chamars, but they have failed to mobilise other scheduled castes such as Mazhabis. Chamar holds a dominant position among Punjab's Scheduled Castes, with Mazhabis and Balmikis being the most deprived and feeling threatened by the situation. During fieldwork, I witnessed a few of these through respondents' perspectives on educational, migration issues and so on.

Case A: Educational issue

Harjeet Singh, a Hindu Ravidassia, was 58 years old. He has worked for the government since 1980. He was paid Rs. 30,000/- per month. His minimum educational qualification was an M.Ed. His wife, who was 47 years old and from a middle-class family, attended a private school. They have one daughter and one son. The oldest son, 32, was married and worked as a teacher in a private school. He earned a master's degree in physical education. His wife had completed nurse training and was employed at a private hospital. The daughter was married and had completed her M.Ed, while the youngest son had graduated from high school and worked for a private tech company. His mother was a stay-at-home mother who was 73 years old. This family was very committed to education. As they said, education is an influential factor in our lives, particularly for raising awareness and finding a job. Baba Saheb understood the importance of education, and we are now following his lead by enrolling in college courses to obtain knowledge and integrate into society. We do a Baba Saheb movie screening in our village to help the locals appreciate the value of education and to raise awareness of its significance in our society.

Harmeet singh, stated that, Dalit students do not receive high-quality education. Since the majority of Dalits are impoverished, they are unable to send their kids to private schools, hence

the majority of them attend government schools. Private schools have a certain number of seats reserved for economically underprivileged groups, but today Dalits and Brahmins have their own seats for economic backwardness. Only students from the general group are capable of achieving 80–90% scores; they have access to tutoring, private schooling, and English-medium instruction. Dalit children attend government schools that lack facilities and have a dismal teacher-to-student ratio. So how are they supposed to compete with kids? Educated people do not care about improving their community. They are not one; there are many castes among the SCs, and there is a superiority complex among them. SC has a lower level of education than the other communities, so how can they connect it to education? Lack of work misleads Dalit youth towards alcoholism. Public and private schools have been divided for a variety of reasons, such as empowerment and community identity assertion.

The government encourages or permits equal opportunity in education and employment. "We won't use the Aata-Dal scheme." Education is necessary for social development. When questioned about the value of education, one Balmiki respondent who works as a sweeper at Municipal Corporation Sangarur districts said, "we realise the importance of education and we are trying hard." We all know that if we are S.C. and have low grades, we can still find a job. But the issue is not so simple; we do not have food to eat, our family structure is unsustainable, and if our children do not help, we will not be able to feed ourselves. Another respondent, Kawal Singh, who was Mazhabi Sikh and 60 years old, remarked his response to the topic of education awareness and said, "People become more conscious when they have an education; educated people produce increased awareness." If someone has money, he is also on the wrong side; if someone does not have money but has an education, he may prevent thousands of others from joining the wrong side." Education has both sides-positive and negative, it depends how you choose your life. Education is a major factor influencing community development. An educated individual has social status and may contribute to their community. Mazhabi, Balmiki, and Sansi groups are the poorest of the Scheduled Castes, with very low literacy rates. Dalits are illiterate, and the majority of them cannot read or write basic words. They understand the importance of education and want their children and the future generation to be educated. There are various factors that contribute to Dalits' lack of education.

Case-B: Migration status

The state of Punjab saw a high rate of migration, especially to other countries. After the annexation of Punjab as colonial territory by the British, the migration from Punjab has a

historical context. Britishers recruited Mazhabi Sikhs in the British army and established canal colonies in Punjab. In Punjab, the Doaba region has a very high rate of migration, and there are even some villages with a high concentration of senior citizens. These villages are called 'Jatheriya de Gaon', or the village of the elderly. Dalits who migrated abroad have also invested back in Punjab in different ways and have reaffirmed their identity. There are so many Dalit gurudwara's and Dera's that have been built with the support and contribution of the Dalit diaspora. The Dera Sachkhand Ballan in Jallandhar and Ravidass temple in Banaras have been built with the support of Dalit NRI's. The Jatt predominance in Punjab's rural structure changes due to increased financial mobility. The migration is significantly different for Dalits because they work in blue-collar occupations in European countries, despite the fact that not all Dalits have benefited and some still experience marginalisation. The vast majority of Dalits move to Singapore, Malaysia, and the Gulf Countries.

Param Gill, age 62, is Ravidassia, and belonged to Mansa district. In response to the question of Dalit migration, he said that "every parent wishes for his or her children to have a stable source of income and be wealthy.". Those who belonged to the Ravidassia community migrated to western countries, but lower caste Dalits do not migrate to western countries because they are not wealthy or educated enough to spend the lakhs of rupees required for their visas to England and America. While some Dalits have succeeded in those countries, the vast majority of them have returned to their original homes. In the Punjab dynamics, since migration is a trend and has social prestige attached to it, all of us also want our children to get settled abroad and live a happy life. But due to limited resources, our children were sent to Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, and Dubai. In these Arab countries, life is also very difficult. Most members of our community become workers due to a low level of education. Even for some people, it is difficult to know whether their children are alive or not.

Mazhabi Sikh respondent from Bathinda district expressed strong views. He said that the main issue with our Mazhabi community is that they fail to learn from the mistakes done by other communities in Punjab. The Ravidassia Chamars, who enjoy immense popularity, have immigrated to western nations. Since the Chamar community immigrated to Canada, they have acquired Canadian citizenship as a result of their unity and mutual support. Our community and region's people, however, are divided. There is not a single leader in our region, there isn't clarity, and they don't want to come together. This has led to the current social-economic backwardness, in some way. Due to Communism, there is no group awareness among the Dalits

in the Malwa region. The communists misled and manipulated the people. They don't encourage community members to work for the unity of their village.

The Scheduled Caste group has maintained its caste identity in the past and in the present. However, there is no unity and no common symbols to communicate with one another. There is no umbrella party or ideology to which they may feel a sense of belonging. Different Dalit groups used different paths and practices in their search for identity. Political parties are likewise not interested in uniting them; the fragmentation and marginalisation of Dalits has benefited political parties. Westernized education and lifestyle are beneficial to living a decent life, but they are not striving toward their unity.' The position of the scheduled caste category did not change even after conversion to Sikhism; they continued to experience discrimination, inequality, and exclusion.

Case C- Cultural and Political Assertion

In Punjab, the caste system is very distinct from the rest of India. In Punjab, the caste system and structure are different because it is not a typical Brahmanical society, and caste positioning is very dependent upon agrarian land. Even though Sikhism is an egalitarian religion, caste hierarchy still exists due to endogamy, exclusion, and various limitations on social interaction. In the past, social relationships between different castes and classes have been developed as a result of regional disparities. Malwa region is a predominantly agricultural society. Land ownership based on identity and caste-based discrimination among the communities; majority of the population are Jats who are landowners and farmers.

According to Hinduism, the Jats were considered shudra; but, after converting to Sikhism, they were not only disassociated from their lower caste status but also became prominent as the state's dominant caste, which gave them the chance to improve their social position in society. In the region, there are also low-class and untouchable castes which experience discrimination from the dominant group in society. The study aims to learn how common lands are maintained in the region. In this context, the region has gained significance as a result of increasing urbanisation and the consequent commercialization of land. Conflicts between communities and demand on shamlat land as a result of such developments have been quite serious. The arguments and analysis are based on an extensive study of the Mohali district, an epicenter of growing urbanization in the region.

Various opinions were expressed in response to a question about the current status of common land in the village. Manmeet Singh, 60-year-old village sarpanch from S.A..S Nagar says

common land does exist in the village and it is auctioned every year. However, he said the land is disputed and was illegally occupied by the big landlords. It may be mentioned here that as per official records the common land is undisputed. On this, the sarpanch clarified that the dispute is 22 years old. In 1985-86, the encroachment on the common land was done illegally, and the case has been dragging for the last five or six years. Recently, the High Court has given a verdict in favour of the panchayat and soon the common land will be in the possession of the Panchayat. The reason for this is that no elections were held in the state during the era of violence in the region. However, since the Panchayati Raj Act was implemented, elections have been held on a regular basis, and panchayats have become active. According to him, the local panchayat earns 5–6 lakhs annually. The profits from the auction of common lands are used for community-wide projects like lighting up the streets, paying the wages of the sweepers and other activities like court cases. However, the village's landowners were happy and showed no signs of worry.

According to them, the village would receive adequate funding for development if the panchayat was placed under the control of the municipal corporation. In addition, they would receive higher market values for their land. The primary cause of individuals who have illegally occupied shamlat property refusing to leave is the real estate industry. This has caused a sharp increase in the price of land. The sarpanch was questioned about any caste discrimination that may have happened during panchayat proceedings. Manmeet Singh, who is a member of the Scheduled Caste community. He made it clear that there is no such discrimination on the basis of caste and that all procedures are conducted in a friendly manner. When questioned about the mandatory 1/3 common land reservation for Scheduled Caste in the annual auction, the sarpanch responded that proper procedure is being followed during the auction. This is because all villagers are informed in advance about the auction and during the auction specific plots are reserved for Scheduled Caste. These reserved lands are auctioned every year and they are taken for cultivation.

One of the Balmiki caste respondents, a daily wager, stated: "We are all daily wagers, so how can we participate in the auction?" We also lack the resources to lease land. Though several of our caste members work for the government in Chandigarh and Dera Bassi, they have no interest in shamlat property. It is all corruption and misappropriation of public funds meant for the village. There is too much party politics in the village. Some are Congress and others are Akali. It is a well-kept secret in the community that Sarpanches just follows his instructions. We poor people have a lot of challenges. They are not providing us with a piece of common

land. In fact, we do not even have enough land for "hadaa rori and barre" (a place to dump waste from the houses). We have to dump waste in open places and sometimes face opposition from people for dumping waste on the roadway or in the open ground of the village school. There is a clear divide between castes and within castes views are divided along class lines.

The powerful caste controls the common lands in society. It creates a distinct hierarchy within the community. The cremation grounds are the most prominent division between the upper castes and the Ravidassia. There are separate cremation grounds for upper castes and Ravidassia in ten villages and cities. Few villages are dominated by the Saini caste. While they are in a better position, Jats do not show interest in working or buying common lands of Scheduled Castes. In Pragpur village, the Scheduled Caste, who leases own common lands, wants to construct parks, playfields, and a community hall for the community. Caste conflict, again from the field it is evident that the common land is a bone of contention between the higher and lower castes. It appears that the differential level of economic mobility has created a sub-class within the larger class category of 'Dalit'; more importantly, this sub-class carries the identity of the caste (particularly occupational caste), rather than annihilation, it appears that 'caste' has re-emerged on a new agenda. This is one of the significant factors, which limited the cultural, and identity assertions to the few castes in the state of Punjab. Punjab is a state where local organizations prevail, and no matter which political party you vote. This is because local level organizations are powerful and work at the ground level.

5.6 Summing Up

This chapter shows that beneath the normative political claims about identity politics lie competing theoretical ways to understand the relationship between experience, culture, identity, politics, and power. These theoretical ways are recognized by the state and its institutions and confer specific rights and privileges. It examines how to understand the relationship between personal experience and political stance. They also examine why status identities are viewed as socially constructed. it also links collective action to specific notions of power to help explain the cultural and political goals at which identity politics is aimed. The political dynamics of Punjab can be described as a spectrum in which there is a movement from contesting identities to confronting them, to mutual accommodation and forming coalitions. The identities of religion, nation, language, class, and caste have been particularly at play in this dynamic arena of Punjab identity politics.

As part of its analysis, this study examines how Ravidassia community members challenge dominant oppressive characterizations in order to achieve greater self-determination within the framework of identity politics of the state. The Ravidasia community is a significant Dalit community in comparison to other Dalit communities like the Balmiki-Mazhabis who have a large presence among Sikhs and Hindus. The community is socially and politically active but their poor economic base limits their options. The community is conscious of its political rights and understands the significance of education for social upliftment. They feel improvement in their social status with the help of reservations and through political mobilization. Respondents living in cities and villages are more likely to favor education. Among Ravidasias, inter-generational educational mobility shows significant changes over time. However, the level of higher education is quite low as compared to dominant communities but higher than other Dalit communities such as Balmiki-Mazhabis.

Data on the pattern of identity formation in the Dalit community and how they have transformed their old to new identity shows that Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia made more effort and succeeded in forming a different identity for themselves than their counterparts. There are distinct patterns of identity formation for the community, with various religious scriptures, symbols, slogans, and so on, while some (Balmikis-Mazhabis) are still searching for their identity. Despite having various symbols, slogans, and so on, their effort is significantly lower than that of other sub-caste groups. In terms of religion, their affiliation with Hinduism and Sikhism precludes them from forming a separate community. The religious symbol of Ravidas has played a major role in developing community feeling among Ravidassia, Chamars and Ad-dharmis in Punjab. Religious identities began to be rearticulated in the rigidity of some ideologies. Ravidassia built their own Ravidas Mandir and Gurudwaras to assert their autonomy as compared to other Balmiki-Mazhabis. In the same way social identities influence the forms of political life, political organization shapes social identities.

Due to identity, Biradari played a crucial role in Punjab's rural agrarian society. One of the most significant characteristics of the Ravidasia community is its lack of land. This has resulted in the rise of a distinct form of identity politics based on the assertion of community. The spread of identity politics and its influence is seen in various political parties and formations. This can be seen in the rise of the Deras and Gurudwaras based on caste. The data found that the ever-increasing role of deras in influencing the political life of their followers, most of whom belong to the socially and economically marginal indigenous groups as well as the migrant lower-caste

farm/industrial labourers from the poor Malwa region of Punjab, may primarily be attributed to the fact that the social basis of political power has not been effectively challenged and has remained largely unchanged in favour of the dominant castes/communities in the state.

Political participation itself is considered an indicator of Ravidasias' development. The data from the fieldwork also points to the Chamars (Ad-dharmis/Ravidassia) as being the most influential dalit caste in politics due to their knowledge, assertiveness, effective leadership, and unity among them. But the Balmikis-Mazhabis are not so powerful because of lack of economic resources, awareness, assertion, unity, and honest leadership. So, the Chamars are more politically mobilized than the Balmikis-Mazhabis. Some of the respondents stated that predominantly two parties have ruled, the Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal. Balmikis have always given preference to the Congress and kept themselves aloof from Akali Dal because of its image as a Jat Sikh-dominated party.

In contrast, the Mazhabis have a soft spot for the Shiromani Akali Dal party due to their affiliation with the Sikh faith. Ravidassia prefers Congress as compared to any other party. Congress has made many policies in favour of the Scheduled Castes. The main reason why the Chamar leaders shifted to other parties from BSP was because they did not see a future for BSP due to its constant decline in politics in Punjab. AAP has emerged as a third political player in the state. But respondents said that they supported the AAP party because of its performance. However, caste-religio based identity politics within the Ravidassia community continues to appear as a reality in the state in general and particularly in the Malwa region.

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Chapter 6

Conclusion

This research work has focused on the nature and working of identity politics of the Ravidassia community in the Malwa region of Punjab. The study argues that the recent cultural assertion of the chamars (Ravidassia/ Ad-Dharmis) results from a long-term process of social exclusion, identity formation, economic growth, and political assertion in Punjab. Malwa region has 11 districts with the largest area of the state. The Jat landlords, who, it might be said, control the political pulse of Punjab, dominate this region. Malwa is representative of Punjabi folk traditions. The people of the region speak the Malwa dialect, which is similar to Punjabi. Malwa is the prime agricultural belt of Punjab. In this region agriculture is the principal source of livelihood. The role of the secondary and tertiary sectors is minimal in providing alternative employment. The south-western parts of Malwa are very sparsely populated. Malwa has a preponderance of Sikh population with the highest percentage of Sikh population recorded in Faridkot.

The caste identity question in Punjab has some compelling features that led researcher to consider it for research. Malwa region has not been viewed as a useful model for understanding the essence of caste. It is a noteworthy case study due to the high presence of Sikhism in the region. This is because religion has been a significant feature of identity politics both on an ideological and theological level. Consequently, the dynamics of identities and development are quite significant to consider as the backdrop of identity politics evolved in Punjab over a period. In particular, the Malwa region provides a suitable case study to examine the nature of different or even juxtaposed ideologies based on caste, culture, community, religion, etc.

In this context the study intended to know how Ravidassa identity is being constructed in the region and the state in the wake of major changes that have occurred in the socio-economic and political realm. This study tried to assess the formation of Ravidassia identity and its larger implications on society, economy, and politics in response to various developments witnessed in the past decades. So, the major focus of this study has been to throw light on Ravidassia community in Malwa region and to map the changes and challenges that have come up due to various articulations and re-articulations of the community. Finally, this study tried to focus on the relationship between the concept of identity and development in this region.

In the Malwa region, the socio-economic and political landscape underwent a drastic change under the influence of colonialism and modernity. However, it is critical to recognize that the Malwa region's agrarian society and economy were divided along caste and communal lines. There has been a notable shift in the way caste and religious communities are mobilized in political and public discourse. This certainly has larger implications for identity politics in the Punjab state. During the last 15-20 years, Punjab politics has fundamentally reshaped the problems faced by marginalized communities, which ultimately need to be reframed from the perspective of their own socio-political status and measure of power.

In the first chapter, the thesis briefly summarizes concepts and the historical background of the research topic under study. It provides an exposition of the problem, objectives of the study, area of study which is the backbone of the present work, justification of the study and methodology. It deals with the clarification of concepts like Identity, Ethnicity, and Identity Politics. In this chapter, we elaborate on the conceptual analysis of all related concepts applied by Brass, Anderson, and Connor to explain the formation of identity, as given by Smith (language, territory, dress, common cultural practices, common descent, etc.). We also consider prominent theories and approaches concerning identity formation, assertion, and politics.

The term identity politics is widely discussed in the field of Social Sciences and Humanities. Identity politics is used to describe phenomena as diverse as multiculturalism, the Dalit movements, the separatist movements, ethnic and nationalist conflicts, and so on. It is also used to describe any movement and action related to politics, culture and identity. Identity politics or what we might call the demand for recognition is thus, at its core, essentially the politics of equal dignity and the politics of difference (or authenticity). It has emerged both in the developing and developed world and has roots in gender politics, sexual politics, ethnic politics, and religious interpretations. Societies all around the world are divided, with different disparities such as gender, caste, race, class, status, power, money, and many more. In order to form distinct identities for individuals and groups, disparities exist. These inequities lead to oppression and discrimination in society. Scholars from several disciplines examined the fundamental causes of socioeconomic inequality in various cultures, within the context of identity politics.

Identity politics in Punjab is based on caste and religion. In general, there are two types of politics: the politics of dominance and the politics of resistance. The politics of dominance is

the quest for power through which identity is mobilized. The politics of resistance is a rights-based politics in which identity emerges as a cohesive factor for establishing internal unity. Identity politics refers to social movements aimed at gaining recognition or independence for historically marginalized or oppressed groups. Usually, but not always, identity politics is organized around racialized or ethnocultural presence. Such groups may demand extreme autonomy or rights within a multicultural context. The paradox of identity politics is that it is based on a group's identity, which is the fundamental root of oppression. A majority or minority group can use ethnic identity to mobilize political activities, raise political consciousness, and make claims for resources, such as social, economic, and political support. In the context of Punjab, Sikh ethnic identity and political power can be achieved through intergroup conflict for dominance. Ethnic identity politics can thus be seen as a dynamic struggle for power between groups, each using ethnic identity as a means toward this end. The power of identity politics is primarily based on the widespread appeal of the identity that is for social change. For example, dalits in Punjab face discrimination and cultural chauvinism.

In the second chapter, we discuss how the concepts and theories associated with Ravidassia Dalit Identity and Identity based politics, have contributed to the understanding and analysis of the present study. It analysed the role of two Dalit movements, Ad-Dharm movement and Ravidassia movement and concluded that these movements played a significant role in bringing consciousness among Dalits to seek an egalitarian society. Initially, the leadership of these movements was ready to sacrifice their lives for the betterment of Dalits and made several efforts to address their issues. They even succeeded in building confidence, raising awareness and a feeling of superiority among the Dalits of Punjab. In this study, a detailed analysis of identity formation among Ravidassias was undertaken in order to understand the dynamic forces that underlie their identity formation and politics of assertion.

The word Dalit represents assertion, self-recognition, and identity. It provides a sense of solidarity among scheduled castes that do not want to identify with traditional identities. This phenomenon can be compared with caste-related movements and the spread of several religious sects in the state of Punjab, where most people have adopted Sikhism and the Ravidassia identity. Over time, when the AdDharm movement first emerged, it became a caste movement and was divided into various identities, such as Ravidassia. Dalits have claimed their ancient identities in the past, but now they are asserting their fundamental identities. They are focusing on their unique identity, which is distinct from Sikhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity.

Some members of the scheduled caste community are uncomfortable using the word Dalit; they want to recognize their identity and be proud to call themselves Chamars, Balmiki, Mazhabi, and Ravidassia, Ramdassia and so on.

Within the context of identity politics, Ad Dharm played a significant role. It helped the Scheduled Castes in their quest for social recognition through the processes of cultural transformation and religious rejuvenation (see Juergensmeyer: 1988; Ram:2004). It has given them a new name, Ad-Dharmi, and a new sense of self. The Scheduled Castes feel a feeling of pride only from the word "Ad-Dharmi," which reminds them of their rich history and historical allegiance to the twice-born. The Ravidassia community is an important community of dalits in Punjab with a wide presence among Sikhs and Hindus. The community is socially and politically active but their poor economic base limits their options. The community is conscious of its political rights and understands the significance of education for social upliftment. They feel improvement in their social status with the help of reservation and through political mobilization.

There are two opposing tendencies in Ravidassia's community self-identity: one is based on integration and the other is based on separation. It is true that Punjab has witnessed some recent trends towards integration due to its shifting socio-political milieu, but the issue cannot be resolved until identity assertion and articulation are reflected in the dominant discourse. Thus, the discussion thus far has shown that dalits have not only refused to hide their supposedly inferior social status but have also challenged the oppressive social systems that obliged them to live on the socio-cultural periphery of the state's hierarchical caste society. In the state, social disparities are inextricably intertwined with the social structure in the form of caste. This is also the structural unit of stratification and the system in and of itself. The caste framework comprises a particular belief system and organization, as well as the phenomenon of exclusion. The caste system is further divided into class inequalities, and the social and cultural framework of society comes from oppression. Based on all these factors, it is important to examine how caste and religious identity has changed Punjab politics.

The third chapter examines the position and participation of Dalit communities in contemporary politics. In contemporary Punjab, caste-based identity politics has been taking centre stage after the decline of ethno-regional communal differences in the past. While ethnic parties such as the BJP and Akali Dal have changed their strategy to focus on identities in order to stay within the state power structure. In the past, political parties were associated with

linguistic divisions now less prevalent. They have vehemently opposed any attempt at re-alignment with the upper castes and communities by sharing political power. In contrast, the upper caste leadership of various political organisations (as well as the Congress) used the deras as a means of acquiring the lower caste vote bank. Deras, in general, have been shown to be highly willing to interact in an obvious give-and-take relationship. In the last ten years, deras have become more prominent and significant in the political arena, which has further increased the complexity of identity politics. Political leaders and candidates from different parties were seen visiting deras during the recent elections in the state. This was done in order to gain blessings and political support from the dera followers. This newly found relationship between the ruling class and the deras has come about at a time when there has been a paradigm shift in the state's politics.

The most recent attempt is to use the dera route to mobilise the Dalit and other backward caste communities for specific political reasons. Deras have already developed as significant counter-culture centres, providing the path for Dalits to assert their own values, practices, traditions, self-esteem, and identity (see Jodhka, 2000; Ram, 2004 (a,b); Kumar, 2014; Lal, 2009). The state does not achieve a significant change in the power structure, so the Dera desires access to the political system and political patronage. The Deras may give their followers direct or indirect advice to vote for a certain candidate or party. For instance, Dera Sacha Sauda supported the Akali Dal party in the Punjab Assembly Elections in February 2007.

Kanchan Chandra (2004) proposes a theory of ethnic party performance in one distinct family of democracies, identified here as "patronage-democracies." Voters in patronage-democracies, she argues, choose between parties by conducting ethnic head counts rather than by comparing policy platforms or ideological positions. They formulate preferences across parties by counting the heads of co-ethnics across party personnel, preferring that party that provides greater representation for their co-ethnics. They formulate expectations about the likely electoral outcome by counting the heads of co-ethnics across the electorate. And they vote for their preferred party only when their co-ethnics are sufficiently numerous to take it to a winning or influential position. In her book, she discusses the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and its target ethnic category, the Scheduled Castes.

The impact of the BSP movement cannot be denied. It has been successful in developing self-confidence and assertiveness among the Dalit community. At the political level, it has

ocassionaly succeeded in gaining power at the state level. There are several key reasons for the BSP's declining popularity, particularly in Punjab. Dalits are classified into categories based on caste, sub-caste, religion, class, and the rural-urban division. The key causes of the BSP's worrying performance in Punjab include the party's weak organisational structure, divisions among party members, the socio-historical structure of Punjab, and "factionalism among various caste leaders, which benefits the more powerful parties."

Despite the paradigm shift in ethnic politics, development politics, and governance, identity remains significant. The Akali Dal in its verbal attacks on the AAP shows that it is a master of identity politics. Despite being called non-Punjabi several times, the party pushed hard to gain a presence in Punjab. However, in 2022, it called itself a "Punjabi party". In the Malwa region, Dalits became a significant choice for AAP because of their social, political, and economic marginalisation. The AAP published a special "Dalit Manifesto" with a 19-point agenda. As we discussed above, it clearly shows that identity politics played a significant role and impacted marginalised groups. Thus, in state politics, identity politics plays both negative and positive roles. Identity politics thrives even though broadly it may look that the parties do not identify with a particular group of society. The politics of difference has led to the exclusivity of each dalit caste. This has allowed the SAD and Congress parties to dominate the political arena. Both parties are controlled by the Jat Sikhs. Thus, we have ruptured the social hierarchy with the perpetuation of a pattern of political dominance. This is the consequence of the strengthening of caste identities and the formation of exclusive caste communities.

In the fourth chapter, we examine how ethnic and social identities have shaped the types of social collectivities such as castes, religion, clan, communities, etc. Here, we analyze the religious, cultural, and social aspects of the Ravidassia community and identify their relevance to contemporary agrarian society in the Malwa region of Punjab. In the last few decades, Malwa has experienced a strong wave of Dalit assertion. In agrarian communities, caste assertion has taken many forms due to economic and political policies implemented by the government. Since the ideological basis of untouchability was markedly weak, the oppression of dalits in the region was related more to the structure of the economy and the ruling interests of the landowning agricultural caste and political elite.

In terms of social groups, the most visible beneficiaries of this change were the substantial cultivators from locally dominant caste groups. These cultivators constitute the upper segment of the agrarian economy. The locally dominant castes consolidated their position in the regional

power structure and acquired a new sense of confidence. Therefore, diversity and complexity are two of the most challenging aspects of Malwa culture. In comparison to Doaba and Majha regions, Malwa is the most populated region by the Jat community. Mazabis, Balmikis and Chamars predominate in different sub-regions of Malwa. Additionally, there are other caste groups that belong to the class of landowners. In Malwa, Kamboh, Rajput and Saini are other landowners. Caste identities were associated with landowning cultivators within the framework of the Jajmani system in the Malwa region of Punjab.

Despite the changing caste dynamics in rural Punjab, it is difficult to conclude that occupational change is a direct cause of political assertion. All these concepts underwent a radical irrelevance in the 1990s when religion remained significant, but the politics of identity began to surface in a big way. The earlier developments had already laid the foundation for identity politics. Let us see how it happened in the case of the dalits in Punjab, as the contestation against the landed castes started from them. Among the socio-economic factors, the green revolution in a Sikh majority state, sub-division of landholdings and the construction of identity discourse among the communities (Dalit and Sikhs) contributed towards the emergence of identity-based politics in the region. Identity plays a significant role in reinforcing caste-class inequalities in rural areas.

In the Malwa region, the caste hierarchy does not seem to have disappeared. There are two factors that reinforce or sustain the caste hierarchy. First, political parties have expanded their social interventionist strategy by establishing and legitimizing a caste hierarchy. Second, the caste hierarchy as it exists has become highly functional for those castes that seem to have a stake in the continuation of the caste hierarchy. There is a visible movement of people away from agriculture as the main source of livelihood. While the landowners are still involved in cultivation, the traditional caste of agricultural labourers, mainly dalits, have noticeably moved away from agricultural labour. Generally, classes begin to form within castes. The manifestation of such a situation is expressed through the political behaviour of various castes. Hierarchy appears as a paradox of functionality. The politics of caste revolve around a community in which vertical heterogeneity is replaced by horizontal solidarity. In contrast, the declining dependence of the lower castes on landowners may manifest itself through political assertions of power and identity. However, such situations do not and cannot force people to end exclusivity (see Judge, 2008).

In the fifth chapter, a detailed socio-economic profile of the Ravidassia community was developed and analyzed through an interview schedule and observation method in Malwa region. The data has been analyzed and interpreted on parameters like sex, age, caste, income, occupation, etc. This chapter not only reflects the socio-economic background of the Ravidassia community but also gives an understanding of the political mobilization of the community for the ongoing movement in the context of identity politics. Based on field research of rural and urban communities from the Malwa region of Punjab, the study examines the prevailing caste relations, the practice of untouchability, forms of assertion (electoral and political), and identity formation, particularly within the Ravidassia community. The important findings of the study as per the objectives are as under:

1)In the Malwa region, the 'Ravidassia Dalits' dominate socially, economically, and politically more than any other caste within Dalits. During the study, it was found that the Ravidassia caste is the most developed amongst Punjab's dalits, whereas the Balmikis-Mazhabis are comparatively backward. In a comparative study, both dalit castes show that they have different levels of education. The Ravidassia are more educated due to their concentrated presence in the cities of Malwa regions where they get exposure and opportunities. The Ravidassia put more efforts to provide education to their children as compared to the Balmikis-Mazhabis.

2)The study finds out that the Ravidassia have become successful in establishing their own identity as compared to Balmikis-Mazhabis. In fact, they have declared themselves as a separate religious community from Hindus and Sikhs i.e. 'Ravidasia Dharam' with separate religious scripture, guru, symbols, etc. But the people of the Balmiki-Mazhabi caste do not make sufficient efforts to establish a separate religion and cultural identity for their community. Despite their differences in slogans, manner of greeting, religious scriptures, gurus, and religious places, they still profess the Hindu and Sikh religions. There is a lack of awareness of separate identities among the other castes.

3) In the socio-economic field, the Ravidassia have seen more changes than Balmikis-Mazhabis because their caste profession evolved into a full-fledged business. They have more economic resources, which have helped them in receiving quality education, which further enables them to get respectable jobs. Balmikis-Mazhabis even could not get the proper benefit of the quota due to their poor economic condition and lack of education. The main reason for the backwardness of Balmikis-Mazhabis is that they are still engaged in their traditional occupation of scavenging and agricultural labour, which has dragged them behind the Ravidassia

community in the socio-economic field. Ravidassias have drifted away from their traditional occupation of agricultural labour. But in the Malwa region some of the Chamar families still work as agricultural labourers. The Ravidassia (chamars) were the first to take the opportunity to do business/trade (Leather trade) and other economic activities, so they could get better educational opportunities because of the prosperous economic situation, and they could obtain jobs through reservation as compared to the other dalit categories in Punjab.

4) Lack of unity, different party preferences and divergence of interests amongst the major dalit groups of Punjab is the biggest obstacle in making them a strong electoral power. In addition to these factors, socioeconomic conditions are also responsible for the lack of political assertion in Punjab. The study indicates that the Ravidassia are politically more assertive due to better economic conditions than the Balmiki-Mazhabis. According to the study, party politics is very active in villages. In Punjab politics, the Chamars are undoubtedly the most dominant dalit caste in all the parties, whether it is a dalit or non-dalit party. In political field, the Balmikis-Mazhabis have very low representation as compared to the Ravidassia community. Dalits in Punjab began to assert their political rights through the Ad-Dharam Movement and the BSP party. As compared with other dalit communities such as Balmiki-Mazhabis, the Ravidassia community plays a crucial role in panchayat elections and decisions. Sarpanchs do not listen to their problems and does not do any development work in their areas. Even the sarpanches belonging to the Balmiki-Mazhabi caste do not dare to speak for their people.

5) Identity politics is still prevalent in Punjab, particularly in the Malwa region because it is the centre stage for cultural assertion and political marginalization of the community. In this region, the understanding of identity politics has shifted over time and is still evolving in response to the rapid socio-political changes in society. First, the impact and development of the Dalit community (chamars/Adhamris/Ravidassia) and how their social transformation has changed the identity politics of the state. Second, the caste groups have developed their own cultural symbols– seen in the construction of their own gurudwaras and joining with non-Sikh Deras to declare their assertiveness for equal rights and dignity. The sense of cultural assertion was particularly noticeable among the Ad-Dharmis as the Ravidass movement emerged as a strong and autonomous movement and an icon of their newly emerging identity-based politics. As one form of ethno-regional identity politics recedes into the background, it is now the turn of caste-based identity politics to emerge in contemporary Punjab. However, the emergence of deras as the organisation through which the new caste-based identity politics is being enacted

remains part of state politics. Sects/deras, come in the way of mobilisation of the dalit community as a political community. Third, the Green Revolution brought several changes to rural societies. The Green Revolution gave rise to agrarian identity formation (a new middle and upper middle class of landowners). It changed not only the income pattern, level of employment and social relationship of farmers and agricultural labourers. Identity-based movements' political goals are defined primarily in cultural terms, even though social and economic inequalities as well as political dependencies are always involved. This has changed the nature of the identity politics of the region.

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