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VOICE OF SIKHS IN AMERICA
(Formerly, World Sikh Council – America Region)

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August 29, 2025.

To whom it may concern,

It is our pleasure at the American Sikh Council (ASC) to support this new initiative namely, *'Crossroads: Journal of Global Perspectives'*.

This journal is dedicated to critical and interdisciplinary study of history, economics, geopolitics, social sciences, and more.

It will bring accessible insights in plain language in these fields at a time of accelerating global change, economic uncertainties, geopolitical realignments, and evolving social structures.

By drawing together diverse disciplines, the journal will foster a more holistic understanding of global changes and local dynamics alike.

I am particularly impressed by the journal's commitment to target policymakers, educators, and an informed public seeking to navigate complexity and propaganda with clarity.

We at American Sikh Council (ASC) fully endorse and support this journal.

Respectfully,

Kavneet Singh
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by Prof. Akhtar Hussain Sandhu**

Administration and Governance of First Sikh Kingdom of Banda Singh Bahadar

by Atinder Pal Singh

Former Member of Parliament and author of book in Punjabi on Banda Singh Bahadar.
(Translated and adapted by the editor from original in Punjabi)

Abstract

Sikhs established their own Sikh Kingdoms twice – from 1710-1715 and then again from 1799-1849.

Historians regard the reign of Banda Singh Bahadar from 1710-1715 as a just, benevolent and progressive reign. His kingdom was far ahead of his time.

This paper looks at the administration and governance of First Sikh Kingdom of Banda Singh Bahadar.

Introduction

South Asia from Kabul to Delhi had been ruled by Mughals before 1710. They were outsiders. They were descendants from Central Asia with foreign roots, culture, religion, ethnicity, and values. They had no sympathy for the natives who they ruled over with the sword.

Mughal Empire of the era controlled 25% of the world economy. For comparison USA and China together today constitute 25% of the world's economy.

Sikhs led by legendary Sikh General and Administrator Banda Singh Bahadar defeated the Mughal Empire at the epic Battle of Sirhind on May 12th, 1710, and established the First Sikh Kingdom.

First Sikh Kingdom was the first time that natives of the land guided by native philosophy established their own kingdom after 700 years of foreign rule and interference. Sikhs had no secret weapon, no outside help, and were outnumbered frequently 10 to 1 in battle.

Banda Singh Bahadar's administration and governance model was described in one sentence as "**ਅਡੇ ਸੋ ਡਡੇ ਲੋੜਵੰਦ ਨੂੰ ਬਖ਼ਸ਼ਿਸ਼ਾਂ ਕਰੇ**".

It can be summarized as pro-public (**ਪੂਜਾ ਅਧੀਨ**), bureaucratic (**ਨੌਕਰਸ਼ਾਹੀ**), rule of law (**ਨਿਆਂ ਅਤੇ ਕਾਨੂੰਨ ਪੱਖੀ**), meritocratic (**ਗੁਣਡੰਡਰੀ**) and *non*-democratic.

Lohgarh: capital of the First Sikh Kingdom

Banda Singh Bahadar established capital of the first Sikh Kingdom at Lohgarh.

Construction for a fort had been started by the Sikh Gurus decades ago. The Lohgarh Fort at the capital was spread over 7000 acres and can be considered one of the largest forts in history. It had 52 advanced structures and defense fortifications. It is described as a '*Network of Forts*'. (Lohgarh Trust - Lohgarh Zone - 52 advance forts, 2025).

"The Lohgarh fortifications comprised a vast network of forts that worked together to create a formidable defence system." (Lohgarh Trust - Lohgarh Zone - 52 advance forts, 2025)

The map published by Lohgarh Trust shows scale of the fort, "*It sprawls in an almost 50-kilometre radius*".

Map of Lohgarh Fort covering 7000 acres.
Map from Lohgarh Trust (Lohgarh Trust, 2025)

Banasar Fort
One of the 52 forts and defense fortifications of Lohgarh.

Buria Fort
One of the 52 forts and defense fortifications of Lohgarh.

Ruins of Lohgarh Fort.

Burj (defensive fortification) in Dabar area.
One of the 52 forts and defense fortifications of Lohgarh.

Terrain of Lohgarh Fort.

Gateway of Khalsa Raj, Thanesar.
One of the 52 forts and defense fortifications of Lohgarh.

Site of Lohgarh Chowki (gateway).
One of the 52 forts and defense fortifications of Lohgarh.

The Author holding a white brick of the 'White Palace'
of Banda Singh Bahadar at Lohgarh.

Abolish feudalism

The First Sikh Kingdom of Banda Singh Bahadar abolished feudalism and gave ownership of the lands to the cultivators of the land.

"*These Zamindars, or Landlords, who in most cases were high Government officials, were more than autocratic kings in themselves, practically responsible to no higher authority. The authorities in themselves did not interfere in their internal management as long as they paid in their fixed contribution, no matter how, how much or on what basis they realized their exactions from the actual cultivators of land, who were practically reduced to the position of mere slaves.*" (Prof. Ganda Singh, 'Life of Banda Singh Bahadar, based on contemporary and original records', p. 86)

"*In matters of Government, he introduced* **one of the greatest fiscal reforms in the country** *by abolishing the Zamindari System of the Mughals which had reduced the cultivators to the position of slaves.*" [Prof. Ganda Singh, 'Life of Banda Singh Bahadar, based on contemporary and original records', p. 242]

This is considered a landmark in history of the Sikhs as it **lay the foundation for inter-generational wealth** rather than '*mere slaves*' (landless laborers). It also empowered the people to increase their productivity as they were direct beneficiary of the output.

Direct Revenue Collection in kind

Under the older feudal system, the Mughal State delegated feudal lords to collect revenue from the producers (farmers). The feudal lords exploited the people. There was no direct contact of the State

with the people. The State did not interfere with the feudal lands as long as it got its revenue. The feudal lords were autocratic and did not care about the people or productivity.

The First Sikh Kingdom of Banda Singh Bahadar abolished feudalism and gave ownership of the lands to the cultivators of the land. This also allowed the Sikh State to collect revenue directly from the producers without any middleman.

The producers had more to themselves, and were empowered to improve their productivity and output. The Sikh State got more revenue from rising prosperity.

Persian sources such as *Ibratnama* quote Sikh Kingdom took 20% of the **produce in kind** as taxes as compared to 40-50% taxes under Mughal Empire.

Another point to note is that **taxes were collected in kind as share of the produce**. If the farmers and producers had a bad year, they did not have to raise money at a time of failed crops.

Later on, the British Empire changed to collecting taxes in cash. Sikh farmers suffered when the crops failed or prices crashed. This drove migration of Sikhs to North America, Singapore, and even China.

"*the British authorities in the Punjab taxed Sikhs not in kind as the Sikh Kingdom used to, but in cash, so that a sharp fall in crop prices led to the bankruptcy of many peasants who failed to sell their products in the markets at a good price*". [Cao Yin, 'From Policemen to Revolutionaries: A Sikh Diaspora in Global Shanghai, 1885–1945', p. 63]

Prof. Ganda Singh says, "*In matters of Government, he introduced **one of the greatest fiscal reforms** in the country by abolishing the Zamindari System of the Mughal*".

Epistocracy: governance by experts, rule of the learned

How to provide good governance? This is "*one of the oldest, hardest questions of political philosophy*". (Thomas Bartscherer, 2023)

All civilizations have thought about this and implemented their own solutions.

Decision making power in First Sikh Kingdom of Banda Singh Bahadar lay with the collective leadership of carefully chosen *Khalsa* rather than a monarch. The *Khalsa* were Sikhs who excelled at governance and warfare. The *Khalsa* were initiated into the order by other *Khalsa*.

Khalsa are frequently misinterpreted to mean 'pure'. The word '*Khalsa*' comes from Persian word '*Khalas*' which means 'of the Sovereign'. *Khalsa* answer to their Guru who is their Sovereign.

Crucially, the decision makers were neither elected by the people, nor hereditary, nor was there a single monarch.

The original 5 Khalsa had been initiated by Guru Gobind Singh himself. It is **partly because of this reason that the First Sikh Kingdom Banda Singh Bahadar is considered true to ideals of Sikh Gurus**. More so than the Second Sikh Kingdom of Maharaja

Ranjit Singh, who reduced the power of Khalsa, and ruled partly like a monarch. He was a monarch, even if benevolent.

This deviation from governance model prescribed by the Gurus led to resulted in more power to the monarch Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his secular modern administration. It also reduced importance of *Khalsa* and Sikh religious institutions.

Prof. Ganda Singh and Prof. Teja Singh write in their book 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh' that the Maharaja secularized the decision making in his administration which reduced relevance and influence of Sikh religious institutions. '*Gurmatta*' for Sikhs is the decision from their highest religious institutions that they always obey. The power of '*Gurmatta*' - literally the decision of the Guru - from highest Sikh institutions declined.

"*After the* **abolition of political Gurmatta**, *religious Gurmatta was allowed to continue, but as the occasions on which it had to be used became rarer and public spirit being dead, it fell into the hands of illiterate fanatics or the irresponsible incumbents of [Sikh] temples, who made it degenerate out of all recognition.*" (Prof. Ganda Singh and Prof. Teja Singh, 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh', 1935, p. 59).

Sikh governance model can be compared to Plato's *epistocracy* – governance by experts. "*Plato is said to ground his rejection in the thesis that in a well-governed regime, knowledge and political power will coincide. In democracies, by contrast, power will be divorced from knowledge because "general public opinion," which in principle holds sway in a democracy, will be deficient with regard to knowledge.*" (Thomas Bartscherer, 2023)

The governance of First Sikh Kingdom of Banda Singh Bahadar was based on *epistocracy*. The *Khalsa* were Sikh equivalents of this. It was governance of experts and rule of the learned. It was meritocracy. Sikh rule was **not democratic**.

Khalsa are trained in benevolence, **philosophy**, political thought, religion, history, and governance. Analogy can be made with Plato's *epistocrats* and Chinese *Mandarin* bureaucrats.

It is this training in benevolence, **philosophy**, political thought, religion, history, that Plato recognized as critical for governors. "*the ruler of Plato's state should be a possessor of knowledge, a 'fully qualified philosopher.*"

The question of how to nurture experts in governance is still relevant today.

Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy is part of National University of Singapore. Prof. Kishore Mahbubani was founding Dean of the School. He writes in his book 'Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy: Building a Global Policy School in Asia' that he also contemplated what skills to nurture in a school of public policy.

*"I asked Joe Nye what the curriculum of a public policy school should consist of. He replied, 'Kishore, it should rest on **three pillars: Economics, Politics and Leadership and Management courses**.'"* [Prof. Kishore Mahbubani, 'Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy: Building a Global Policy School in Asia', p. 6]

Direct Democracy

Decisions on matters of local relevance were taken via a form of direct democracy. All Sikhs *who were impacted* would gather together. They would deliberate on the issues. Decisions were taken via **consensus**. This is key. It was not a case of simple majority. There were no party lines. There was no elected representative with unlimited powers and no right to call for 4-5 years.

Sarbat Khalsa (ਸਰਬੱਤ ਖਾਲਸਾ) - literally 'All of Khalsa' - is a gathering of all concerned Sikhs. Those who are most affected by the agenda actively participate. All viewpoints are aired. There is no committee. Decisions are made by consensus (general agreement).

A decision by consensus is different from voting and majority. In a decision by consensus, all views are carefully considered and best effort is made to address all legitimate concerns.

A decision by consensus is reached when everyone supports the decision and no one strongly opposes it.

Process for decisions by consensus are well understood. It may require a facilitator as well.

The advantage of this approach is that:

- It does not allow a majority to make decisions against the minority. Decisions are made by consensus. It is not a system based on '51% for, and 49% against' to elect dangerous clowns.
- It does not allow truly bad decisions as people would revolt right there on the spot.
- It does not allow decisions to be made by distant authorities or closed door decisions as in regulations.

- It does not allow nameless faceless people to ignore your views under the pretext of majority.
- People chosen for a task can be recalled proverbially' the next day' by calling another Sarbat Khalsa.

'Chosen Five' (ਪੰਜ ਪਿਆਰੇ) are also chosen to implement the decisions. People are chosen for the particular task for which they have experience and specialist skills. They do not get blanket authority to do what they want. There can be multiple groups of people chosen for different tasks.

Sikh's do not have history of electing entertaining dangerous clowns with no right to recall and limitless powers over all matters for years as in so called 'modern' representative democracy.

Sarbat Khalsa is in active use today at community and local level.

Justice for the people

Prof. Ganda Singh writes about Banda Singh Bahadar: "*His justice was expeditious and he sometimes went to the extent of **relentlessness in his punishment of tyrannical officials**. The rank and position of the offender never influenced his spirit of justice and his summary method of dealing with criminal cases made him a terror to the tribe of petty functionaries.*" (Prof. Ganda Singh, 'Life of Banda Singh Bahadar, based on contemporary and original records', p. 251).

"Those who do not administer justice are cast into hell. A king should practise justice." (Prof. Ganda Singh, 'Life of Banda Singh Bahadar, based on contemporary and original records', p. 252)

This is significant. Even today in modern 'enlightened' democracies, there is **two-tier justice system**. The justice people get depends on how close people are to the government.

There is selective enforcement of justice all over the world. Laws are interpreted differently.

Neil Gorsuch is an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court. He writes in his book 'Over Ruled: The Human Toll of Too Much Law': "*those who feel the cost most acutely are those without wealth, power, and status.*"

"The "sagacious, the enterprising, and the moneyed few" may be able to anticipate, influence, and even profit from so much shifting law. But the "industrious… mass of the people" can do none of those things. In the end, law serves as an instrument only "for the few, not for the many. "

Most modern 'democratic' Nation-States follow the principle, "*Show me the man and I'll show you the crime.*" (Lavrentiy Beria, chief of Joseph Stalin's secret police)

"*The **rule of law** is not an end unto itself. In large measure, **it is about protecting individual liberty**.*" [Neil Gorsuch, Janie Nitze, 'Over Ruled: The Human Toll of Too Much Law', p. 30]

Law and Justice today *ignore* individual liberty.

Law and Justice today have become an end to itself rather than a means to an end (individual liberty).

Law and Justice today serve the '*the enterprising, and the moneyed few'* rather than the people.

What a contrast the Banda Singh Bahadar was with its "*relentlessness in his punishment of tyrannical officials*".

Sikh Kingdom upheld 'individual liberty'. Modern enlightened Western Nations and democracies do not.

"*In his zeal for the emancipation of the persecuted and down-trodden, he earned the blessings of the poor and the destitute whose cries had not been heard by anyone for centuries past.*" [Prof. Ganda Singh, 'Life of Banda Singh Bahadar, based on contemporary and original records', p. 241]

Conclusion

The First Sikh Kingdom of Banda Singh Bahadar lasted about **5 years** (1710-15). Keeping in mind that the First Sikh Kingdom had a short reign and was constantly under attack by forces that controlled 25% of the world's economy, the achievements of the First Sikh Kingdom are nothing less than spectacular.

The **administration and governance model** can be summarized as follows:

- **Ended feudal system** and granted rights of land to those who tilled the land. This empowered the famers to be more productive and have ownership of the land and their produce.
- **Direct Revenue Collection** by abolishing feudal lords as middlemen. Taxes were collected in kind as share of the revenue rather than in cash.
- **Epistocracy**: governance by experts, rule of the learned
- **Established a form of direct democracy** with group of affected and concerned citizens getting together (*Sarbat Khalsa*) to take decisions via consensus.
- **Justice for the people:** "*relentlessness in his punishment of tyrannical officials*", and upholding individual liberty.

Banda Singh Bahadar was subsequently captured along with 700 Sikhs by an army of more than 35,000 Mughals. He and his followers were taken to Delhi. His son was killed in front of him. He was tortured to death. His closest followers were given option that their life will be spared if they renounced Sikh values and convert to Islam. Not even one out of more than 700 converted.

The First Sikh Kingdom of Banda Singh Bahadar was a milestone in the history of Indus Valley Civilization and for the Sikhs. It gave physical and political manifestation to philosophy of Guru Nanak. It continues to inspire Sikhs today.

Seal of Banda Singh Bahadar
Seal is read from bottom right to top left because seal is in Persian
– a right to left language.

Inscription reads:
Deg Teg Fateh, Nusrat (grace) Bedrang (without delay), Yafat (prosperity)
Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh.
Translated as:
Fateh (victory) from Deg (pot) and Tegh (sword);
Prosperity without delay by the grace of
(Guru) Nanak, and Guru Gobind Singh

(Image and description courtesy of Tanvir Singh)

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Coins of the Sikhs: Symbols of Sovereignty

by Tanvir Singh

Abstract

Sikhs established their own Sikh Rule twice – from 1710-1715 and then again from 1799-1849.

Sikhs minted their own coins throughout this period and in-between years.

The period in-between the two Sikh Rule was the rule of the Sikh Misls (Confederacy). They were not formally united and organized but would get together when required.

The Second Sikh Rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh also minted coins at various mints. Sikhs did not debase their currency (coins) by mixing their silver coins with other base metals like copper. This shows that Sikhs did not offload financial problems of the State on the public.

This is significant in the light of currency debasement going on all over the world, which leads to so many economic, political, and social problems. This practice of 'sound economics' likely contributed to Sikh Rule being a progressive, enterprising, just, and inclusive Rule as regarded by outside observers of that time, and historians today.

Punjab: a Sovereign Nation

A nation is a group of people with a shared identity based on shared values, culture, history, language, or ethnicity.

Historically and geographically the Punjab has been separate from India.

Punjabis (and Sikhs) are not Indians. Their identity is Punjabi (regional, cultural, civilizational, and linguistic), and Sikh (ethno-religious), but not Indian.

Shah Muhammad in his ode *Angrezan Ate Singhan Di Larai* (Shah Mohammad, 2025) also known as *Jangnama Singhan atey Firangian* gives an eye witness account of the First Anglo Sikh War:

ਜੰਗ ਹਿੰਦ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦਾ ਹੋਣ ਲੱਗਾ । ਦੋਵੇਂ ਪਾਦਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਫ਼ੌਜਾਂ ਭਾਰੀਆਂ ਨੀ ॥

ਅੱਜ ਹੋਵੇ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਤਾਂ ਮੁੱਲ ਪਾਵੇ । ਜੇੜੀਆਂ ਖ਼ਾਲਸੇ ਨੇ ਤੇਗਾਂ ਮਾਰੀਆਂ ਨੀ ॥

ਸਣੇ ਆਦਮੀ ਗੋਲੀਆਂ ਨਾਲ ਉੱਡਨ । ਹਾਥੀ ਡਿਗਦੇ ਸਣੇ ਅੰਬਾਰੀਆਂ ਨੀ ॥

ਸ਼ਾਹ ਮੁਹੰਮਦਾ ਇਕ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਬਾਝੋਂ । ਫ਼ੌਜਾਂ ਜਿਤੁ ਕੇ ਅੰਤ ਨੂੰ ਹਾਰੀਆਂ ਨੀ ॥ ੯੨

The translation is:

Between the Punjab and the Hind, the war started, both imperial forces are strong and skilled.

If Maharaja (Ranjeet Singh) was alive today, he would've rewarded,

the Khalsa for the swords it wielded.

Men die with bullets, and elephants drop dead.

O Shah Muhammad without the Maharaja's bidding, in the end forces lost, despite winning !

When Shah Mohammed wrote "*Between the Punjab and the Hind war started*", it clearly indicates that the Punjab and the Hind or Hindustan were two separate entities.

Sohan Lal Suri in his classic *Umdat-ut-Twarikh* writes that Ahmed Shah Abdali withdrew from the Punjab and the Hind in AD 1176. Punjab was a separate entity from the Hind or Hindustan even when it was under the Mughal rule.

The town of Sirhind was called Sirhind because it was literally the *Sir* (head) of *Hind* (India). Hindustan ended at Sirhind, and Punjab began (Sirhind, Wikipedia, 2025)

Map of Sikh Rule (1799-1849) of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Coins as a symbol of Sovereignty

In Indian subcontinent it's a common saying that the who rules has the authority to do anything legal (or illegal).

<div align="center">

ਜਿਹਦਾ ਜੋਰ ਓਧਾ ਸਿੱਕਾ ॥

</div>

Rulers were minting coins just to assert their sovereignty over a state or a province.

Alexander the Great invaded India and minted Alexander's victory coin to assert his victory and sovereignty.

Victory coin of Alexander the Great commemorating his victory over King Porus of Hindustan.

Coins of the First Sikh Rule of Banda Singh Bahadar

Dr. Surinder Singh writes in his book 'Coins of the Sikhs', "*It is now firmly established on the basis of the historical accounts and numismatic investigation of the coins located so far that the initial Sikh coinage was started by Banda Bahadur in AD 1710.*" [Surinder Singh, 'Coins of the Sikhs', p. 42]

Chapter 1 of his book gives detailed account of the coins of First Sikh Rule.

Dr. Surinder Singh adds, "*Hence, based on circumstantial evidence also one may believe with a reasonable amount of certainty that the Sikh coins were struck during 1710-13.*"

"*Although there no longer exist any doubts regarding the existence of the initial Sikh coinage of 1710-12, still the study of the initial Sikh coinage will remain somewhat incomplete and partially inconclusive till the first year's coin and until the account of Ijad or of any other contemporary writers which mentions these coins or any other contemporary historical reference are traced and examined by scholars and numismatists.*"

The Tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh sent Banda Singh Bahadar to establish Sikh Rule (Khalsa Raj). It is very likely that establishing sovereignty would have included minting coins.

One can argue that sovereignty is incomplete without your coins. Therefore, it is very likely that Sikhs under Banda Singh Bahadar would have struck their own coin. Why would they not?

The verses on the coin are:

ਸਿੱਕਾ ਮਾਰਿਆ ਦੋ ਜਹਾਨ ਉੱਤੇ, ਬਖਸ਼ਾਂ ਬਖਸ਼ੀਆਂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੀ ਤੋਰ ਨੇ ਜੀ।

ਫਤਿਹ ਸ਼ਾਹਿ ਸ਼ਾਹਾਨ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਦੀ, ਮਿਹਰਾਂ ਕੀਤਿਆਂ ਸੱਚੇ ਰਬ ਏਕ ਨੇ ਜੀ।

Coin stuck for the two worlds (spiritual and temporal), with blessings of Guru Nanak.

By the conquest of Guru Gobind Singh King of Kings, and by the grace of One True God.

ਜਾਰੀ ਹੋਇਆ ਸੰਸਾਰ ਦੇ ਸ਼ਾਂਤੀ-ਅਸਥਾਨ, ਸ਼ਹਿਰਾਂ ਦੀ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਧੰਨਭਾਗੀ ਰਾਜਧਾਨੀ ਤੋਂ।

Issued from the place of peace; the model city, and our blessed capital city.

*Silver coin
attributed to First Sikh Rule
of Banda Singh Bahadar. (Wikipedia, 2025)*

Gurprit Singh in his paper 'Coins of the Sikhs: Nānakshahi Couplet' has listed dimensions of the coins. (Gurprit Singh, 2011)

Diameter: 28 mm
Weight: 11.96 grammes

From these two dimensions and knowing the density of grade of Silver, we can calculate the thickness.

It is worth noting that the coins of First Sikh Rule of Banda Singh Bahadar did not have any images of Banda Singh Bahadar or even Sikh Gurus. This is in line with Sikh ethos to discourage worship of objects or personalities. Ideas expressed in words have highest place in Sikh religion.

It is also worth noting that the First Sikh Rule has the concept of *'model city'* (ਸ਼ਹਿਰਾਂ ਦੀ ਮੂਰਤਿ). This is similar to concept of 'City on a Hill' during America's foundation and independence. Sikhs and Americans envisioned their cities will be a model that others can look up to.

Coins of the Sikh *Misls* (Confederacy)

The period in-between the two Sikh Rule was the rule of the Sikh *Misls* (*Confederacy*). They were not formally united and organized but would get together when required. Crucially, they launched their own coins even when they did not have formal rule.

Small in number, Sikhs dominated the region culturally, militarily, and politically. They launched waves of attacks on Delhi and asserted their sovereignty.

Coin issued under Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, 1765 AD. (Wikipedia, 2025)

Coins of the Second Sikh Rule (1799-1849) of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

Maharaja Ranjit Singh established the Second Sikh Rule in 1799. There were more than a dozen mints in his time. (Sikh Coins, 2025) Some of these were:

1. Lahore
2. Amritsar
3. Multan
4. Peshawar
5. Kashmir
6. Nimak (Pind Dadan Khan)

The mint at Nimak (Pind Dadan Khan) was started by local *diwan* (leader) Raliya Ram and is near the well-known Khewra Salt mines which are the sole source of Himalayan Pink Salt in the world. The coins were also known as 'Raliya Rami' coins and 'Nimak' coins. This was during the reign of Maharaja Duleep Singh (son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh).

The mint is noteworthy as it was visited by British Official Alexander Fleming in 1849. Record of the visit is recorded in Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal 1849, p. 31, and in the Journal of Oriental Numismatic Society (Jyoti Rai, Oriental Numismatic society, 1995).

Alexander Fleming noted, "*Visited the mint here, which is under the superintendence of the former. Silver is collected in all directions in the shape of old rupees, bangles and silver ornaments, which after being refined are converted into the new Lahore Rupee.*

At present the silver from which rupees are manufactured, are Mahmoud Shah Rupees from the Hazara and counties to the north, and of the value of about 12 annas.

These contain copper and lead, which is separated from them previous to their being converted into the new rupees This is effected by the process of cupellation, and which is performed in a very simple but effective way. A hole is dug in the earth according to the size of the cupel to be made, into this hole a quantity of wood ashes is thrown, moistened with water and wrought up into a saucer-shaped vessel, its sides projecting above the level of the ground. On these are placed two pieces of fire clay so as to increase the depth of the cupel and encircle its mouth, except for about 3 inches at one side, in which is inserted the mouth of a tube connected with a mussuck to act as a bellows. This apparatus being prepared, the cupel is filled with charcoal, on which after it is Ignited the silver to be refined is thrown, and in the case of Mahmoud Shah Rupees, an equal weight of lead is thrown in along with them so as during its oxidation to carry all the copper into the substance of the cupel, and leave the pure silver behind.

The experiment we saw performed was on Rs 1000, and the operation was finished in two hours, during which time an intense heat was kept up by the bellows. The lead and copper are afterwards extracted from the cupel by ordinary means, and contain a little silver, probably in consequence of the quantity of lead used being in excess of the proper proportion to the amount of copper contained in the assay.

*The silver being obtained of sufficient purity to constitute the new rupees, **which are said to be pure silver,** it is cut into bars about the breadth of a rupee and handed over to an artificer, who cuts these into the necessary weights to constitute the rupees. This being done, the rough bits of silver are heated to redness on hot charcoal, and when hot are beaten on an anvil with a round-headed hammer into the shape and size of the standard rupee.*

In this state they are handed over to a man who finishes them by impressing the necessary inscription, which is done on a die of a most simple description, being an anvil with a round and highly tempered steel surface, on which the inscription is inscribed in reverse.

*On this the rupee is placed, and on it **a punch with a round and highly tempered steel face, on which the inscription to be impressed on the upper side of the rupee is carved**. The punch being applied to the rupee, a smart blow from a heavy die is given by a man who stands in front of the one in charge of the die, and who holds the punch in his left hand and a handful of raw rupees in his right, the lower die being firmly fixed in a strong case.*

In this way 40 rupees were passed through the die well engraved, in one minute, and the artificer said that on an average he could engrave 1500 per hour".

*"**From 1000 Mahmoud Shah [of Durrani Afghani empire] rupees, 750 new Lahore [capital of Sikh Kingdom] rupees are manufactured**".*

This important factoid shows that coins of 'Mahmoud Shah' of Durrani Afghani empire were 25% copper (debased). The coins of the Sikhs were of '*pure Silver*' and **not** debased.

Coins of the Nimak mint (around 1849 AD)

As soon as the sovereignty of Durranis ended in Kashmir, Sikhs started minting coins from Kashmir. The very first year of issue of Sikh coins in Kashmir started in 1819 AD.

First coin of Sikh Kingdom from Kashmir from 1819 AD.

Last coin of Sikhs from Kashmir from 1846-47 AD.

Conclusion

Sovereignty and minting coins went hand in hand. As the areas came under a different sovereign, the coinage too changed and it is evident now after seeing so many examples.

Three notable things about Sikhs coins that are worth repeating are:

- Sikhs coins did not have any images, not even of Sikh Gurus. This is in line with Sikh ethos to discourage worship of objects or personalities. Ideas expressed in words have highest place in Sikh religion. There were a few exceptions such as images of a leaf, peacock, tree, *swastika*, *Nishan Sahib*, and the rare special occasion vanity coins like the portrait coin. (Aashish Kochhar, 2020)
- Sikhs issued coins during the *Misl kaal* (era of *Confederacy*), even when they did not have a formal Kingdom or Sovereignty. Sikhs dominated the region culturally, militarily, and politically. They launched waves of attacks on Delhi and asserted their sovereignty.
- Sikh coins were of '*pure Silver*' and not debased (mixed with copper) right up to the end of Sikh Empire in 1849.

The last point is significant in the light of currency debasement going on all over the world, which leads to so many economic, political, and social problems. This **practice of 'sound economics' likely contributed to Sikh Rule being a progressive, enterprising, just,**

and inclusive Rule as regarded by outside observers of that time, and historians today.

Sikh coins were always a symbol of Sikh sovereignty and will remain a proof that Sikh expression "*Raj Karega Khalsa*" (Khalsa shall rule) in their *Ardas* (prayer) is not a mere wish but it was a reality. With *Akal Purakh's* (Supreme God) blessings, Khalsa shall once again rule.

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A Cultural Materialist Critique of 'Punjabiyat': Haryana Perspective

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Abstract

'Punjabiyat' connotes a common approach, a shared perspective, and a co-inherited value system that can deliver the two striving nations, India and Pakistan, out of the clutches of divisive politics. Punjabiyat could be the key to building a stronger regional partnership that could eventually empower SAARC and create a balance of interests in favour of South Asia. By corollary, Punjabiyat, associated with the Punjab region of South Asia, could serve as a bulwark against neo- imperialism and ward-off Western hegemony. In fact, the foundations of a stronger South Asia can be based on the principles of Punjabiyat that rise above religious and communal divides upholding egalitarianism, brotherhood, democracy, syncretism, grassroots spirituality combined with scientific approach that are remarkable characteristics of Undivided Punjab found still extant and demonstrated in residual forms wherever people of Punjab reside in their region or as diaspora. For the purpose of the paper, the social structure of the Undivided Punjab is

investigated and juxtaposed with the socio-political scenarios emerging in contemporary times, especially on the Indian side and viewed from the perspective of Haryana, a state on the Indian side. The article makes use of the anthropological concept of cultural materialism reflected in the literary approach of critics including Raymond Williams, Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and Louis Montrose.

Introduction

The partition of India was the loss of *Punjabiyat* to colonial agenda and divisive forces. Partition turned numerous Punjabis into 'refugees' and 'muhajirs' but a probe to assess if the fate of Punjabiyat has been sealed forever, may still be worthwhile to guide the policy-making of the two concerned nations.

The present study is driven by the hypothesis that Punjabiyat is a set of defining characteristics of Undivided Punjab which can one day bring two nations severed in a political operation, India and Pakistan, closer. Punjabiyat is the distinctive approach of the Undivided Punjab that is still visible in its syncretic traditions wherever these survive. However, though found in residual forms, it is evolving and dynamic.

Punjabiyat has been affected by the material realities including political and economic conditions prevailing and demographic changes occurring in the Punjab region, including the state of

Haryana, that have contributed to its cultural dynamism. It may be ultimately established that Punjabiyat can flourish perennially through regional cooperation but shall wither if the nations on both sides of political territory cannot foster it to maintain independence from neo-imperialist regimes and internal politics of schism.

Presently, fresh attempts to counter the core values of Punjabiyat can be witnessed and therefore, the value-system demands renewed attention to assess the extent to which the counterforces have altered the value-system and ethical code that drives 'Punjabiyat.' The research adopts cultural materialism to present a critique of Punjabiyat while parallelly conveying the extent to which the 'history' of the region may be a 'construct'. Punjabiyat in its *ur*-form will resolve not only issues between brother nations, India and Pakistan but also those skirmishes that might separate brother states, Haryana and Punjab. It is Punjabiyat that brought farmers across Haryana and Punjab together to voice concerns regarding Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020. The spirit of Punjabiyat fuelled the bonhomie that was maintained throughout the tough years of the agitation. The same spirit of Punjabiyat holds the key to resolving the SYL issue between Punjab and Haryana which is perhaps a boggy issue created in local politics. Nation-States that have had less water have been able to optimise their resource use and sharing can even avert flood- like situations as rivers run their course downstream without considerably affecting the riparian rights. The present article is propelled by subjective rather than objective, an involved rather than dispassionate attempt to delineate the concept of 'Punjabiyat,'

refracted through the prism of Haryana, a state carved out of Punjab on the Indian side of the border in 1966.

Discussion

Nation-states with non-secular, pro-religious status evidently find it hard to reciprocate diplomatic gestures and appeals for mutuality due to the stated and clearly exclusionary basis of their identity formation. As a solution, they can adopt, affirm, articulate and emphasise a shared regional identity that is not subject to principles other than of justice and commonweal. Punjabiyat, a cultural concept pervading Punjab unites its people, even if other ideologies unhinge the harmony. In the long duration of history, Punjabiyat will show that the recalcitrant Punjab is also the resilient Punjab that that learns from the crucial experiences that history has forced upon it.

Punjabiyat can ward off outside aggression, raise respect for Pakistan and India on the international level, help cut down defence costs and even contribute substantially towards the economic prosperity of the two nations that are already leading the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) nations. As members of some powerful science and technology clubs of the world, possessing enviable capabilities that two nations can actually make Asia a formidable power, but with the only important proviso that they substitute 'Punjabiyat' for religious politics. Both Pakistan and India are part of bodies like the Commonwealth of Nations (1947), SAARC (1985) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (2017). The interests of these two nations

are in no way at loggerheads with each other, though political pretensions may project it so. In fact, the two countries gain more through collaboration rather than antagonism, which can benefit only extraneous, outside powers and shall be at the cost of the well-being and development goals of the two nations. In fact, 'religion' as a premise for dividing the nations is a frivolous pretext since India does not identify itself as a religious state, and there is no cause of feud or skirmish apart from historical wounds incurred towards the end of imperial sway over India. Moreover, Pakistan, despite basing its identity on religious premises, has been able to forge strong alliances with nations with large atheistic populations, populations from other religious sects, communist affiliations and exercising non-religious politics like China or the US. In fact, Western, Eurasian and South East Asian powers that are non-co-religionists of Pakistan have stayed as its allies despite executing controversial operations against many neighbouring nations in the Middle-East that have jeopardised the survival of a majority of co-religionists. Since 1961, India, as a NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) nation, has been able to maintain its sovereignty related to decision-making in the face of hegemonic powers like Russia and the US. However, this independence seems to have been curtailed through claims following the abrupt settlement of the 2025 India-Pakistan conflict. To both Pakistan and India, ***Punjabiyat can serve as an antidote to their ailing diplomacy, reflected briefly and sporadically in gestures where bus services, train services and such exchanges were used to build metaphoric bridges***.

Thus, Punjabiyat is a precious reality in its residual form, the vestiges of which are worth saving; it is a seed to be nurtured.

Political demagoguery, on the other hand, banks on logical fallacies, empty rhetoric and delusional propaganda that suits only the vested interests of certain hegemonic groups operating and growing on both sides of the border. Much can be learnt by the eight SAARC nations, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka from **ASEAN**, a platform of South-East Asian countries. Association of Southeast Asian nations (ASEAN), founded in 1967, is a regional bloc of ten (10) countries, namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam that ***have furnished an example worth emulating by pivoting their cooperation on what is common rather than focussing on dissonances and dissimilarities.*** Of course, diversity is a strength rather than a weakness as Indian leadership on many international platforms and its role as a balancing power in the South Asia well illustrates. In fact, healthy rivalries between adjoining nations can boost development.

'Punjabiyat' Bridging Borders

The rubric of this discussion points to the indigenous appellant 'Punjabiyat' that gives primacy to the understanding of the indigenous person regarding his/her identity, where the native belongs to Punjab on both sides of the border between India and Pakistan. This border can be intriguingly defined in physical, psychological, temporal, geographical, and political terms, as Punjab can be navigated as a space that has been inhabited before the arrival of the British, during the colonial regime, and afterwards.

'Punjabiyat' is a regional identity that spans two important nations that seem to be at loggerheads today. It mainly indicates the prevalence of a folk tradition engendered in an agricultural ecosystem surrounding and created by five rivers irrigating the plains of Punjab. This folk tradition depicts the shared roots of the indigenous people regardless of their religion and specific customs dictated by religion.

Polysemy of 'Punjabiyat'

In Undivided Punjab, the religious customs came secondary to folk customs determined by the regional ecology, economy and ethos. This paper then intensively explores the meaning of ***Punjabiyat, a legacy of the Undivided Punjab that may be extant and palpable in the invisible bonds of brotherhood that bring the people of these nations together, at times overriding the political discourses and schisms that divide them.*** Further, this paper investigates how the concept of 'Punjabiyat' can serve as a force that cements the bond between India and Pakistan.

First and foremost, Punjabiyat was engendered in Punjab, the fertile land in South Asia inundated by five rivers. Linguistically, it is relatively easy to disambiguate the word 'Punjab', but it is challenging to explicate upon 'Punjabiyat,' a set of characteristics related to ethnicity and religion yet not limited or subject to these identities but defining an attitude, a set of manners and clutch of attitudes, a patent behavioural approach that was engendered in Punjab, the territory to which it refers.

Etymologically, 'Punjab' is the anglicised version of 'Panjab,' a word referring to the 'land of five rivers' and tracing its linguistic roots to Persian where 'Panj' means 'five' and 'ab' stands for 'water'.

However, Punjabiyat is polyphonic and polysemic, it is subject to much variegated narrativizing propelled by diverse discourses.

For instance, 'Punjabi' to which 'Punjabiyat' is imputed is itself a dynamic and loaded term. It can refer to a 'person' and to a 'language' that belongs to Undivided Punjab.

Furthermore, with the crisis precipitated by the partition of India, the term became more ambiguous. Certain groups adopted the term as an appellation, and others did not, so as to create or mark a distinction.

Moreover, the term is problematised by the associated epithet 'Punjabi' that could refer to the whole demos of Punjab region and apply to the whole populace of the region from India to Pakistan, but which has been appropriated in the Indian context to designate a specific community of Hindus who are now identified as Indian Hindus due to the subscription to the lamentable colonial intervention calling for the formation of Pakistan, carved out of the original colony. So, contemporary **Punjabi Hindus re-settled in Haryana were historically Hindus belonging to a region considered beyond the aegis of India.**

The associated word 'Punjabi' is, then, a misnomer when applied to a community, since it is not appropriated by everyone from Punjab and is even avoided in reference to the Sikh community of Punjab.

Ironically, however, 'Punjabi' is an acceptable label in regard to its use as the name of a language even when the language 'Punjabi' is expressly, pronouncedly and specifically, linked to the distinctively Sikh ethos that originated in this region.

It is likely and evident that the term 'Punjabiyat' has undergone many transformations over the period of a century. The diverse definitions may be linked to socio-historical movements that precipitated in the form of displaced populations, but also correspond to misrecognitions that attend upon migrations and schisms.

In the pre-partition times, ***'Punjabi' was less a religious identity and more a folk identity***. Yet in post-partition India and in the contemporary right-wing politics of India, there have been attempts to redefine and limit how Punjabiyat is understood. This includes flawed conceptions and, often, a misconception, misrecognition, and misapprehension of the word 'Punjabi' and the identity linked to it. This may be because, in volatile times, identity becomes fluid so as to aid survival, or to create a sense of dominance, assimilation and affiliation.

Punjabiyat has several explanations that have been more or less adequate to their purpose for the reason of being first, parochial, second, used by outsiders who lack a clear frame of reference (and confuse Punjabiyat by attaching it to a select community known to them), and third, used by some displaced groups as an adopted label to easily assimilate themselves into a new settlement in the aftermath of a volatile period. Most references to Punjabi and Punjabiyat are erroneous and limited.

The stigma associated with 'displacement' and its attendant vulnerabilities attached pejorative meanings to the term 'Punjabi' in Haryana, where the migrant population was resettled and allocated proportionate or equivalent land, which is a factor in understanding the fracture and weakening of Punjabiyat.

The average person recognised as a 'Punjabi' in India is actually a person migrated from the Punjab of Pakistan's Lahore and even Bannowal not a person belonging to Amritsar or Ludhiana. Now, according to Wikipedia, the term "Bannowal region" likely refers to 'Bannu,' a city and division in southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Bannu is located on the Kurram River and was previously part of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) as Frontier Region Bannu.

Since, during the partition, there was massive population swapping from West to East and East to West Punjab based on religion, the Hindus that came from the Eastern side of Undivided-Greater Punjab to the Indian side were treated as migrants by the locals. Though in the Indian side of Punjab, the Jatt Sikh community dominates, this community is identified as 'Sardar.' On the other hand, in India, 'Punjabi' is an appellation claimed by and bestowed, with greater readiness, upon the large group of displaced Hindus. Many who were displaced and lost their original homes, made some parts of Punjab and large parts of Haryana their new home after the allocation of land in these areas.

The Punjabi community in India, which is concentrated mainly in Haryana and Punjab, is a group that practises Hinduism and, in contemporary Indian politics, favours the right-wing politics of

Hindutva, especially due to its exposure to the human crisis precipitated by the partition. Years later, the secular ethos of Haryana also succumbs to religious discourse, and politics is dominated by the historical past of severance and partition, Haryanvi too is no more the indigenous Haryanvi but an identity usurped by the Punjabis of Pakistan who came in various waves and settled down majorly in Haryana during partition of India and later before 1984 when the pro-religionist Sikh movements took over Punjab.

The Heirloom of 'Punjabiyat' in Haryana

Haryana's syncretic ethos has helped assimilate migrants from all over the country as it has accommodated waves after waves of migrants who have been displaced forcibly, as well as immigrants streaming in voluntarily.

However, lately, the migrant populations have become so significant that it is affecting the socio-cultural environment of the state. The increasing upper-crust Hindu majority that has had a bitter experience of persecution in their native states, with its collective memory and narrative of violence and discursive hatred of the communal other, have started to dominate the otherwise secular agrarian consciousness of the state.

Critical Trajectory: Narrative and Discursive Focus

Be it fiction or non-fiction related to the partition of India, Jinnah, Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi appear on the fictitious scene, bringing

authenticity and creating a believable space-time for characters in the narrative, but the farmer leaders of Punjab are absent.

Consequently, due to omission of these stories from the mainstream narrative, the whole secular discourse of 'Punjabiyat' remains unavailable to the reader who is fed on and feels satiated only with stories of trauma, violence and aggression that reaffirm the 'two-nation theory' or need for ghettos. Here, one may refer to Louis A Montrose's 1989 essay 'Professing the Renaissance' that evokes the concept of the 'textuality of history' where historical 'facts' are found to be as much a product of 'construction' as of 'reality' (Montrose, 1994, p 35).

Punjabiyat Succumbs in History: Refugees and 'Muhajirs'

As times verified, the idea of 'mass exchange of population' suggested by Congress and grabbed by its ace rivals, the Muslim League and the Hindu Maha Sabha, could only be part of a dystopian scheme. It gave birth to traumatised people displaced forever, rootless: in India, 'refugees' seeking refuge and in Pakistan called 'muhajirs,' identified primarily by their displaced status rather than the shared values of Punjabiyat that lay supine, battered, brutally by bigotry. This odd 'othering' and exclusion of that which was formerly included in a group usually precipitates in times of scarcity, deprivation and competition that follows a fanatical upsurge.

The discourse in the country never really could overcome the mammoth currency that the Two-Nation theory had gained by its very realization and practice after the 'Punjabiyat' forces were crushed through a collusion of colonialism with schismatic powers. Discourse supporting communal divisions rests on perceived differences rather than similarities. While people of one region often share characteristic similarity in lifestyle, culture and response to the surroundings, the tendency of organized religion is to exhort its followers to adopt signs that distinguish them and demonstrate signs that highlight the disparity. The points of divergence are usually not innate or prompted by the nature or climate of a particular place, but rather ritualistic and significant for a limited sect, sometimes to the point of making routine inconvenient rather than convenient. Religious indulgence in realpolitik creates prejudice and affects a bias in approach towards people who do not belong to a specific community. If aggravated, these differences erupt as violence, persecution, massacres and genocides. Many times, people forget that their interests are aligned and succumb to discourse that enhances myopia.

'Hasty generalization' is a prominent fallacy where any isolated happening, incident, occurrence or person is considered to be normative and representative of a particular group. The conclusion regarding the traits and characteristics of this community is hastily drawn, and no benefit of the doubt is given. The correlation is made without systematic observation over a period of time. Thus, this logical fallacy is practised in response to alienated communities quite often, as a single act is found to corroborate a host of acts imputed to a specific, often estranged, community or a completely

unknown community, from xenophobia to apartheid; from religious persecution to discrimination against ethnic minorities- these foster hasty generalisations endorsing stereotypes. Such categories being watertight determine relationships between communities on a hierarchical rather than an equitable basis. For instance, an action that is censurable in a particular scenario will often be considered as indicating the usual behaviour of the 'other' sect, becoming a pretext to question the ethics of the whole community to which this person belongs. On the other hand, any objectionable behaviour demonstrated by a person from one's own sect will be perceived as a trait of that specific individual, casting no reflection or shadow over the community as such.

It is noticeable in the politics of this representation that the real aspirations of Indian people, their faith in development goals of the government of Undivided Punjab, were ignored by the political leadership in the decisive phase just before the partition and that the narratives have continued to indulge in the neglect. The discourse and narrative that kept the Hindus and Muslims together in the villages of Greater Punjab have been sacrificed to the altar of the leadership of those who agreed to the Mountbatten plan. These were only 'representative' of Indian people in the narrow terms of British recognition. These select ones never had a majority mandate for them. The real leader of Punjab was a regional party that worked in tune with the ethos of the people of Punjab, who mainly resided in the villages. Truly, religion is a luxury and religious disputes are guided by the elite who have leisure enough to broach up non-issues. When India was partitioned, some sixty million of her ninety-five million Muslims (one in four Indians) became Pakistanis; some

thirty-five million stayed back in India, the largest number of Muslims in a non-Muslim state' (Menon et al., 1998, p. 4). For the leaders on the table, perhaps, it was a conflict-negotiation situation much as in the corporate boardrooms, but for people, it was an undeclared civil war, and since then we have had disputed borders in every country of South Asia (Menon et al., 1998, p. 21).

History as well as the present are documented selectively to marginalise the viewpoint of the masses. While many discuss the scientific method and objective approach of historians, Hayden White in Metahistory (1973) stresses the 'art' involved in historical writing. The chronicle is open-ended but there is a tendency to 'narrativize' the past through 'selection' and 'arrangement', to tell it like a story with a beginning, middle and end. This precludes omissions and inclusions so that a cohesive and convincing tale is told. At the same time, however, every historian seeks to achieve what White calls diverse kinds of "explanatory affect" (p.5).

In his essay "Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture" Montrose observes: 'By the textuality of history, I mean to suggest, firstly, that we can have no access to a full and authentic past, a lived material existence unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question…' (1994, p. 16). Montrose is concerned with human societies that have existing written records. It has been observed that history is dictated by the establishment and the incumbent powers. What is found valuable and what is superfluous, is determined by the authorities prevailing at the time. This idea is affirmed by Hayden White who observes that 'the very claim to have discerned some kind of formal coherence in the historic record brings with it theories of the nature of the historical

world and of historical knowledge itself which have ideological implications for attempts to understand "the present", however, this "present" is presented through processes of chronicling, story, emplotment, rhetoric and ideological filtering (1973, p.5).

According to Sreedharan, Michel Foucault too perceives statements as representations of events (2004, p.289) and all these events as forming a reality that was selective. Therefore, it was power that determined what was 'truth' and 'knowledge'(2004, p.290). In this way, even history is 'fiction' (2004, p.290). This whole scenario, thus, could be understood through the concept of 'hegemony' and related idea of 'episteme'. E Sreedharan discusses Antonio Gramsci's perception of 'the capacity of a dominant class to articulate its interests'(2004, p. 279) so that these appear to be the common interests of the larger society. This is done by assuming 'political, intellectual and moral leadership'(2004, p.279). This leadership is being assumed by groups in Haryana with severe caste and religious biases.

As Michel Foucault notes in The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, ***what is important and what is not is decided by the élite and the powerful of any point in time in history***. So, language recognition opens the doors to cultural recognition tied to ultimate survival. With Haryanvi being neglected, the narratives-historic or literary-in the language remain inaccessible and uncirculated. They lack currency and recognition on both national and international platforms. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin claim, 'Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth,' 'order,' and 'reality' become

established' (1989, p.7). The undermining of dialects for languages is a small but noteworthy part of the problem. Terry Eagleton in Literary Theory: An Introduction notes that 'the so-called 'literary canon,' the unquestioned 'great tradition' is in fact a 'construct, fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time' (1983, p.10). He also observes that value-judgements are 'historically variable' and have 'a close relation to social ideologies' (1983, p.14).

The need of the hour is to end a cultural contest that favours perspectives from 'without' immediately and empathise with the perspective of the native Haryanvi population to control rampant rivalry and further hostilities. Both the administrative machinery and media- 'ideological state apparatus' and 'repressive state apparatus' have been harnessed to undermine the identity of native or indigenous communities in favour of a homogenising Brahmanical discourse. The paper is a bid to assert that the government must review and revise its recent turns of policy, if it is really concerned about ethnic harmony and economic prosperity in the state.

A Short Historical Trajectory Traced

The study to decipher 'Punjabiyat' takes its exploratory course charting the periods from 1947 leading to partition of Undivided Punjab (movement of Hindus from West Pakistan into Southern Punjab, now Haryana), leaping towards a right-wing upsurge and beginning of caste polarisation in Haryana in 2016 undermining the harmonious relationships shared by most indigenous communities with this dominant local agrarian community of the state, the Jats.

The academic probe rests at the farmers' agitation hinged on the spirit of brotherhood fostered by 'Punjabiyat' and points favourably towards the potency of punjabiyat as a possible SAARC premise.

Subjectivity, Perspective and Cognitive Bias

Admittedly, this academic 'assay' (as Foucault would deliberately spell it) offers a limited but substantial understanding of Punjabiyat from a certain viewpoint with its attending biases- a point of view shared by the indigenous community of Haryana.

Haryana, a small but by no means insignificant state has uncannily turned into an epicentre for identity politics and politics of representation over the last decade, propelling an incisive inquiry into the dynamism of 'Punjabiyat,' that it inherited and that informs its stable core values and its parochial versions. The acceptance and assimilation of migrants in mainstream Haryana, which made it possible in the first place, is under ideological attack today. The paper endeavours to decode the myth and reality of current state slogan 'Haryana 1 and Haryanvi 1' and recommends an antidote to caste schisms/communal clashes and cultural contests in revival of Haryanvi-Punjabiyat ethos as exemplified in the socio-political and economic programme envisaged through a largely rural cross-community alliance forged by farmer leaders of pre-partition Punjab including Sir Fazl-i-Hussain, Deenbandhu Sir Chhotu Ram, Sir Sikandar Hyatt Khan and Khizr Hyatt Tiwana that had consonance with the needs of original inhabitants. To explain and justify his non-communal and united Punjabi stand, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan used

to say, "I am Punjabi first, then a Muslim," and indeed, this was his essential conviction.

That such a secular agrarian consciousness actually existed is noticeable in the heirloom of ideals of popular leadership of pre-partition Punjab surviving in the post-independence politics of agrarian leaders of Haryana. Modern Haryana leaders like Tau Devi Lal, and Bansi Lal endorsed cross-community alliances to further the interests of farmers. Even Chaudhary Charan Singh had a great influence on the affairs of UP and Haryana, where similar native communities and cultural ethos reign. While these early leaders called for a Hindu-Muslim-Sikh peasant alliance, AJGAR (Ahir-Jat-Rajput peasant network), and based their political approach on the Urban-Rural Divide, the current-day discourse is based on communal divide and primarily religious bigotry or caste polarisation. The weakening of links and fragmentation of the Punjabi ethos can be registered in the next line of leadership in Haryana, who resorted to politics of dominant castes rather than politics of shared values, unlike their political predecessors.

The social and political relegation of rural Haryana to the margins has been achieved through a marginalization of native/folk narrative and sacrifice of rare discourse of religious harmony (reigning in the region most of the time) to a hegemonizing religious and caste-ist discourse. This is being executed through a demographic shift that is in consonance with religious homogenization, so that ultimately, the interests of the upper crust in the Hindu caste hierarchy may be dubbed as common interests. The evidence to support the proposition comes from administrative records like census reports and revenue department statistics, but also news items. There is

simultaneously a steady attempt in narrative and discourse to relegate the concerns of the 'folk.'

The research paper offers a counterfoil to the normative propensity to represent the 'local' population of Haryana through the lens of urban Hindus, despite the fact that sixty-six (66) per cent of the Haryanvi population is rural.

Demographic Twist to Haryana's Punjabiyat

Haryana was formed out of Punjab in 1966 with linguistic reorganisation as a pretext but perhaps the reason could be to carve out a more manageable region especially when this part was facing skewed development due to lack of resources.

The Census Report issued by the Government of India for the state of Haryana in 2011 highlights that about 62.15 % of people live in rural areas, while only 34.79% of people live in urban areas. A decadal growth rate of 10 per cent has been recorded in rural Haryana but the urban areas have shown an astronomical decadal rise of 44.25 per cent. The Gurgaon district has registered the highest urban decadal growth rate of 236.45 per cent, indicating an alarming trend where urbanisation is taking over the rural way of life. Though these migrations earmark Haryana as a progressive state, there is a lack of acknowledgement of the many merits that make Haryana a chosen place of settlement by people across the country. This also indicates both rural to urban migrations and migrations across states in which people are migrating to Haryana (Gurgaon is part of Haryana that fall under NCR) rather than from Haryana to other states. Migrations from rural to urban areas are usually due to

a lack of amenities, facilities and opportunities which must be provided since neglect of the hinterland is directly related to lack of attention to native communities. Also, the growth of the urban population puts great pressure on the resources of a state, as space, water, and air are put to the disposal of immigrants. To draw out an effective and balanced plan of development and understand the needs of people in the state, a demographic profiling with the socio-cultural history of the subjects is important. The lack of migratory profiling in the state is proof of its relative neglect in this area. There is a definite need for migratory profiling, as the diverse needs of an increasingly heterogeneous population must be understood, alongside the concerns of the largely rural native population, which has little representation in the state's or central government's development plans. The most worrisome factor is that the migrations to Haryana, despite being considerably larger than in other states, have largely been assumed and not overtly acknowledged, despite figures and statistics revealing an ingress. This was, of course, to facilitate seamless resettlement and absorption in the mainstream Haryanvi life. However, this persistent silence over migrations has today led to the emergence of the vicious politics that seek to isolate the native ethnic community of the state. The endeavour and its proper study, however, are outside the scope of the present paper.

Why rethinking migrations in the context of Haryana is important is to create a proper credit statement for the state to counter rampant negative publicity fanned by emergent social order, and also to salvage the position of the native ethnic groups. The local populations of Haryana accommodated the new settlements and

refugee colonies in the aftermath of Partition, the Punjabi Suba Movement and the Khalistan movements- all historical times of crisis in Punjab, lending a safe sanctuary to affiliates in disturbed parts of the region.

The indigenous population of Haryana escaped much of the partition distress being on the deeper Indian side, but the migrant populations from the freshly-formed Pakistan side who were re-settled here had a traumatic past experience that fuelled a different kind of politics alien to the ethos of this land where the likes of the stalwart secular leader Deenbandhu Sir Chhotu Ram were born, had lived, and worked.

In the last seven decades, with growing demographic participation and increasing political clout, however, the term 'Punjabi' in Haryana has gained other connotations, such as that of resourcefulness, urbanity and entrepreneurial spirit. Many of those who initially identified as 'Punjabi' have now adopted the term 'Haryanvi', which can confuse outsiders about the extent of indigeneity of these populations. Again, the indigenous rural Hindu Jat community had never adopted the term 'Haryanvi,' nor was it popular with them.

A Retrospective on Partition

Mushirul Hasan is close to the truth when he observes that the 'decade preceding Partition frequently escapes historical scrutiny (2001, p. 3). Actually, this period belongs to a unique politics of peace that does not belong to either the Congress or the Muslim League. The decades belonged to the Unionist Party. And to look

back and concede that these two 'national' level parties had completely messed up in the province so much that it changed the geographic contours of the land as well as the people must be undoubtedly difficult. Even at present, when the authors and readers look back at Greater Punjab, the basic premise of religious division seems to colour the whole approach. However, this frame bearing a picture of Punjab torn asunder by religious hatred is unlike the Punjab viewed from the socio-economic angle. Greater Punjab, advocated by Akali Dal, a regional political party of Indian Punjab, indulging in regressive and parochial politics, is not to be confused with Undivided Punjab. The advocates of 'Greater Punjab' propose reunification within Indian Punjab by merging back Haryana, Himachal and two districts of Rajasthan. This is definitely not a beneficial proposition as de-centralisation and division of territories that are unmanageable and underdeveloped, due to distance from the centre in extensive administrative areas, is preferred.

Undivided Punjab, on the other hand, refers to 'The Punjab Province, officially the Province of the Punjab, was a province of British India, with its capital in Lahore and summer capitals in Murree and Simla. At its greatest extent, it stretched from the Khyber Pass to Delhi; and from the Babusar Pass and the borders of Tibet to the borders of Sind. Established in 1849 following Punjab's annexation, the province was partitioned in 1947 into West and East Punjab; and incorporated into Pakistan and India, respectively' (Wikipedia). Its ethos is definitely worth preserving albeit the most threatened.

The Way Forward: Global Cues for Local Context

In many ways, Punjabiyat lost when Punjab's people were turned to refugees and muhajirs but Punjabiyat wins when they unite. Sadly, this happens more often in foreign lands than in India or Pakistan. When we learn to unite with our old neighbours or young brothers, Asia would prosper like Europe, which has learn to live together after its devastating wars. Perhaps, Punjabiyat could be better understood in a global context when the word is taken out of its postcolonial bearings and retrenched into its context unadulterated by modern colonial experience. But ironically and somewhat paradoxically, even better would be a consideration of the term in the contemporary world, where one is not situated in India or Pakistan but abroad.

Conclusion

'Punjabiyat' can indeed be understood in the wider global context where Indians and Pakistani citizens meet outside India. In a foreign land, their common roots and affiliation to the Indian mainland take primacy, and 'Punjabiyat' as a holistic ethos that is beyond religion, manifest as an original cultural tie. The Punjabi ceases to be a word that divides but turns into a set of shared values that unite folk regardless of their religion and political affiliations. It is no more a word 'adopted' by a migrant Hindu of Arora-Khatri origin, 'avoided' by a Jatt Sikh from Punjab or 'marginalised' by religion for a Muslim from Punjab region but a word that embodies the spirit of an ancient land ravaged by invasions, colonisations and displacements yet transcending the violent history through the secular thread of

human compassion and brotherhood found more in its rural landscape with its tradition of local 'dargahs' dedicated to native 'peers' rather than in mosques, gurudwaras or temples; its spiritual sites rather than pilgrim centres; its simple holy sites than canonised places of worship; its Sufi tradition rather than its religious bhajans; its leaders looking inwards for emancipation of agriculture and evolution of the society. However, even the best ethos can be severely compromised and overcast by clouds of communal tensions which was visible when the social fabric of Punjab was rent apart 1945 with the death of Sir Chhotu ram who has been described as 'the Rock of Gibraltar standing guard against communal rift' amongst Hindus and Muslims of Punjab, reaching its acme on the independence of the two nations. The people should then turn into the sentinels of 'Punjabiyat' to ensure the survival of this valuable and vibrant ethos of Panjab, transcending historical boundaries and straddling political boundaries. In 2014, India revoked the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to Pakistan, which is mandated by Article 1 of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), 1994, mandated by the World Trade Organisation to ensure non-discriminatory trade practices. This move marked the end of continual Indian attempts at an outreach towards its estranged neighbour. ***Punjabiyat could be the proverbial but also practicable balm to heal even festering wounds and avoid tragic precipitations in future.***

Future Research

The vast expanse and myriad hues of the landscape as it took on waves of settlements and invasions would be gratifying but arduous to encompass. Future articles can focus on select texts, co-texts and some key figures and events that may illustrate the culture and society of Punjab whose 'residual', 'dominant' and 'emergent' phases, to use Raymond Williams' terms, can be made visible in modern times and which have been subject to mainstream academic and political discourse. This planned study can use the writings of Sir Chhotu Ram, a stalwart farmers' leader and a key political figure of Undivided, Greater Pre-partition Punjab that ran from Peshawar to Palwal to provide a credible context for analysis of some key developments surrounding partition evoked in fiction surrounding partition or to throw sidelights on fictional renderings of certain characters created in popular texts that are supposed reflect the realities of the critical times that were decisive of the fortune of the leaders and masses of Punjab.

The co-texts can be derived from letters, speeches made in legislative bodies and newspaper clips of the period, while the literary texts are provided by authors as diverse as Rudyard Kipling, Bapsi Sidhwa, Bhisham Sahni, Khushwant Singh, Amrita Pritam and Salman Rushdie. While texts like Khushwant Singh's A Train to Pakistan, Amrita Pritam's Pinjar, Bhisham Sahni's Tamas engage squarely and head-on with the partition of Punjab or India, others like Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children and Rudyard Kipling's Kim give a touch-and-go reflection of what Punjab might be turning it into a magical landscape or the exotic place, a fetish for the erstwhile coloniser and an equal fetish for the erstwhile colonised reader who

is identified now as the 'postcolonial' reader as s/he has the tools to read 'against the grain'. There are also set off by quasi-historical, anecdotal, testimonial accounts as recorded and rendered by authors and investigators like Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin. There is an understanding lent by New Historicist critics like Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose and Hayden White about the caution to be observed in approaching both literature and history as both are forms of narrative impacted by political, social and economic forces.

This paper can have the following objectives: Investigating the phenomenon of how migrants from Pakistan to Haryana first successfully dubbed themselves as 'Punjabi' and now have adopted the identity of 'Haryanvi.' How does this create confusion and how does it undermine the indigenous inhabitants or locals comprising mainly of agriculturists of the region; Contemporary social, cultural and political upheaval that has deepened schisms and isolated the indigenous dominant group that sits oddly within the Hindu fold; to investigate the meaning and nature of the term 'subaltern' as first used by Antonio Gramsci, in 1947 in reference to 'subaltern classes' in his Prison Notebooks and later modified and limited by Gayatri Spivak in her essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Thereby, suggesting a prospective exploration of possibilities of academic agency of the subaltern and indigenous to carve out a niche space in reference to Haryana; to reflect on colonial and postcolonial understanding of Punjab; to concentrate on specifically, erring descriptions of Punjab and its affiliates; to touch upon areas of conflict and dissonance within history; to enumerate reasons for effacement of records and subaltern historiography.

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Fractured Foundations: Colonial Institutional Engineering and the Communalization of Muslim-Sikh Relations in Punjab: 1849-1947

by Asif Nazir

Abstract

By providing a radical reassessment of Muslim-Sikh ties in British Punjab, this article challenges both syncretist and primordialist histories. In order to establish religious community as the primary, frequently exclusive, axis of political and social life, British colonialism intentionally destroyed pre-existing fluid solidarities, according to this argument. Through a critical examination of colonial knowledge production (ethnography, census), socio-economic interventions (canal colonies), legal codification that prioritised religious orthodoxy, and the politically toxic system of separate electorates, the article shows how the Raj manufactured the very competition between communities that led to the violence of Partition. By combining postcolonial theory and subaltern studies viewpoints, it highlights the shortcomings of historiography that is centred on the elite and shows how colonial practices interacted with and frequently undermined local agency and resilient daily coexistence. It presents the horrifying violence of 1947 as the inevitable conclusion of this protracted process of officially sanctioned communalisation rather than as an anomaly.

Introduction

Punjabi Muslim-Sikh relations are still distorted by the lingering effects of the 1947 Partition conflict. Problematically, dominant frameworks vacillate between romanticised views of pre-colonial concord and stories of inescapable ancient hostility (Gilmartin, 1988; Pandey, 2001). They are both analytically deficient. According to this article, the British colonial state (1849–1947) was the main architect of a major shift, actively creating the competitive structures and community categories that characterised politics in the late colonial era. Using a framework of colonial institutional engineering (Chatterjee, 1993; Scott, 1998), it goes beyond the straightforward "divide and rule" cliché to analyse how particular policies, such as census classification, "martial race" theory, canal colony development, legal restructuring, and separate electorates, systematically reshaped social reality. In order to highlight the frequently contradictory persistence of everyday coexistence and the agency of non-elites trapped within colonial structures (Guha, 1983; Amin, 1995), it critically engages with the limitations of elite political narratives (Jalal, 1985; Talbot, 2006). As a result, the violence of Partition is not the result of the eruption of timeless hatreds, but rather the disastrous result of decades of intentional colonial policy interacting with the political strategies of emerging

communal elites operating within the limitations and opportunities the Raj provided.

Colonial Knowledge: Manufacturing Difference as Political Reality

The root of the colonial state's strength was its epistemic project. The well-known claim made by Bernard Cohn (1996) was that colonial knowledge was a kind of control rather than objective observation. The decennial census was its primary tool, and it was started seriously after 1857. By forcing the strict, mutually exclusive labels of "Hindu," "Muslim," and "Sikh" onto a complex environment that was marked by fluidity, overlapping customs, and localised identities, British administrators purposefully created these communities as distinct political entities (Oberoi, 1994). **Rather than being descriptive, this classification was performative. According to Malhotra (2002), Sikhs were bureaucratically consolidated into a separate "community" despite having a surprisingly porous identity that included a variety of beliefs and practices frequently shared with Muslims and Hindus, especially Sufi traditions.** This enumeration process produced the crucial information needed for later political manipulation. "Martial races" was a parallel hypothesis that was equally constitutive. Sikhs were given preference in the enlistment of the Punjab regiments due to their designation as a top "martial race," which fostered a privileged relationship with the Raj (Yong, 2005). Critical Viewpoint: Although this policy benefited certain Sikh groups (mainly Jats), it was more than just practical militarisation; it

was a calculated move to establish a loyalist opposing force in Punjab, which naturally fuelled animosity among Muslim groups (such as Rajputs or Pathans in some areas) that were considered less "martial" and thus excluded from this lucrative source of prestige and income (Roy, 2013). As a result, the production of colonial knowledge created the measurable, rival religious groups that served as the foundation for political activity, aggressively stifling alternative identities based on caste, geography, or family.

Socio-Economic Engineering: Resource Competition and the Erosion of Customary Mediation

Punjab's economic landscape was drastically altered by British initiatives, which **purposefully created new levels of competition between communities**. According to Ali (1988), the canal colonies in western Punjab are a prime example of state-directed socioeconomic engineering that has significant societal repercussions. Ex nihilo, this enormous endeavour produced valuable agricultural land, and the colonial state was the only one who could decide how to divide it. The bulk of new settlers were Muslims, frequently as tenants, although Sikh farmers, especially Jats from the central districts, were given large landholdings in a calculated move. Important realisation: This was not a random occurrence; rather, it was a planned demographic experiment intended to upend long-standing socio-ecological balances and kinship networks, reward loyalty (Sikh military duty), and maintain a solid agrarian basis (Gilmartin, 1988). Crucially, this competition

was structured by colonial institutions within the newly imposed religious categories. Colonial courts and administrative authorities, which only acknowledged religious communities as valid collective identities, were increasingly used to mediate disputes that may have been resolved through biraderi (kinship) or zaildari (local administrative) institutions (Sturman, 2012). The role of legal codification as a catalyst for community development Common standards were further undermined by the colonial judicial system. Although it claimed modernity through codification, it gave scripturalist interpretations of religious law (Shariat, evolving Sikh Rehat Maryada) precedence over pluralistic customary law (riwaj), which had historically governed relations between communities, especially with regard to inheritance, property, and village-level dispute resolution (Malhotra & Mir, 2012; Sturman, 2012).

Religious Reform: Internal Consolidation and External Demarcation within Colonial Constraints

The colonial background is essential to understanding the religious reform movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including the Singh Sabha and other forms of Islamic reformism. Critical Re-analysis: Even though these movements are frequently depicted as completely inward "awakenings," they were significantly influenced by and actively participated in the communal categories and competitive atmosphere that the Raj promoted (Jones, 1976; Oberoi, 1994). In reaction to colonial classification and Christian missionary activities, the Singh Sabha made a concerted attempt to establish a clear Sikh identity by eliminating "Hindu" accretions and

standardising practices (Malhotra, 2002). Similar to this, Islamic reform organisations (Deobandi, Ahl-i-Hadith) placed a strong emphasis on a universal Ummah and scriptural purity, in part in response to criticism from the West and the perceived necessity of fortifying communal identification within the colonial political system (Metcalf, 1982; Gilmartin, 1988). **Subaltern studies perspectives are important because they remind us that, despite the propagation of exclusive ideologies by elites, everyday syncretism and shared cultural practices (such as worshipping at shrines like Sakhi Sarwar or Sehwan, participating in each other's festivals and life-cycle rituals, and sharing folk traditions of music and qissa) remained resilient at the village level** (Amin, 1995; Mir, 2010). Vital Difficulty: Historiography that only examines reformist rhetoric runs the risk of exaggerating the extent to which community exclusivism has permeated society and hiding the rich, if tense, subaltern realm of common lifeways that existed beneath elite politics. Sacred Place as Battleground: Because colonial rule politicised religious identity, the administration of places of worship became a crucial hot spot. Although it began as an internal fight against Hindu mahants, the Sikh Gurdwara Reform Movement of the 1920s became entwined in the communal logic since gurdwara control represented Sikh political assertion in relation to other communities (Fox, 1985). Likewise, disagreements over mosques became more prevalent in society. In these conflicts, colonial authorities frequently stepped in, further establishing the religious community as the pertinent political actor (Gilmartin, 1988). Thus, even as common practices persisted subalternly, reform

movements both responded to and were made possible by the colonial institutional framework, helped to solidify boundaries.

Political Institutionalization: Separate Electorates and the Death of Cross-Communal Politics

Separate electorates were introduced by the colonial authority as its most direct and destructive interference; this was fully realised in the Government of India Act 1935. Examining critically: According to Jalal (1985) and Chatterjee (1993), this system was the institutional pinnacle of the colonial agenda of communalisation, not just a concession to communal sentiment. It established a twisted political logic that made it impossible to avoid: success necessitated the outright demonisation or marginalisation of others and the exclusive appeal to one's own "community" by requiring people to pick representatives of their own religious community. Election-related partnerships turned suicidal. The system radically altered political reasoning at all levels, but historians frequently concentrate on this. To garner support, local politicians, prospective leaders, and even voters have to work inside this communal straitjacket (Ahmed, 2009).

Sikh fears, which were heightened and used as weapons inside this system, were not illogical; rather, they were a result of their numerical minority status (~13–15%). In a Muslim-majority West Punjab, Sikhs saw the Muslim League's 1940 demand for Pakistan as an existential threat to their holy sites, political voice, and physical protection. The demand was presented as Muslim self-determination under the colonial communal logic (Talbot, 2006).

Within the restrictive framework of sectarian politics established by the Raj, Sikh political responses (Azad Punjab, Khalistan, and demands for weightage) were essentially reactionary tactics (Shani, 2007). The Unionist Myth of Resilience: It is necessary to critically revaluate the Unionist Party's early success, which is sometimes touted as evidence of persistent intercommunal class cooperation. Landed elites (Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh) who had momentarily similar class interests made up the majority of its support. The important thing is that it operated inside the structure of distinct electorates, depending on shaky agreements between communal blocs instead of overcoming them. Its demise in 1946 made clear that it was unable to resist the centrifugal dynamics that colonial policy had unleashed and institutionalised, particularly after the League utilised electorally sanctioned religious appeals to successfully mobilise the Muslim masses (Kamran, 2015; Ahmed, 2009). Communism's success was assured by the political structure itself.

Partition Violence: Systemic Culmination, Elite Complicity, and Subaltern Suffering

The terrible bloodshed that occurred in 1947, especially against Muslims and Sikhs in Punjab, was not an unplanned plunge into savagery. It was the natural, if hideous, result of the procedures that had been painstakingly planned for a century. A situation where communal identification became the main source of security and power was brought about by decades of colonial categorisation, communally structured resource competition, the legal primacy of

religious identity, and the political logic of distinct electorates. Due to the existential crises brought about by partition, the "other" society became a barrier to both individual and national existence in the newly formed nation-states (Pandey, 2001).

The idea of solely "spontaneous" violence is being questioned by new studies. **Local leaders, political groups (such as the Muslim League National Guards, RSS, and Akali leadership), and even components of the state's disintegrating bureaucracy and police played a part in planning, directing, and enabling the violence for political purposes—to "cleanse" the area and establish authority** (Khan, 2007; Daechsel, 2015). The conceptual rationale came from decades of cultivating the discourse of communal exclusivism.

Subaltern historiography compels us to face the particular atrocities: forced population exchanges, the destruction of religious places (erasure of common holy geography), and targeted sexual abuse against women (symbolic attacks on community honour) (Butalia, 1998; Menon & Bhasin, 1998). Once enabling syncretism, the closeness now allowed for horrifyingly personal violence. The violence acted as a physical manifestation of the political demands of elites and the ideological division of communities created by colonisation.

The British government's disastrous inability to oversee the transition, which put speedy withdrawal ahead of upholding law and order, left a security void in which communal militias flourished (Talbot, 2006; Khan, 2007). Their departure was the last careless action that allowed the explosion to occur.

Conclusion

Colonial institutional engineering in British Punjab significantly altered the course of Muslim-Sikh relations. Through tangible policies, the British Raj actively created religious communities as the basic unit of political life rather than merely taking advantage of latent differences. For example, divided electorates made communal mobilisation the only practical political tactic, the census established categories, the canal colonies created competition that was framed in communal terms, and the legal system destroyed shared norms. Despite having their own dynamics, religious reform movements were greatly influenced by and helped to create this communalisation within the colonial context. As elite political actors manoeuvred and took advantage of these frameworks, and subaltern coexistence experiences continued to endure under mounting pressure, the colonial system as a whole inexorably prioritised communal identity over all other considerations. Thus, the violence of the 1947 Partition was not unique nor abnormal. It was the horrifying, but predictable, result of a century-long operation that methodically tore apart Punjab's social fabric, substituting hostile, hardened communal blocs for pliable solidarity. Accurately recognising colonialism as the main institutional architect of this divide is essential for comprehending the lasting effects of communalism and the unsolved traumas that continue to influence post-colonial India and Pakistan's politics and cultures. Bitter fruit is still being borne from the "fractured foundations" established in colonial Punjab.

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BOOK REVIEW
Punjab: An Anatomy of Muslim-Sikh Politics by Akhtar Hussain Sandhu

Reviewed by Gurpreet Singh Rehal (London)

The realities of partition of Punjab and the role of the Indian National Congress leaders in the violent foundation of the Indian state in something that Indian history has failed to reconcile, the effects of which are evermore present today in terms of the second-class status of the religious minorities and lower castes.

Looking at the present predicament of Sikhs within India, many in the diaspora look back at the history and find it difficult to appreciate why the Sikh leadership did not opt for a Sikh State or reach a settlement with the All-India Muslim League to avoid the partition of the province.

The book entitled *Punjab: An Anatomy of Muslim-Sikh Politics* goes a long way to answering that question.

Dr. Akhtar Hussain Sandhu agrees with Sikh Historiography that Sikhs failed to make use of their privileged position in the
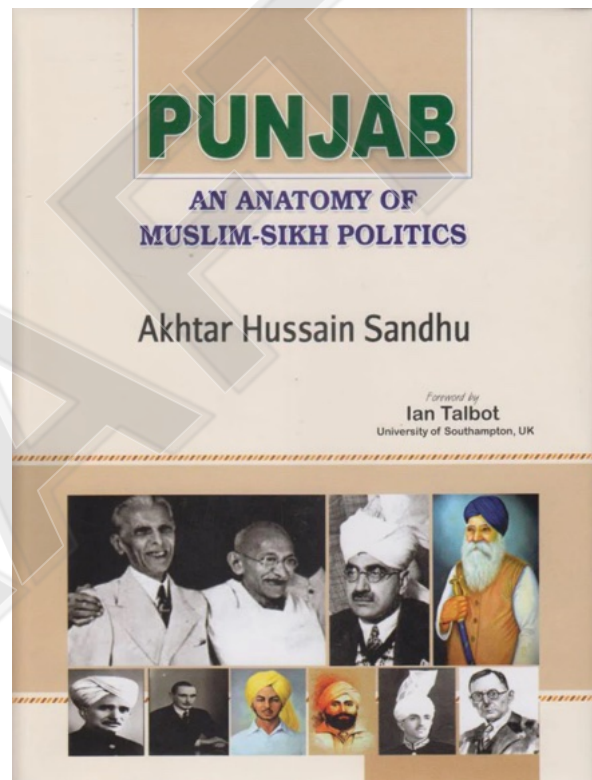
negotiations with the British to benefit their community despite having fear the most to lose.

History is testament to the fact of how being in a weak negotiating position fails to reach a settlement, and the Sikhs of Punjab are one such example for which they paid a heavy price. The failure of these negotiations continued to be the existential crisis of survival that the Sikhs face.

Dr. Sandhu identifies many reasons of the Sikh failure in August 1947, chief among them was that leadership failed to have a realistic look at the situation and come to an agreement on what would be achievable under the prevailing circumstances.

The Sikhs were not a majority in any district of the British Punjab and were not a party working at all India level. There existed an **antagonism between the Sikh landed aristocracy and the** *Shiromani Akali Dal* **(Sikh Political Party)** which further weakened the community's negotiating power by the latter that could not utilize the former's links with the imperial administration.

Dr. Sandhu enlightens the reader on how the **repeated threats of violence by the Akali Dal** to prevent partition led to a breakdown of trust with both the British and Muslim League. The League too had not formed any committee that could engage the Sikh political parties on certain conflicting issues. The sure way to avoid the partition of Punjab necessitated negotiations with Muslim League being the sole representative of the majority community of Punjab and the largest party in the Punjab Assembly after the elections 1946. Negotiations with all stakeholders would have presented the limits of the alternative options to solve the Sikh problem.

Retrospectively, the Sikhs should have had much common ground with Mr. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, for they **both feared the same thing – in the words of John Stuart Mill 'tyranny on the majority.'** Pakistan with a federal setup and additional representation of Sikhs in the national legislature and army would have made the Sikhs a potent force in Pakistan but the Sikhs failed to explore this possibility despite efforts made by Jinnah. MA Jinnah campaigned during the elections 1946 on the **idea of Muslim self-determination based on hopes and horrors**, he maintained flexibility in his approach ensuring the unity of Muslims behind the idea.

On the other hand, the Akali Dal's re-demarcation of borders for the Azad Punjab met resistance from those Sikhs left on the other side of the proposed border. The Akal Dal was rather dismissive of these groups and pacified them with false promises rather than seeking solid solutions.

It also **appeared to be more concerned with its position and perception within the Sikh community rather than focusing on getting solid concessions from the other stakeholders.** The Akal Dal's focus on the Azad Punjab scheme which had been rejected by the Congress and many Sikh factions lacking contingency planning could only spell catastrophe. Dr. Sandhu paints a picture of weak Sikh leadership, unable to keep pace with changing developments and unable to recognize and respond to the threats of Hindu conspiracy, in particular how the Congress sought to divide the Sikhs and eliminate their potency as a political force.

The book also touches on rural politics of the Punjab, where relations between Sikhs and Muslims reflected a peaceful coexistence, but how these relations were unable to counter the tide of religious nationalism fermenting in the cities. **Using primary sources, including police intelligence reports, Sandhu's work studies the pre-partition politics of Punjab and specifically Muslim-Sikh politics in an authentic manner.** Sandhu analyzes the strength of Sikh leadership and contrasts this with that of the Congress and the Muslim League, scrutinizing the relative negotiating positions, demands and **missed opportunities**. Identifying key weaknesses within the Sikh community, and its internal political and class divisions, Dr. Sandhu explores why the demand for Azad Punjab was ultimately untenable and how the Congress sought to dominate the Sikhs as a political force. Positing what Sikh inclusion within Pakistan may have looked like, Sandhu's exceptional work is considered timely as communalism in South Asia rears its head once more.

Whilst there are many books on Partition of Punjab, this book is the first of its kind that offers a glimpse into the Sikh-Muslim relations from the west Punjabi perspective. In examining the causes of partition Dr. Sandhu opines that not only Punjab lacked a charismatic leader that could unite all the Punjabi communities although Ch. Chhotu Ram tried it but that the national parties also lacked Punjabi leadership that could work for the interests of Punjab. Also, the central Congress leaders did not allow autonomy of provincial leaders to decide on the provincial matters. This has been a lasting legacy of the Congress in India which ultimately led to the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in east Punjab as an effort to resolve

state-center relations. This splendid work by Prof. Sandhu is a welcome work on an internationally neglected topic, Muslim-Sikh politics. The wide use of primary sources, in particular, India Office record, Press Branch, Fortnightly Reports, police intelligence reports is an important addition to the study of pre-partition politics of Punjab and comes at an opportune time with the recent opening of the Kartarpur corridor.

The book may benefit from including details of the Shaheedganj and Rikab Ganj affair (precursor the Gurdwara Reform movement) which weakened the prestige of the Sikh aristocracy in the eyes of the Panth as sole representatives of the Sikh community.

The **Sikh aristocracy was too submissive to the wishes of the Government** and acted in their interests rather than build a consensus within the Panth and reach a settlement with the British. Raja Sir Daljit Singh along with prominent members of the Chief Khalsa Diwan sought instead to silence dissenting voices. The Rikab Ganj affair ultimately resulted in the leadership of the community passing to more progressive groups.

This book is written in the perspective of the Muslim League point of view but the author has given all standpoints of the rival political parties which make this book a unique research work.

The other notable aspect is that Dr. Sandhu has portrayed the cultural panorama of brotherhood between Muslims and Sikhs along with the polluted politics of the urban Punjab.

All Punjab lovers must read this book *Punjab: An Anatomy of Muslim-Sikh Politics* authored by Akhtar Hussain Sandhu, Professor of History, columnist and TV Analyst living at Lahore.

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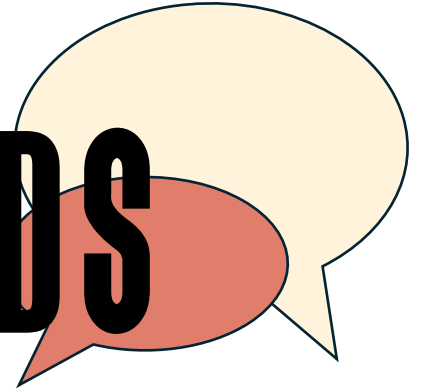
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