GULABDASIS: RELIGION, SECT AND SOCIETY IN COLONIAL PUNJAB

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PREFACE

The land of the Punjab has always been fertile with great religious traditions of Hinduism, Budhism, Islam, Bhakti, Sufism, and Sikhism. The varied nature gave space to different religious traditions, cults, and popular faiths. Thus, it produced a lot of literary traditions like Saint literature, Gurmat literature and Sufi literature. After the annexation of Punjab, the Punjabi society was colonized and so were history, memory, tradition, and religiosity. The forms of knowledge, power and religious and cultural transformation changed the public sphere of colonial Punjab. In this transition, a new faith emerged which was established by Saint Gulab Das. Gulab Das gained prominence in the Punjabi public sphere and the intelligentsia of colonial Punjab. The practice of the sect defied the rules of caste and norms of commensality. It is not surprising that the message of Gulab Das appealed to a large section of marginalized men and women of colonial Punjab. The Gulabdasis rejected the patronage of the state and negated the culture of the dominant upper caste and elites. The sect rejected and broke the social barriers and gave space to a low-caste Muslim prostitute named Piro from the brothel of Hira Mandi Lahore who emerged as the first women poet in colonial Punjab. The sect, thus, provided a much-needed solace to the downtrodden and suppressed sections of Punjabi society. Gulabdasi sect also enriched the literary traditions of Punjab through the various writings of the 'Arif Poets' who emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The present research is an attempt to critically examine the contribution of Gulabdasis and their interface with mainstream religions.

I may halt for a while, and avail this opportunity to place on record my gratitude to all those who have made a direct or indirect contribution towards the successful completion of this thesis. First and foremost, I bow my head in reverence to the Almighty God, for providing me with this opportunity to work with intelligentsia and enabling me to reach far beyond my own restricted ambit of thought and action. No words can express my gratitude towards my parents and whole family whose farsightedness, support and sagacity have liberated my mind from the shackles of ignorance. The support of my brothers- Barinderjit Singh, Maninderpal Singh has been critical in my life. A very special 'thanks' to my niece, Japkirat Kaur, who has brought

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I would like to thank my uncles, Surinder Singh and Karnail Singh. My life could have taken an entirely different course, had not they cared to provide me with the best educational facilities even beyond their resources. I will always miss the friendship and love of my sister Sneh Lata. I reverently acknowledge their generous support, invaluable blessings and selfless but untold sacrifices for my better and bright future.

With great pleasure, I take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude and sincere regards towards my supervisor Dr. Jasbir Singh, Department of History for his inspiration and seasoned guidance. He was a constant source of inspiration for me throughout the work. He was like a lighthouse throughout the execution of the work. I am falling short of words to express my thanks to my esteemed teachers. I acknowledge the role of Prof. Surinder Singh who encouraged me over the years as a teacher, a model scholar and an inspiring intellectual.

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My profound thanks go to the Library Staff, Department of History, Chandigarh, Central Library, Panjab University, Chandigarh, and Bhai Gurdas Library, Guru Nanak Dev University, Punjabi University, Patiala; Central Library of Jawaharlal Nehru, CHS Library Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi, Incharge and Staff Nehru Museum and Memorial Library, New Delhi, Incharge and staff of Sikh History Research Library, Khalsa College, Amritsar for their help and cooperation while looking for various sources. I am especially thankful to Sant Vijender Das Ji and Panjab Digital Library for providing vital manuscript material to me. Once again, I convey my sincere thanks to all.

Date: **(Amritpal Singh)**

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

The land of the Punjab has always been fertile with great religious traditions of Hinduism, Budhism, Islam, Bhakti, Sufism, and Sikhism. Thus, it produced a lot of literary traditions like Sant literature, Gurmat literature and Sufi literature which depicted the composition of the shared cultural practices and composite culture of the Punjab. The people of the Punjab, because of their respective great religious traditions and their historically evolved common indigenous culture, constituted a pluralistic culture.[1] Thus, the cultural matrix of Punjab is a "historically evolved habitat and has a particular pattern of life, reflecting in specific social, religious, cultural and linguistic signifiers, creations and artefacts"[2] Syncretism and shared veneration formed the bedrock of Punjabi social life. The veneration of Sufi saints was among the myriad aspects of popular religion[3]. Terms like shared, composite, popular and syncretic culture describe a culture or a set of practices that transcend community boundaries.[4] Punjab was the land of religious syncretism and cultural fusion. Syncretism involves blending, synthesizing and harmonizing. It is deployed as an analytical space standing in opposition to religious orthopraxy on one hand, and religious communalism on the other.[5] However, there are a lot of objections and contradictions to the term syncretism but in South Asia, the term has carried a positive connotation which is invested with a load of demonstration of composite cultures, shared religious sites and religiously mixed following of tombs and saints that acted as an antidote to the pathology of communalism.[6]

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1 Ishwar Dayal Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy: Exploring Medieval Punjab Through Hir Waris,* Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 2009, p. 21.

2 Ishwar Dayal Gaur, *Forgotten Makers of Panjab: Discovering Indigenous Paradigm of History,* Sardar Mahan Singh Dhesi Memorial Lecture delivered at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar.Ibid, p. 8.

3 Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab,* University of California Press, America, 2012, p. 245.

4 Meeto(Kamaljit Bhasin Malik), *In the Making: Identity Formation in South Asia,* Three Essays Collective, Gurgaon, 2007, p.27.

5 Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language,* pp. 226-227.

6 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis: Gender, Sect and Society in Punjab,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 20.

The ideas of these traditions were further spread by various sects and cults like Nath, Kanpate Yogis, Udasis, Nirmalas, Gulabdasis, Sewapanthis, Namdharis through the fusion of different practices and cross-religious following. The genre of Qissas also contributed to the history of Punjab's socio-religious as well as political and cultural life.[7] Waris Shah, Muqbal, Hasham Shah, Peelu, Qadir Yar, Fazal Shah Sayyad, and Hafiz Barkurdar are the noted *qissakars* who constructed the idea of religious and cultural syncretism in the Punjab. These literary forms set the discourse of syncretic tradition and inscribed the social scenario of undivided Punjab. These syncretic traditions depict the pluralistic and composite culture of the Punjab.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Ranjit Singh ruled over large parts of Punjab and on the other side, British Raj was keen on the annexation of the Punjab.[8] The paradigm of socio-economic relations was under transition. After the annexation, the changes introduced by the British were fundamental and meant to transform the Punjabi society in more than one way.[9] The communal consciousness began to emerge among the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim middle classes. Punjabis turned to communal ethnography and launched a programme of reforming people and started communal tracts through the advanced print industry.[10] "By the end of the nineteenth century, religious identity was in the process of expressing itself in the combination of symbols based on language, script and religion".[11]

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7 Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2010, p.9.

8 After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, in 1839, the whole of superstructure of a state raised by him fell to pieces. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had strived hard to keep the British away from Punjab but the kingdom, built up by forty years of resolute ability, did not long survive its founder. The British had set their covetous eyes on the territory of the Punjab. The British were preparing for the annexation of the Punjab as early as 1840. The 'king killing' raised the hopes of Governor General Lord Ellenborough (1842-44) for an early opportunity to occupy the Punjab, either directly by occupation or indirectly through protection. On 20th October, 1843 Lord Ellenborough wrote to the Duke of Wellington that, "The time is not far away when Punjab will be under occupation of the British". In July 1844 Lord Hardinge was sent to India as a Governor-General. He too was expansionist. The appointment of a military commander as the Governor General of India clearly indicated the British design of military action against the Sikhs. In September 1844, Major Broadfoot, considered to be 'too prone to war' was sent as agent at Ludhiana: Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017 (First Published 1963), p.41.

9 Paramjit S. Judge and Gurpreet Bal(eds.), *Reconstructing Identities: Society Through Literature*, Rawat, Jaipur, 2008, p.8.

10 Ishwar Dayal Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy*, p. 59.

11 Keneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movement in British India*, New Delhi, 1999, p.121.

The print culture and concept of modernization constructed the contested vision of shared composite culture and syncretic tradition. The newspapers and journals printed in the Punjab promoted the opposite of harmony.[12] The British were trying to colonize the society of Punjab with their form of knowledge. Bernard S. Cohn aptly remarks that "colonialism was not sustained and strengthened only with the tools of superior powerful military organization, political power or economic wealth but as much by the cultural technologies".[13] They constructed the vision of superiority in every sphere of society and attested other cultures and traditions as inferior. The traditions were analyzed in the framework of modernization and world capitalism. The cultural forms in societies then classified as "traditional" were restructured and transformed by and through this knowledge. Thus, it created new groups and oppositions between the colonizer and the colonized, European and Asian, modern and traditional, West and East.[14] But in Punjabi society, people had their own form of knowledge and understanding drawn from their traditions. In the wake of Edward Said's Orientalism, efforts have been made to uncover the parallel discourse securing colonial domination through particular representations of Indian society and culture.[15]

In these contestations and voids, in the early nineteenth century, a sect came into being in the village of Chathianwala (District Kasoor now in Pakistan). According to the Sikh accounts, Gulabdas, the founder of this sect, was born in 1809, in the village Rataul in the present district of Tarn Taran of Punjab. His father was Hamira and his mother was Deso. He had served as a trooper in the army of Maharaja Sher Singh but on the abrogation of Sikh rule, he became a follower of Pritam Das.[16] According to E.D. Maclagan, Pritam Das was the real founder of the Gulabdasi sect whose principal disciple was Gulab Das, a Jat Sikh, a former *Ghorchara* who joined the new sect after

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12 Rajmohan Gandhi, *Punjab: A History from Aurangzeb to Mountbatten,* Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2013, p. 255.

13 Bernard S. Cohen, *Colonialism and its Form of Knowledge,* Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1997, p. ix.

14 *Ibid*, p. ix.

15 M. Kasturi, *Embattled Identities: Rajput Lineages and the Colonial State in Nineteenth-Century North India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2012, p. 3.

16 Harbans Singh(ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism,* Vol.II, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2001(Second Edition), p. 118; Gurpreet Bal, "Religion and Gender Identity in the Writings of a 19th Century Woman Poet Perero", *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 10, 2, 2003, p. 186.

the collapse of the Sikh monarchy.[17] Ganesha Singh's account clarifies his service under the Pahuwind chiefs.[18] In search of the meaning of life, Gulabdas met the Udasi sadhus and then some faqirs; studied Vedanta with Deva Singh Nirmala and stayed with Haridas Girdhar.[19] Thus, Gulabdas started his spiritual journey with the Udasis. Giani Gian Singh describes this in *Shri Guru Panth Parkash* but does not mention the name of the Udasi Sadhu. After leaving the Udasis, he went to Dhanaula situated in the Malwa area and studied lexical and prosodic from Dhyandas.[20]

Kahan Singh Nabha also confirms these details about Gulabdas in *Gurshabad Ratnakar Mahankosh*.[21] All renowned Sikh scholars have mentioned Gulabdasi sect which shows its popularity at that time. Even Gian Singh declared him an atheist in his narrative's beginning and writes: "*jaise bhaye varan ho taise nastak ine lakhijo"*.[22] Some oral traditions tell that the forefathers of Gulabdas who came from Chathianwala and settled down at Tarn Taran had a conflict with the chiefs of Chathianawala. Despite that, he established his institution at that place. It was the centre of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule and Gulabdas rejected the patronage of his state. This is a question that despite the rebellious nature of this sect; Ranjit Singh allowed him into his territory. He negated the culture of the dominant upper caste and elites. It is illustrated in a major Punjabi novel '*Shayiri*' by Sawrajbir.[23] However, he emerged with his way of life; some Sikh intellectuals integrate him with Charwahak philosophy and epicurean nature who made his own parallel theological concepts and rejected the orthodoxy of major mainstream religions. He was a deviant monist who was in search of the logic of life and a maverick intellectual who wrote mystic poetry reflecting the Bhakti tradition. The concept of consensual sex and intoxication relates him to the Tantra. A.H Bingley

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17 H.A.Rose, *A Glossary of the Castes and Tribes of the Punjab and North-Western Frontier Provinces,* Vol.II, language Department, Punjab, Patiala, 1970(First Published 1883), p.319.

18 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis,* p. 16.

19 Ganesha Singh, *Bharat Mat Darpan,* Vaidak Bhandar, Amritsar, 1926, pp. 126-29; Giani Gian Singh, *Shri Guru Panth Parkash,* Bhai Chatar Singh Jiwan Singh, Amritsar, 1990 (First Published 1880), p. 1292.

20 Giani Gian Singh, *Shri Guru Panth Parkash,* p.1293.

21 Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, *Gurshabad Ratnakar Mahankosh,* Languages Department, Patiala, 2019(Reprint), p.423.

22 Giani Gian Singh, *Shri Guru Panth Parkash,* p.1291.

23 Swarajbir, *Shayari,* Chetna Parkashan, Ludhiana, 2013.

raises questions about the restriction over the inter-caste marriages in the sect and questions whether they were free to inter-dine without caste restriction.[24] Broadly speaking, Gulabdasis belong to the trend categorized as Bhakti, since devotion to the absolute constitutes its dominant mode of worship. The existence of diverse religious traditions in distinct regions and different times identifies sects and saints with two broad streams within the Bhakti movement, i.e.*nirguni* and *sarguni*. These two currents are distinguished by the way they conceptualize the 'Absolute' as an object of devotion.

The sect rejected and broke the social barriers and gave space to a low-caste Muslim prostitute named Piro from the brothel of Hira Mandi Lahore. She became the first woman poet of the Punjab. Indeed, the compositions of Sadhu Gulab Das and Piro reflect the same blend of a message of pure devotion with an underlying critique of social discrimination, as is the characteristic of the *dohas* of Kabir. They also highlighted the strong impetus given to the trend by medieval mystics. In the 1860s, Gulab Das gained prominence in the Punjabi public sphere and the intelligentsia of colonial Punjab. The practice of the sect defied the rules of caste and norms of commensality. It is not surprising that the message of Gulab Das appealed to a large section of marginalized men and women of colonial Punjab. Later, the socio-religious acculturative movements in Punjab like Arya Samaj, Singh Sabha, and the Ahmadiyas, created their vision in the limelight of modern conception without having any vision about culture and then expressing identities themselves in combinations of symbols based on language, script and religion and took for granted the syncretic tradition.[25] The Gulabdasi sect produced many intellectuals who further detoured the way to the Singh Sabha campaign and the latter criticized Gulab Das. They had some ideological differences. Giani Ditt Singh[26], a Singh Sabhaite intellectual could not differentiate the

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24 A.H. Bingley, *The Sikhs,* National Book Shop, Delhi, 1998, p.23.

25 Ishwar Dayal Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy*, p. 19.

26 Born in 1853, he was an eminent Singh Sabha reformer and editor. His father Divan singh was an admirer of the Gulabdasi sect and he sent Ditt Singh to Dera Gulabdasian at Village Tior near Kharar in the Ropar district. Later he shifted to the main Dera at Chathianwala. Then, he became An Arya Samaji also but finally entered Singh Sabha along with his friend Jawahar Singh under the influence of Bhai Gurmukh Singh. He became the editor of *Khalsa Akhbaar* and it was under his editorship that *Khalsa Akhbaar* became an efficient and powerful vehicle for the spread of Singh Sabha ideology. He wielded a powerful pen and wrote more than forty books and pamphlets on Sikh theology, history and current polemics: Harbans Singh(ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism,* Vol.I, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2002 (Fourth Edition), pp. 589-90.

popular religion and space of marginal sections within Sikhism and remained silent on the issue of popular religion or folk form of religion, caste and its vision in Sikhism. The overwhelming presence of low-caste men and women among the devotees of Gulabdasis embodied a social ideology opposed to the religious and worldly dominance of the upper caste. The rebellious nature of a sect and its literary resistance in the given social scenario of society forces us to rethink the logic of formulating a sect, religious traditions and society in the historiography of colonial Punjab.

Hence, in the nineteenth century, the Punjab experienced socio-religious and cultural transformations. The relationship between sect and mainstream religion was under interrogation in the socio-religious history of the colonial Punjab and the idea of syncretism was in obscurity. The institutionalization of a sect with parallel theology was still questionable when religious traditions already existed. Thus, this is a serious attempt to rethink and understand the diverse dimensions of a religious order that emerged in early nineteenth-century Punjab. By analyzing the significance of religious traditions and the emergence of a new faith as a mode of expression of resistance for subordinate groups, this study tries to move beyond the concerns of religious studies and tries to explore new themes and debates in the study of religion. The following brief review of literature will help in placing this sect in a proper historical context and justify the requirement of this academic endeavour.

Anshu Malhotra in *Gender, Caste, and Religious Identities: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab*[27] (2002) tries to define gender and caste in nineteenth-century Punjab. She argues and defines how caste changed in relation to class mobility. She sees the reformists as agencies that kept the emphasis on middle and upper-class women and she mentions that lower-class and caste women were often ignored. She has focused on gender in colonial Punjab, reformist movements in Punjab and how they neglected women. Harjot Oberoi in *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition,* (1994) [28] states that there was great diversity in the Sikh community before the late nineteenth century when reformist campaigns defined and delimited Sikhism. He deals with the Sanatan Sikhism of the

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27 Anshu Malhotra, *Gender, Caste, and Religious Identities: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002.

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

early nineteenth century in its range and depth. He examines that period of Sikh history which is considered important to contemporary Sikh society. He marked men who had been influenced by the British presence in the Punjab and forged homogeneous religious identities to consolidate their own position in Punjabi society. Popular religion is also examined along with good analyses of such traditions as those concerning Sakhi Sarvar and Gugga Pir. Niamh Moore and Yvonne Whelan (ed.), *Heritage, Memory and the Politics of Identity: New Perspectives on the Cultural Landscape*, (2007)[29] critically examines the understanding of developing and new cultural landscape and of heritage in the context of national and local identities and deals with the power relation that shapes collective and cultural memory. This book raises some key questions like whose heritage is being remembered; in what form; and why.

John C.B. Webster in *Popular Religion in the Punjab Today,* (1974)[30] focuses on the theme of popular religion and the beliefs and practices of Punjabi people. It examines the religious life of a sect and a community in one particular village or town. It gives detailed information about the performed rituals, functions, and festivals of the people. K.N. Panikkar, *in Culture, ideology, Hegemony, Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India,* (1995)[31] gives a great insight into various aspects of ideology and hegemony, which are both inherited and imposed. A detailed focus is given on the struggles of culture and ideology in colonial India. He expresses it through a variety of socio-cultural movements and individual initiatives. It explores the interconnections between culture, ideology and hegemony and is an effort to explain how Indians, under colonial subjection negotiated their past and present and envisioned a future for the society in which they lived.

Lars Fogelin in *The Archaeology of Religious Ritual*, (2007)[32] analyses the ritual through the archaeological frame. He argues that the ritual cannot be understood without the analysis of the religious doctrines, beliefs and myths. He builds his argument with the perspective of archaeology and explains how earlier archaeologists

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29 Niamh Moore and Yvonne Whelan (ed.), *Heritage, Memory and the Politics of Identity: New Perspectives on the Cultural Landscape*, Routledge, New York, 2007.

30 John C.B. *Webster in Popular Religion in the Punjab Today,* Christian Institute of Sikh Studies, Batala, 1974.

31 K.N. Panikar, *Culture, Ideology and Hegemony*, Tulika Publishers, New Delhi, 1998.

32 Lars Fogelin "The Archaeology of Religious Ritual", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 36, 2007, pp. 55-71.

thought about it and saw human action as the basis to form rituals. This study underscores the ritual practice and argues that archaeologists reject a clear opposition between religious and non-religious action or artefacts, but rather assert that the experience of ritual and ritual symbolism promotes social orders and dominant ideologies. Christopher Harding focuses through *Religious Transformation in South Asia: The Meanings of Conversion in Colonial Punjab*, (2008)[33] on the socio-economic and cultural meaning of socio-religious 'upliftment' in Punjab. It begins by analyzing the socio-economic and cultural background in Punjab, particularly that of rural low-caste people. It raises the question that in this upliftment, yet dependent and isolated nature of low-caste life exists, and claims its manifestation in idiosyncratic and combative forms of low-caste religion. 'upliftment' in the Victorian British context is then examined, followed by its appearance in Punjab in a variety of forms from the work of Mission Societies and British officials such as Lieutenant Frank Brayne and Sir Malcolm Darling, to Indian innovations such as the Arya Samaj and Ad Dharm religious movements.

J.S. Grewal in his book, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*, (1998)[34] focuses on the debate between "critical scholars" of the Sikh religious tradition and its "Sikh critics" regarding debatable issues in the study of Sikhism. The study traces the historical beginnings of Sikhism till the late eighteenth century. It is based on the sources of early Europeans associated with the East India Company. It examines the major works of J. D. Cunningham, Ernest Trump, and M. A. Macauliffe which were produced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It refers to Trump and Macauliffe's opposing interpretations of the Sikh tradition. Trump claimed that Sikhism was "a form of Hinduism" and also gave some offensive remarks in his introduction to The Adi Granth (1877). On the other hand, Macauliffe emphasized the "originality" of Sikhism and its identity as distinct from that of Hindus, and more valuable for the British, the Sikhs, and the world at large. J. S. Grewal in *Historical Perspectives on Sikh Identity*, (1997)[35] gives insight into important issues within the Sikh tradition. The author explores the interrelations between the organized processes

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33 Christopher Harding, *Religious Transformation in South Asia: The Meanings of Conversion in Colonial Punjab*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009.

34 J. S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1998.

35 J.S. Grewal, *Historical Perspectives on Sikh Identity*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1997.

of institutionalization and the unconscious, and the spiritualism in which people come to know themselves. He raises the basic question "Who is a Sikh?" and through this, he critiques the works of W. H. McLeod, Harjot Oberoi, Daljeet Singh, and G. S. Dhillon. Grewal argues that McLeod touches upon a question of distinct identity in the pre-Khalsa Sikh tradition, but he set his domain around the elite and the masses and Oberoi uses the same empirical data and observes that Sikh identity is not yet "fixed". Grewal frames and sharpens the Sikh identity as distinct from the institution of the Khalsa.

W.H. McLeod in *Who is a Sikh? The Problem of Sikh identity*, (1989)[36] discusses important contemporary issues like the definition of the Sikh. McLeod argues that the first followers of the Nanak were Nanak-Panthis who practised the *Nam Simran* form of meditation that Guru Nanak taught in his *Bani*, and rejected caste and sectarianism. The successive Gurus institutionalized community (panth), possessing a scripture and festivals which distinguished them from Hindus or Muslims. McLeod argues that this transformation is not a definitive answer being provided to the question, "Who is a Sikh?" He analyses the reformation campaign led by the Singh Sabha movement and considers legislative attempts to define the Sikh. McLeod defines *Sahajdhari*, *Kesdhari*, *Amritdhari*, and *Patit* and their historical context. W. H. McLeod's book *Exploring Sikhism: Aspects of Sikh Identity, Culture, and Thought*, (2000)[37] includes sixteen published essays by W. H. McLeod that gives insights on a period of over thirty-five years of Sikh scholarship by the author. McLeod begins with an important examination of the relationship between Sikhism, Islam, and Hinduism, adopting a position that downplays the role of Islam and cites the Hindu saint tradition as the more significant influence on Sikh origins. He also focuses on the teachings of Guru Nanak, conflicts between Sikh faith claims and historical evidence, the key role of the Khalsa and the *Rahit*, an examination of the terms *Panth* and *Sant*, the reformist Singh Sabha movement, the millenarian Kukas, and discusses the term "fundamentalist" and its implications to Sikhism. A theme that runs throughout this work is the conflict between the interpretations of the believer and the interpretations of the outside scholar. McLeod tries to be respectful towards tradition but does not hesitate to point out apparent conflicts between tradition and historical evidence.

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[36] W.H. Mcleod, *Who is a Sikh? The Problem of Sikh identity*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989.

[37] W.H. Mcleod, *Exploring Sikhism: Aspects of Sikh Identity, Culture, and Thought*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000.

Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier (ed.), "*Sikh Identity in the Light of History: A Dynamic Perspective*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, (2004)[38] compiles papers presented at an International Conference on the theme of 'Sikhism in the light of History' and critically discusses various aspects of scripture, social history, diaspora, gender and the national and religious identities in Sikh historiography. Pashaura Singh discusses the contribution of W. H. Mcleod to Sikh history. Mcleod studies *Rahit* in light of historical Sikh sources. N.G. Barrier scholarly analyses the power and authority of the *Akal Takht* and gives further elaboration on religion and politics. These themes give insights to understand Sikh historiography.

Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier's book *Sikhism and History*, (2004)[39] is based on the International Conference which was held in Ann Arbor in 1996 at the University of Michigan. The theme which is discussed in this work is the question of identity in Sikh historiography. This work discusses the primary issues like symbols of the Sikh identity in the light of historical literary sources. Pashaura Singh reviews the textual historical sources of the first five Gurus and analyses the nature and scope of the idea of Guruship, liturgy, festivals and life cycle rituals, caste and role of martyrdom and how these contributed to reshaping the Sikh identity. In this book, the scholars deal with the theme of identity but analyze it from different perspectives and see it through the prism of diaspora, colonialism, non-Punjabi perspective and ethnicity.

Ishita Banerjee-Dube and Johannes Beltz in *Popular Religion and Ascetic Practices* (2008)[40] talk about the study of a religious community called Mahima Dharma which is located in the Orissa. It theorizes the ascetic tradition and its socio-religious impact on society and the space of margins. It locates the tradition in the context of nirguna Bhakti. It also studies the social stratification of Orissa where the Mahima Dharam emerged as a social transition.

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38 Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier (ed.), *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004.

39 Pashaura Singh. N. Gerald Barrier (ed.), *Sikhism and History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004.

40 Ishita Banerjee Dube, Johannes Beltz, (ed.), *Popular Religion and Ascetic Practices: New Studies on Mahima Dharma*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2008.

Religion in Indian History, (2007)[41] an edited work with an introduction by Irfan Habib defines religion and its transformation from the prehistoric period to the modern period from the Marxist perspective. Irfan Habib discusses the various layers of religion and their role in the evolution of tribal society to feudal and capitalist society. He discusses casteism as maintaining a strict obligation of endogamy and hierarchal order and the notion of Brahmanical notion of purity. This work gives insight into various socio-religious popular movements in the early15th and 16th centuries which disowned both Islam and Hinduism and followed the path of *nirgun* Bhakti.

C. A. Bayly's critical work *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*,(1999)[42] analyses Indian society during the colonial period. The central power of the Mughals declined and the regional groups consolidated their power and British Raj consolidated itself at that time. Bayly explores how colonial economic consolidation affected Indian society under the framework of the world's changing economy and the impact of imperialism on Indian traditional society.

Farina Mir revisits the Punjabi qissa tradition which is related to Perso-Islamic literature in her article "*Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives: Rethinking Cultural and Religious Syncretism*," (2006)[43]. In this article, she relates the popular narratives in the context of Punjab. The *qissa* depicts the cultural and religious life of the Punjab. The Hir-Ranjha narrative tradition reflects the form of piety and devotional shared practices which are fundamentally syncretic practices.

Blessings Chinsinga in "*The Interface between Tradition and Modernity: The Struggle for Political Space at the Local Level in Malawi*,(2006)[44] critically builds a context of the debate about the relevance of traditional leadership institutions and alternative culture in the processes of democratization and decentralization. The article discusses how traditional leaders played a primary part in the motion of any movement

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41 Irfan Habib(ed.), *Religion in Indian History*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2007.

42 C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1987.

43 Farina Mir, Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives: Rethinking Cultural and Religious Syncretism, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 48, No. 3, Jul., 2006, p. 727-758.

44 Blessings Chinsinga "The Interface between Tradition and Modernity: The Struggle for Political Space at the Local Level in Malawi", *Civilisations*, 54, 1/2, 2006, pp. 255-274.

and despite the work done for local conditions; they were just finding their own space in society.

In "*Community and Identities: Interrogating Contemporary Discourses in India*," (1999)[45] Surinder. S. Jodka describes the different approaches which construct the role of community and colonialism to the rigidity of the caste hierarchy in Indian society. He talks about the tradition and modernization within the political structure of colonialism from different views of scholars and sets it in the contemporary socio-political structure.

Mark. Juergensmeyer, in *Religious Rebel in the Punjab- Social Vision of Untouchables* (1988)[46] provides a deep insight into the plight of Dalits in Punjab. He explores the social vision of the untouchables and their fight for separate identities like those of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims which led the cause to raise the Ad Dharm movement in Punjab by Mangoo Ram.

Harish K. Puri, in his article "*Scheduled Castes in Sikhism"*(1983)[47] gives insight into Dalit identity and the author argues that due to the dominance of Jat Sikhs on SGPC, Akali Dal a political party and also on the economy of Punjab, the lower castes move to other religious sects to form their own identity, like Nirankari, Ad Dharmi and for Radhasoami etc.

Meeta and Rajiv Lochan explore a number of 'deras' in various parts of the state of Punjab in their article "*Caste and Religion in Punjab: Case of Bhaniarawala Phenomena*," (2007)[48]. The article explores the various reasons why Dalits and other marginalized groups follow such deras who promise them an alternative to mainstream religion. Yet they start to acquire strategic political overtones. The article proves its point with the example of Bhaniarawala and analyses this sect in this domain. He was essentially a religious guru but became a vote bank for politicians in the early 21st

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45 Surinder. S. Jodka, Community and Identities: Interrogating Contemporary Discourses, *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol. 34, No. 41 (Oct. 9-15, 1999), pp. 2957-2963.

46 Mark. Juergensmeyer, *Religious Rebel in the Punjab- Social Vision of Untouchables,* Ajanta Publishers, 1988.

47 Harish K. Puri, "Scheduled Castes in Sikhism", *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol. 38, Issue No. 26, 2003.

48 Meeta and Rajiv Lochan, "Caste and Religion in Punjab: Case of Bhaniarawala Phenomena", *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol. 42, Issue No. 21, May 26, 2007.

century in Punjab. It also gives insight into the political economy of these deras and their inclination toward the political parties.

Saurabh Dube in *Caste and Sect in Village Life: Satnamis of Chhattisgarh 1900-1950*[49] talks about caste and sect's relation in village life especially focusing on Satnamis of Chhattisgarh who are low caste. He examines how these people under the leadership of Ghasidas, who was a farm servant gradually formed a sect, gave a challenge to the upper caste and rejected the deities and temples and just kept faith in a formless God called Satnam. Dube shows the relation of the sect to village life, its caste system, and agrarian relation and defines the cultural hegemony.

A.M. Shah's *Sects and Hindu Social Structure*[50] gives insights into the phenomenon of the sect of Hindu society. It is based on empirical data. This study analyses the caste and sect in relation to the understanding of both religion and society in a particular period. He argues that the social organization of a sect reciprocates the socio-political structure and its importance in sociological literature. Finally, he touches upon the changing contours of the sects in modern times, and the problem of their study.

Opinderjit Kaur Takkar in *Sikh Identity*: *An Exploration of Groups Among Sikhs,* (2000)[51] analyses groups within Sikhism through the prism of Rahit Maryada and critically discusses the fluidity of Sikh identity. This study discusses the Singh Sabha movement's impact on certain groups and exclusion or inclusion within Panth. This work gives insight to understand the debate of various sects' practices with different sets of beliefs.

James T. Richardson's article *From Cult to Sect: Creative Eclecticism in New Religious Movements,* (1979)[52] is based on the work of Roy Wallis on cult-to-sect evolution and discusses the Jesus movement, which originated as a cult but quickly

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49 Saurabh Dube, *Caste and Sect in Village Life: Satnamis of Chhattisgarh 1900-1950,* Indian Institute for Advanced Studies, Shimla, 1993.

50 A.M. Shah, "Sects and Hindu Social Structure", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol. 40, No.2, 2006.

51 Opinderjit Kaur Takkar, *Sikh Identity*: *An Exploration of Groups Among Sikhs*, Routledge, New York, 2005.

52 James T. Richardson, "Cult to Sect: Creative Eclecticism in New Religious Movements", *The Pacific Sociological Review*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1979, pp. 139-166.

evolved into a sect. He discusses some factors like social organisations, individual factors, and internal and external factors among the group. This model helps to understand the changes in the religious shuffles and new social forms to develop and transform the cult into a sect. Roy Wallis in *Scientology: Therapeutic Cult to Religious Sect* [53] discusses the continuous conceptions of the cult. He elaborates on the collectivities theory which forms the cult. He claims that 'epistemological authoritarianism' is a central feature of the cult. He argues that the sectarianization has the arrogation of authority which stands on the basis of a claim to a new and superior revelation.

Madan Lal's article *Gurudom: The Political Dimension of Religious Sects in Punjab*, (2009)[54] sets the relationship in the domain of religion and politics and focuses on the nexus of politicians, and bureaucrats with Deras (religious sects), particularly in Punjab. It explores how the heads of Deras depict themselves as worldly gods with various titles to generate unconditional devotion among followers. This nexus of the Deras heads and political leaders led to the cause of various social and sectarian conflicts between the masses. It critiques in particular the brokering capacity of the Deras, which push the politicians to seek their patronage in the sense of a vote bank.

Peter Gaeffke, David A. Utz in *Identity and Division in Cults and Sects in South Asia*, (1984)[55] talks about the nature of sect and its construction. The work argues that the issue of societal consensus on religious differentiation takes a special character when that consensus is translated into identification. It discusses some variables of sects and argues that a sect is a transformation from individual to group and socio-political movement, and political affiliation further improves the position of that particular community.

Navratan Kapoor's *Sadhu Gulabdas: Jeevan Te Rachna,* (1987) [56] is the monographic study of Gulab Das's life and his writings. It gives insight into the

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53 Roy Wallis, "Scientology: Therapeutic Cult to Religious Sect", *Sociology*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (January 1975), pp. 89-100.

54 Madan Lal, "Gurudom: The Political Dimension of Religious Sects in the Punjab", *South Asia Research*, Vol. 29, 3, 2009, pp. 223–234.

55 Peter Gaeffke, Utz, A. David, (ed.) *Identity and Division in Cults and Sects in South Asia*, Department of South Asia Regional Studies, Philadelphia, 1984.

56 Navratan Kapoor, *Sadhu Gulabdas: Jeevan Te Rachna*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1987.

philosophy of his writings, their form, and the literary tradition in which Gulab Das wrote his poetry. He further briefly discusses the followers of the sect. This is a very informative monograph on the history of the sect, its literature and its theological concept. Bikram Singh's monograph *Kishan Singh Arif: Jeevan Te Rachna*, (1987)[57] sheds light on the life and literature of a disciple of Gulabdasis named Kishan Singh Arif. He also wrote some poetry and qissas in vernacular language.

Gurpreet Bal in her article *A 19th Century Woman Poet of Punjab: Peero,* (2003)[58] refers to the first woman poet Piro. In this article, Gurpreet Bal explores society, religion and Identity in her poetry. Piro criticized the major religions like Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism in her poetry and also criticized the prevailing discourse of equality of these all religions. It gives light to the analysis of women's space in contemporary society at that time.

Anshu Malhotra in the article *Telling Her Tale? Unravelling a Life in Conflict in Peero's Ik Sau Sath Kafian (one hundred and sixty kafis)* (2009)[59] examines Piro's 160 *kafis* in which she tries to represent her own life story. She explores her identity, and self-representation in the diverse cultural landscape of the Punjab. In this article, Malhotra gives a brief life sketch of Piro who is called Piro Preman, a Muslim prostitute, who lived in the middle of the nineteenth century and joined the sect of Gulabdas. Malhotra discusses this significant shift in how she becomes the consort of her Guru, Gulab Das. In this article, she describes how Piro captured the image of pre-colonial Punjab in which she attempts to decipher the conflict between Hindus and Muslims.

Atam Hamrahi and Surjit Chander have edited *Arif Rachnavali: Sadhu Daya Singh Arif di Prapat Prakashit Rachna*,(2002)[60], the published poetry of Sadhu Daya

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57 Bikram Singh Ghuman, *Kishan Singh Arif: Jeevan te Rachna,* Punjabi University, Patiala, 1987.

58 Gurpreet Bal, "*A* 19th Century Woman Poet of Punjab: Peero", *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol 10, No.2, 2003.

59 Anshu Malhotra, "Telling her tale? Unravelling a Life in Conflict in Peero's Ik Sau Sath Kafian (one hundred and sixty kafis)", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 46, no. 4, pp. 541–78, 2009.

60 Sadhu Daya Singh Arif, *Arif Rachnavali: Sadhu Daya Singh Arif di Prapat Prakashit Rachna,* (Edited by Atam Hamrahi and Surjit Chander), Bhai Chatar Singh Jeevan Singh, Amritsar, 2002.

Singh Arif who was a noted saint in nineteenth-century Punjab. It reflects the idea, morality and notion of religious identity during late nineteenth-century Punjab. Similarly, Raj Kumar Hans's article *Devotion and Dissent Punjabi Dalit Saint Poets* (2014)[61] describes the literary tradition of the Punjab during the second half of the 19th century. He deals with four Dalit saints in the literary tradition and analyses them in the Sikh context. Their writings were the voice of dissent for the marginal sections of society. He critically builds arguments on their writings and their social concerns. He examines that devotion and dissent both do not contradict but reciprocate each other. These voices of dissent (poetry) represent the denial of subordination of the dominant and depict the shared rich culture of popular religious tradition. Anshu Malhotra in the article *Bhakti and the Gender Self: A Courtesan and a Consort in Mid-Nineteenth Century Punjab* (2012)[62] discusses the Bhakti tradition and a woman in the context of margins who contested her space in early nineteenth-century Punjab. However, she discusses how Piro depicts herself as a prostitute to whom Bhakti opened the spiritual path, and made her a consort of the guru.

Ashu Malhotra's book *Piro and Gulabdas: Gender, Sect and Society in Colonial Punjab*[63] talks about the turbulent times of the disintegrating Sikh empire in the nineteenth century and the emerging colonial rule. The defining feature of her book is colonial modernity, sect, religious tradition and space of women during that period. She presents the life sketch of an unknown woman, Piro and her little-known sect, the Gulabdasis. Piro's forceful autobiographical narrative knits a fanciful tale of abduction and redemption, while also claiming agency over her life. Piro has a voice of a low-caste Muslim and a former prostitute, who searches for the meaning of her life in a heterodox sect. Malhotra argues for the relevance of such a voice for our cultural anchoring and empowering politics. Piro's remarkable poetry reframes Bhakti imagery in exceptional ways and demonstrates how it enriched the lives of women and low castes. Malhotra's work is also a pioneering study in the cultural and religious current sphere.

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61 Raj Kumar Hans, "Devotion and Dissent Punjabi Dalit Saint Poets", Vijaya Ramaswamy (ed.) *Devotion and Dissent in Indian History*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2014, pp. 188-215.

62 Anshu Malhotra, "Bhagti and the Gender Self: A Courtesan and a Consort in Mid Nineteenth Century Punjab", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 46, No.6, 2012, pp. 1506-1539.

63 Ashu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis: Gender, Sect and Society in Punjab*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017.

The wide-ranging literature is helpful to study different traditions, understanding society and contested vision of the identity and religious currents in the colonial Punjab. The present study does not place the sect only in the domain of syncretism. The existing literature helps us little to chalk out the convergence and divergence of new faiths such as Gulabdasis with earlier traditions. There is no detailed work on the Gulabdasi sect and contemporary society. The existing specific literature on Gulab Das locates the space of women and sets Piro in the nucleus of the studies. The present research work tries to explore the religion, sect and society of colonial Punjab through the prism of syncretism which has carried a positive connotation in South Asia and invested with a load of demonstration of composite cultures, shared religious sites, and religiously mixed traditions. The sect of Gulab Das is analyzed in the light of diversity, plurality and shared cultural tradition. An attempt will also is made to critically analyse the orientalist discourse about the Punjabi society which constructed the vision as inferior-superior, traditional-modern as well as religious and secular.

The objectives of this research are to explore the emergence, and changing trends in religious traditions, sects and society in the colonial Punjab. It attempts to study the idea of syncretism, ideologies, composite culture and socio-religious change in the concept of colonial modernization and its impact on society in the colonial Punjab. It tends to chalk out the convergence and divergence of new faiths such as Gulabdasis with earlier traditions. It examines the process of exclusion and inclusion and the space of margins in the colonial Punjab. It also tries to understand Gulabdasis and Singh Sabha's intellectuals' perspectives on caste and identity.

The proposed study tends to analyse the role of shared cultural traditions of the pre-colonial Punjab and the concepts of syncretism, modernization, culture and invention of a new tradition and its impact on the society in the colonial Punjab. The study tries to trace the space of margins in the transition of society in the religious tradition and power politics. The locale of the research will be spanning from the early eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. The study follows the prevalent qualitative methods of historical analysis with philosophical, theological, ethnological, and sociological approaches. Various sources are studied in depth to provide authentic and coherent information on the theme. This present work draws attention to the terms and ideas to explain the vernacular literary turn in Punjabi and its cultural significance

in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Punjab. These ideas include theories of vernacularization, everyday life and the public sphere. Among these the concepts of caste, gender and religion are the most challenging. The present study is based on a detailed examination of both Primary and Secondary sources collected from various Archives, Libraries, fieldwork and observation. Primary sources include contemporary and near-contemporary works written in Persian, Urdu and Punjabi, Travel Accounts, and Official Publications like Gazetteer and Census Reports. A number of secondary sources have been consulted including encyclopedias, books and research articles. Ph.D Theses and M.Phil Dissertations have also been found useful in the study.

The present research focuses on the society in the Punjab during the period of the early nineteenth century. The study has been divided into five chapters apart from conclusion. The first chapter is an introduction to the society of the Punjab and a review of studies in the context of society. The introduction also looks at the area of the Punjab which has been taken up in this research. It outlines how the present research is organized.

The second chapter is divided into three parts. The first part covers the geography and different religious traditions in the Punjab since its settlement. The second part covers the historiographical trends in the domain of religious studies. It defines religion as a particular area in the academic domain and generally in the public. In this part, the major question is about how religion is used in history. The third part deals with further debate on tradition and modernization in the history of Punjab and religious studies. In this part, a critical analysis of the term syncretism in the domain of culture and religion is done. The last part distinguishes the theory of sect formation and the difference between sect and cult. This portion studies certain sects and cults with new sources and perspectives.

The third chapter attempts to envisage the nineteenth-century saint poet Gulab Das. It begins by tracing the early life and intellectual formation of Gulab Das who founded the new faith between 1809 to 1876. It tries to discuss the themes, contexts and theological understanding of Gulab Das. Conventional scholarship classifies Gulab Das as a Bhakti poet. This tag obscures the wholistic personality of Gulab Das and puts him into fragmentation. In this context, Jon Keune argues that the definition of Bhakti is

deceptively familiar, uncritically understood and historiographically overburdened.[64] Precisely because of Gulab Das's apparent idiosyncrasies and divergence from the early nineteenth to late nineteenth-century conduct as a disciple of Udasi and Nirmala Sects, he is a compelling subject of historical investigation. Therefore, we need to think about and revisit these contexts in different manners and analyze them in the light of south Asian religious tradition. The existing literature is focused on examining the elements of resistance of the sect and challenge to dominant and mainstream monotheistic religions. The sect of Gulab Das stood for the dignity, solace and new social space it provided to its primarily low caste in the colonial Punjab. This chapter tries to explore the vernacularity of religion, non-elite society and the social landscape of mainstream religions in colonial Punjab.

The fourth chapter discusses the intellectual tradition and textual lineage of the Gulabdasis. Some disciples were closely associated with the Gulabdasi sect. These devotees, scholars and saints restructured the vernacular religion and culture, and sustained the textual lineage of the sect. They represent the intellectual tradition/ culture of the Punjab. Here, the intellectual word denotes the scholarship and literary wisdom of Punjab in terms of religion and culture. The conventional Punjabi frontier society demands evidence to be justified as a literary and intellectual society. The egalitarianism of religious traditions not only broke all divisive lines but set the discourse of literary tradition in Punjabi society. In the sect of Guabdasis, there were noted saints under the above domain. Three poets are most important to discuss here who emerge between the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century Punjab. These scholars and intellectuals extended the textual and spiritual lineage of the sect in particular and represent the intellectual literary tradition of the Punjab in general. In this chapter, the relationship and interaction of the disciples of Gulab Das and the transcreated Gulabdasis philosophy and rituals of this sect which were under formation in Punjab in the first half of the twentieth century are explored. This chapter is divided into two sections the first section problematizes the question of the poets' agency and their historical consciousness in courtly society while the second

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64 Jon Keune, *Eknath in Context: The Literary, Social and Political Milieu of An Early Modern Saint-Poet,* (ed.) Rosalind O'Hanlon, Christopher Minkowski and Anand Venkatkrishan, *Scholar Intellectuals in Early Modern India*, Routledge, New Delhi, 2015.

section explores the colonial influence on these poets' religious thought and literary production stemming from their sojourn in the Punjab during the early twentieth century. The first poet Kishan Singh Arif (1836- 1900) was the foremost disciple of Gulabdasis. The second Gulabdasi poet is Dharam Das Arif (1866-1918) who was a very famous scholar and attained the status of Saint. The third one is Ditta Ram alias Giani Ditt Singh (1850-1901) who learned and was trained in the sect of Gulabdasis. Later he becomes a noted poet, polemicist, journalist and primary orator of the Singh Sabha movement.

The fifth chapter explores the transformation in the sect after partition. No major changes took place in the sect of Gulabdas under the regime of Ranjit Singh and later colonial period. But the partition of 1947 led to structural changes in the sect. In this chapter, an attempt is made to explore the changing contours of this sect and also study branches and their location after and before the partition. This chapter also examines the theological changes related to caste, gender and sects' spiritual inheritance during that period. It is focused on how the sect is run in contemporary times. The various branches of Gulabdasis had to shift in Sindh and Punjab after the partition in 1947. The chapter is based on fieldwork, observation and formal and informal conversations which give a new narrative of the various centres of the Gulabdasis located in Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Hansi, Sirsa, Nurmahal and Mansa. In the conclusion, the major findings and arguments are given.

CHAPTER -II

THE RELIGIOUS TRADITION, SECT AND SPACE

The Punjab has never been a homogenized region in the domain of religion, culture and society. Heterogeneity is the essence of the Punjab since its settlement. The socio-cultural fission and fusion comprised the people of different tribes, races, cultures and religions who came and settled down in this region. The Naths, Jogis, Sidhas, Buddhist monks, Bhakti Saints, Sikh Gurus and various cults and sects represent the great religious tradition of Punjab. In its cultural space, several diverse races and cultures met and coalesced. Persians, Greeks, Parthians, Scythians, Kushanas and Huns came in an unending sequence.[1] In the third millennium before Christ, the Punjab formed a part of the Indus culture's civilisation when its cities and towns were close to the rivers, particularly in their lower courses. The city of Harappa which flourished as a major urban centre for about 500 years was situated on the left bank of the river Raavi, about a hundred miles lower than Lahore at present.[2] Though the cities and large towns of the Indus culture began to decline in the second millennium before Christ, the broad pattern of human settlement continued and the new cities like Taxila, Sialkot and Jalandhar as well as Lahore were among other things as the index of the northward movement.[3] In the Pre-historic age, after 4000 BCE, human settlements of Neolithic culture began to develop in the Punjab.[4] The Kot Diji culture of northern Sindh extended to Punjab and North-West Frontier Province Around 3200 BCE.[5] The Sothi-Siswal culture covered the area of north-eastern Punjab. The urban Harappan culture extended over the Punjab plains and ended up in the line of Sub-Himalayan foothills. The site of the prehistoric Ropar is still very close to the river Sutlej. The outermost sites are Manda (in Jammu), Ropar and Chandigarh.[6]

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1 Ishwar Dayal Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy: Exploring Medieval Punjab Through Hir Waris*, Manohar, Delhi, 2009, p.37.

2 J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2002(Reprint), p. 2.

3 *Ibid*, p. 3.

4 J.S. Grewal, *Social and Cultural History of the Punjab*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p.12.

5 *Ibid*, p. 14.

6 Irfan Habib, *Prehistory (People's History of India)*, Aligarh Historians Society, Tulika, New Delhi, 2002, pp.9-13.

The boundaries of Punjab shifted in the past. In the Vedic period, Punjab was known as *Sapt Sandhu*. When the Greeks occupied it, they called it *Pentapotamia*. Punjab was also styled *Taki*, derived from the tribe of Taks or Takkas who were once the undisputed lord of Punjab and were ruled over the lower parts of the Sindh Sagar doab.[7] During the period of Akbar, in the late sixteenth century, it was synonymous with the province of Lahore.[8] The lack of a single geographical identity led to the use of several prefixes to be used for the Punjab i.e 'Mughal' Punjab, 'cis-Sutlej' Punjab, 'trans-Sutlej' Punjab, 'British' Punjab, 'West' Punjab and 'East' Punjab.[9]

Buddha Prakash characterizes the Punjab landscape as a region that not only played an important part in the history of India but also acted as the crossroads of many movements of culture, commerce and people in Asia.[10] Thus it became a cockpit, a crucible and confluence, in which there was an unending amalgamation of communities and cultures resulting in a broad, pragmatic, experimental and utilitarian outlook and a robust, clear-cut and comprehensive commonsense view, which cut at the root of all sorts of dogmas, conventions and conservatism.[11]

Historians and archaeologists hypothesize the practised languages and religion by the Indus people. At the time of the Aryan influx into India in the second millennium before Christ, the Indus Culture was in decline. The earliest Aryans lived in eastern Afghanistan, Panjab and the fringes of western Uttar Pradesh.[12] When the nomadic Aryans established small republics and monarchies nearly all over the Punjab the agricultural economy was revived. Most probably their beliefs and practices were different from the Indo-Aryan peoples. There has always been ethnic plurality in the Punjab which was distinguished by its cultural tradition. The Vedic Aryans interacted with the people of the Indus Culture not only to produce the prototype of a social system based on caste but also to evolve a new system of religious beliefs and

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7 J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, p. 4.

8 *Ibid*, p. 3.

9 *Ibid*, p. 35.

10 Buddha Prakash, "Ancient Punjab: Panoramic View" in Harbans Singh and N.G. Barrier (eds.), *Essays in Honour of Dr Ganda Singh*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1976, pp.1-27.

11 *Ibid*, pp.2-10.

12 D.N. Jha, *Ancient India*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 2014, p.43.

practices, combining the simple worship of their nature-gods with well-developed cults of the Indus people. [13] The ritual sacrifice occupied a central place in the religious worship of the Indo-Aryans. Important changes took place with the passage of centuries largely due to the amalgamation of the Indus and the Indo-Aryan people and with the coming of the new people into the Punjab.[14]

Aryans established their small republics and monarchies almost all over the Punjab. During the fourth century BCE, when Alexander invaded Punjab, the Ambhi ruler ruled over the upper Sindh Sagar Doab and Puru tribe on Chaj doab.[15] Later on, Punjab became an integral part of the vast Mauryan Empire which extended over Bengal to Afghanistan under Asoka. [16] After thousand years with the fall of the Mauryan Empire, Punjab politically diverged from the Ganges plains. In the Second Century BCE, the great king Menander, known as Milinda, ruled over the western doabs of Punjab.[17] Greek coins attested to its authentication and influence over the whole of Punjab before the invasion of Shakas or the Scythians. The Kushanas also remained the lord of Punjab. In the seventh century, Harsha ruled over eastern Punjab up to the river Beas.[18]

After the Vedas, the greatest cultural influence came from Budhism. Its protagonists used Prakrit as the chief medium of communication.[19] Moreover, the kings of foreign tribes were patrons of Buddhism largely because they could become a part of the recognized social order by accepting Buddhism. They also patronized Buddhist art and architecture in Punjab. The great importance of Buddhism in Punjab in the early Christian centuries has not been properly appreciated by historians. By the seventh century, however, Buddhism was on the decline. Yuan Chwang provides fascinating information about the state of Buddhism in Punjab. Its monasteries and scholars were still very important.[20] Shaivism and Vaishnavism were coming to the fore, with new

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13 J.S. Grewal, "Historical Geography of the Punjab", *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol.11, No.1, p. 5.

14 *Ibid*, p.10.

15 J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, p. 3.

16 *Ibid*, pp.2-3.

17 *Ibid*, p.3.

18 *Ibid*, pp. 3-4.

19 J.S. Grewal, "Historical Geography of the Punjab", p. 9.

20 T.Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, Vol.2, 1904, London, p, 22.

worship icons in temples and their architectural features. The Vedas were venerated in theory but ignored in practice. During that time, the Epics and Puranas were gradually becoming the more important scriptures.[21]

With the advent of the Turks, new cultural traditions of theology and law, and new religious practices were introduced here. J.S. Grewal states that the new theosophical ideas and religious practices were introduced by the Muslim mystics known as Sufis or Sheiks.[22] A large num of the indigenous people began to appropriate these new ideas and practices. The new script and cultural amalgamation enriched the notion of plurality. J.S. Grewal said that to the scriptural authority of the Vedas and the *Puranas* was added the authority of the Quran and to Sanskrit in Devnagri script were added Arabic and Persian in slightly different scripts of their own.[23]

In India, Islam is highly influenced by local or vernacular religious traditions and culture. Sufism is the primary example in the Indian context. Bruce B. Lawrence argues that in a little over three centuries (1200-1530), Sufism became immensely important in India, although Islam had previously enjoyed only a sequestered flowing. [24] India is one of the five great centres of Sufism, together with Iran (including Central Asia). Mesopotamia, Syria and North Africa.[25] Sufism is fundamentally grounded in the Quran. The teacher of the external laws (*Shariat*), the mystic path (*Tariqat*) and gnosis (*Haqiqat*) is the prophet himself. I.D. Gaur analyzes the vernacular character of Sufism which is deep-rooted in the local culture. He states that the vernacular character of Islam was more a cultural phenomenon than simply a religious/theological one, and needs to be understood from the viewpoint of its variegated vernacular shades.[26] For Ishwar Dayal Gaur, the Sufis made space for Islam, the new religion, in the everyday life of villages and towns- a space which was historically and culturally more significant than political domination and theological hegemony.[27] In other words, the

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21 J.S. Grewal, "Historical Geography of the Punjab", p. 10.

22 J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*, Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1969, pp.1-40.

23 J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, p.4.

24 Bruce B. Lawrence, *Notes from a Distant Flute*, Tehran, 1978, p. 88.

25 A.M. Shushtery, *Outlines of Islamic Culture: Historical and Cultural Aspects*, Bangalore, 1954, p. 413.

26 Ishwar Dayal Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy*, p. 151-52.

27 *Ibid*, p.152.

Sufis adopted vernacular culture; understood it and Islam became a popular religion. Thus, Islam could reach and be understood in the public sphere at the level of commonsense. The Sufis de-hegemonized the dominating mediation.[28]

The idea of the Indic bhakti movement coincided with those of Sufi mysticism which was taken as the strand of anti-intellectualism. In Punjab, for example, Shaikh Farid, Guru Nanak, Shah Hussain, Sultan Bahu and Bulle Shah, over a long span from the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries, were against religious intellectualism and formalism.[29] The northern hemisphere of medieval India was not only a receiver of Islam and Sufi tradition but it provided a fertile ground for the origin of Sikh Panth. There are certain panths like Nath, Jogis, sects and cults, and popular shrines which need much investigation. However, this region as noted by Pashaura Singh is predominantly occupied and infected with oriental discourses in the field of religion, identity and culture.[30] Yogesh Snehi marks these Panths as the discursive dialectic of religious practices in Punjab that makes the region a fascinating subject of investigation.[31] This scenario has become the object of the historical debates on religion in Punjab.

Historiographical Trends in Religious Studies

Recently, there is a debate about the word 'religion' and the words for 'religions' such as Hinduism, Buddhism, or other religions. There we have many differentiations between different meanings of the word 'religion'. It can mean religiousness in the sense of personal religion, religion in the sense of religious traditions serving religious persons, religion in the sense of religious traditions as wider socio-historical entities, religion as ideal religion to which religious traditions aspire, and religion as a discipline against other disciplines. More efforts are required to bring out these nuances. Much more labour is warranted to bring out the complexities within each religious tradition, not only between different 'sects' but also between conservatives, fundamentalists,

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28 *Ibid*, p.152.

29 *Ibid*, p.53.

30 Pashaura Singh, "*Sikh Identity in the Light of History: A Dynamic Perspective*," in Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier (eds.) *Sikhism and History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, p. 103.

31 Yogesh Snehi, *Spatializing Popular Sufi Shrines in Punjab:Dreams, Memory and Territoriality*, Routledge, New York, 2019, p. 5.

liberals and radicals. Attempts to get rid of these words i.e 'religion' and 'religions' have been made since the publication of W. C. Smith's 'Meaning and End of Religion' but it is more important to engage with the substance of 'religion' and 'religions' lying behind the attempts to get rid of these words.[32] Arvind Pal Mandair also raises the question that why the object of study cannot be something like religion (or tradition). Why in other words, religion is no longer a question that asks about itself (e.g. what is religion?) or why the only relevance of religion in secular education is in terms of the phenomena through which it can engage academic enquiry?[33]

The basic element in every religion is a spiritual reality which is different from the more real or true than the sensually perceived empirical reality. Talking about Sikhism, Arvind Pal Mandair considers its description and definition as the basis of the study of religion[34]. He extends his argument and states that the structure of a religion is determined by answers to the question of whether or not that reality is creative and attributive, and they serve as clues to its character and therefore to its study. Similarly in other religions, there are certain conceptions of reality, or God, which are essential to their proper understanding. [35] Romila Thapar understands the religion through fragmentation and elaborates on its diverse range of sects and argues over the comparison with Semitic religions and set a qualifying frame. In a further comparison with Semitic religions, Thapar states that "Religions such as Islam or Christianity do diversify into sects but this diversification retains a particular reference point-the historical founder and the teachings embodied generally in a single sacred text or a group of texts regarded as a canon. The area of discourse among the sects in these religions is tied to the dogma, tenets and theology as enunciated in the beginning. Buddhism and Jainism are up to a point similar except that their non-theism has led to some debate on whether they qualify as 'religion'. However, all these themselves as

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32 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1991, pp.1-5.

33 Arvind Pal Mandair, "Thinking Differently about Religion and History: Issues for Sikh Studies", in Christopher Shackle, Gurharpal Singh and Arvind Pal Singh Mandair, *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity,* Curzon, Richmond, Surrey, 2001, p.49.

34 *Ibid*, pp. 49,50.

35 Arvind Pal Mandair, *Advanced Studies in Sikhism*, Bloomsbury, New Delhi, 2013,p. 16-17.

part of the historical process of the unfolding of the single religion even though they may have branched off from the mainstream."[36]

For a significant period in post-colonial India, religion remained outside the domain of historians' investigation, a field that has been dominated by the understanding of the state and political economy. Thus, even while religion defined the complex political contours of the Indian state in multiple ways, it remained outside the purview of this secularity.[37] In one of his early writings on culture and consciousness in modern India, K.N. Panikkar argues that: "Contemporary Indian religion as an ideology had embraced almost every sphere of existence, thereby masking the socio-economic and political reality. Therefore, if people are to be made to face the reality, therefore, the illusion that masks reality is to be removed. Developing a critique of religion, therefore, becomes an immediate political task."[38] This perspective shrinks the religion and over-emphasizes the political economy as the primary element which is much needed for secular India. In this regard, Yogesh Snehi argues that this idea strengthened the oriental assumptions about fundamental themes in Indian historiography, particularly concerning Islam and the 'medieval' in Indian history and, in the context of Punjab, issues of invasion, conversion and martyrdom.[39]

In the history of South Asia, religion has been a key concept to study society. Religion is deep-rooted in every layer of society i.e birth, death, marriage and other ceremonies related to life. In South Asia, people have had faith in religion in various forms from Indus Valley Civilization till the present. The Punjab has remained the centre of world religions at different times. The people of the Indus Valley Civilization worshipped nature. There is a dearth of literary sources which can provide information regarding religious beliefs and practices. But we have some archaeological sources which are useful to construct a picture of this issue. The objects like stone, phallus and

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36 Romila Thapar, *The Past as Present: Forging Contemporary Identities Through History*, Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2014, p. 138.

37 Yogesh Snehi, *Spatializing Popular Sufi Shrines in Punjab,* p. 45.

38 K.N. Panikar, "Culture and Consciousness in Modern India: A Historical Perspective," *Social Scientist* 18, 4, 2012, p.7.

39 Yogesh Snehi, *Spatializing Popular Sufi Shrines in Punjab,* p. 45.

rings appear to represent *lingas* and *yonis* and seated male figures of stone are seen as the prototype of Shiv as 'a Yogi'.[40]

Generally, religion is defined as a relation to supernatural powers and other forms like beliefs and worship. Everyone links himself with religion even from primitive ages. The idea of religion has several contestations among scholars of various disciplines. In philosophy, certain philosophers narrate religion as integrated with human nature and the ultimate cause of everything which occurs in the individual as well as in the world. Psychologists try to find out why a man is religious. Usually, historians have studied the origin, growth and change of religion.[41] Anthropologists and sociologists have also been trying to analyse the role of religion in society. Religion, as a systematized sociological unit claiming unbridled loyalty from its adherents and opposing an amorphous religious imagination, is a relatively recent development in the history of the Indian people.[42] The social anthropologists and sociologists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century focused much on the sociocultural domain of religion. Evans-Pritchard distinguishes the theories regarding primitive religion into two groups that are psychological and sociological.[43] In the nineteenth century, studies in the sociology of primitive religion defined two trends, evolutionism and functionalism. Both of these currents covered and dominated the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. J. Troisi clarifies that these tendencies are mutually exclusive.[44] Durkheim is primarily affectionate towards the evolutionistic and historical assumption which is the primary concern for historians of religious studies. However, social anthropologists and sociologists adopted evolutionist perspectives; that religion is a phenomenon that existed in the form of certain religious beliefs. This is the core idea that propounded many theories regarding the origin of religion. Further, J. Troisi discusses its two aspects; one is 'intellectual' and the second is 'emotional'.[45] Troisi, Evan-Pritchard and Wilhelm Schmidt uphold the first approach. Spencer and Tylor are

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40 J.S. Grewal, *Social and Cultural History of the Punjab*, p. 29.

41 J. Troisi, *Tribal Religions: Religious Beliefs and Practices Among the Santhals,* Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 2-4.

42 Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1995, p. 17.

43 J.Troisi, *Tribal Religions,* p. 2.

44 *Ibid*, p. 2.

45 *Ibid*, p. 2.

the pioneers of the intellectualist approach. Both identified the religious beliefs in primitive societies as an intellectual attempt on the part of primitive man to understand natural phenomena and biological events.[46]

Marx and Engels in all probability were influenced by Tylor's view in tracing the origin of religion in the primitive man's sense of awe and fear in the face of an inexplicable nature or religion emerging as the fantastic reflection in man's mind of those external forces that control the daily life.[47] Marxist thinker George Thompson constructed the relationship between man and nature. The reciprocities of this physical labour developed gradually a consciousness in humans. The fear, emotions and labour led the cause to build a religion. [48] Thus, Thompson considers both intellectual and emotional elements for the origin of the religion.

The intellectual approach is also very close to this argument and analyses it as a first intellectual attempt of a man to understand natural phenomena and biological events for his survival. Tylor further describes the phenomena of biological fact. The emotionalist approach claims that religion and spiritual beliefs take birth from feelings of wonder, awe, fear and respect. Such admiration is aroused by natural entities such as mountains and the sun or natural occurrences such as storms.[49] Marett posited a pre-animistic stage where a belief in 'mana' prevailed. [50] The nineteenth-century evolutionists assumed that primitive religion arouses out of ignorance and intellectual inadequacy and therefore, would not last forever. The alternative approach to religion was influenced by functional theory. Primarily, the adherents of this approach like Durkheim, Redcliffe-Brown, Malinowski and Evan-Pritchard attempted to show that religion is functional to social cohesion and solidarity of society.

By the time of the advent of modern sciences, materialistic philosophies had gained much significance, and materialistic interpretations were accepted, by and large, valid in the fields of sociology, economics, political science, psychology and history.

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46 F. Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, Vol. 3, William and Norgate, London, 1876-1896; E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, Vol. 1, New York: G.B. Putnam's Sons, 1920.

47 Uday Mehta, *Religion and Gurus in Traditional and Modern India,* Kalpaz Publications, New Delhi, 2018, p. 18.

48 George Thompson, *The Human Essence,* Rahul Foundation, Lucknow, 2008, pp. 9-23.

49 J.Troisi, *Tribal Religions,* p. 3.

50 R.R. Marett, *The Threshold of Religion,* Methuen, London, 1990, p. 3.

All these studies focused on the phenomena of the empirical world but took less or no account of the transcendent world. From the viewpoint of religion, the worldviews of these disciplines are partial and lop-sided. Their methods and assumptions can be valid within the domains of particular disciplines. However, it creates problems and contestations when these disciplines regarded these implications for the study of religion as well. Arvind Pal Mandair argues that "religion relates primarily to the transcendent world which is of little concern to the social scientist. Consequently, the methods of social sciences are of little use for the study of religion.[51] J.S. Grewal comments that religion has developed its own methodology and principles of study leading to a world-view that is holistic and comprehensive instead of being limited and narrow. Ontology is too central to be ignored.[52]

The intellectual-historical approach since the times of the Enlightenment took structural changes in the consideration for understanding religion. This movement oversimplifies religion and tradition. Further, the orientalists have stretched the ideas and described the civilisations of China and India under the garb of the 'mystic East'.[53] This trend of historiography attested to Indian tradition or South Asian tradition and its understanding of history writing as conventional. J.S. Mill sowed the seeds of communalization to compartmentalize the period as the Hindu period and the Muslim period. But it is rightly argued that European Christianity was purely exempted from these types of investigations.[54] It creates differences filled with the notion of superiority. It was particularly prominent in the intellectual climate of nineteenth-century colonialism. Theories of evolution and race were freely applied in the comparative study of religion, originally understood as disingenuous comparisons intended to reveal which religion was superior.[55] In the words of Carl Ernst, "When other religions showed as hybrid composed of various 'oriental' influences then it created the dependency over it and inferiority in nature. Despite the later progress of

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51 Christopher Shackle, Gurharpal Singh, Arvind Pal Mandair, *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity*, Curzon, Richmond, 2001, p.53.

52 J.S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1998, p. 275.

53 Carl, W. Ernst, "Situating Sufism and Yoga," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15, 1, 2005, p. 18.

54 Yogesh Snehi, *Spatialising Popular Sufi Shrines in Punjab*, pp.1-2.

55 Carl W. Ernst, "Situating Sufism and Yoga", pp. 18-19.

historical research into the relation of Christianity to the cultural and religious world into which it was born, the colonial legacy of ambivalence towards 'oriental religions' still lingers. In addition, it is also important to recognize the extent to which the romantic concept of the 'mystic east' was a screen for debates about religion in the European Christian contexts. Problematic issues coded under the names of mysticism and pantheism could be projected in this way onto a foreign oriental substratum".[56] However, there are many differences between urban and village societies. In South Asia, the village community has diverse concepts such as popular religions and folk beliefs. Harjot Oberoi further stretches this diverse tradition and connects it with the peasantry. He states that the peasant settlements, spatially removed from urban centres and geared to a production system predominantly based on household production and consumption, had an inbuilt centripetal force. Among other things, this contributed to an amorphous growth of local gods, deities and spirits.[57]

In the conventional historiography of religious studies, religion is understood as conservatism and it does not have a space for the reason. In the historical method, there is not much space for religion. It can be argued that a high proportion of the historiography of religion is occupied by some western thoughts which illuminated religion to be considered an oppressive force and hamper the scientific temper. With the rise of the nationalist approach to religious studies, colonial ideas also encountered this area of study.

Religion in India today is a phenomenon of great significance.[58] It is directly used in the political arena which affects the lives of its citizens in varied manners. However, in recent years, religion constitutes and demonstrates many functions. Generally, in contemporary times, religion is considered a conservative, retrogressive force that hampers free thinking and the progress of society as well. But this statement is obscure when religion is deep-rooted in the lives of large sections of the people. Regis Debray considers religion an important fact in society. The continued centrality

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56 Yogesh Snehi, *Popular Sufi Shrines in Punjab,* p.2.

57 Harjot Oberoi, *Construction of the Religious Boundaries*, p. 15.

58 See S.N. Eisenstadt, Reuven Kahane and David Schulman (eds.) *Orthodoxy. Heterodoxy and Dissent in India*, Mouton Publishers, New York, 1984; P.N. Chopra (ed.) *Religions and Communities of India*, East-West Publication Ltd. UK, 1982; E. J. Bardwell L. Smith. Leiden (ed.) "Religion and Social Conflict in South Asia", *Brill International Studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology,* Vol. XXII, 1976, p. 117.

of religious ideas is perhaps because these try to tackle the problem of human suffering, whereas all progressive styles of thought approach the issue with impatient silence[59]. Then religion is not to be represented as a regressive force in society. A bunch of scholars like David Hardiman, Rosalind O'Hanion, Mark Jurgensmeyer, Saurabh Dube and Ishitia Banerjee Dube have studied the low-caste and untouchable movements in India and have shown the different ways in which religion has been drawn upon and appropriated by different groups to critique and question domination and authority.[60] Religion becomes an agency itself to challenge authority. In this study, an attempt is being made to understand the religion as a mode of resistance of the subordinate masses in the Punjab, whom the religion filled with enthusiasm to live and search for the meaning of life. Here subordinate groups symbolize the 'marginal' in society and faded entity in historiography.

However, there is a shift in South Asian Historiography which recognizes religion itself as an autonomous agency for these marginal groups in the making of history.[61] Ishita Banerjee Dubey understands this transformation as the speculation which provided much-needed corrective to the tendency to subsume the initiative of subordinate groups within the construct of elite leadership.[62] However, in the transformation and shift, religion remains aloof and marginalizes itself in historiography. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century's low caste and untouchable studies claimed that efforts as a 'movement' consolidated with organized leadership but the role of religion was marginal. However, an overemphasis on autonomy prompted the social scientists to neglect the close ties of authority and

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59 Regis Debray, "Marxism and the National Question", *New Left Review*, 105 (September-October 1977) p.29 cited in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso Publishers, London, 1983, p.18.

60 On the conduct of resistance in a religious idiom, see David Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1987; Rosalind O'Hanion, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1985; Mark Jurgensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement Against Untouchabi1ity in 20th Century Punjab*, University of California, Berkeley, 1992; Saurabh Dube, *Religion, Identity and Authority among the Satnamis of Colonial Central India*, Unpublished PhD. Thesis, Cambridge University, Cambridge, 1992.

61 D.R. Nagraj and Prithvi Datta Chandra Shobhi, (ed.), *The Flaming Feet and Other Essays: The Dalit Movement in India*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2014.

62 Ishita Banerjee Dube, Johannes Beltz, (ed.), *Popular Religion and Ascetic Practices: New Studies on Mahima Dharma*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2008, pp-14-22.

domination with the subaltern agency.[63] Stephen Fuchs and K.S. Singh argued in their studies that the tribal movements which were infused with a religious ideology, prophetic leaders led their followers in pursuit of the millennium.[64]

In modern Indian history, religious tradition is studied as a discourse and the historians who study religion are trying to analyse its 'essence', and for this quest they critically analyse sources. Yogesh Snehi argues that when this 'source' gets recognized, religion is a-historically established in its 'pure' and unchanging 'essence'.[65] This largely 'modern' conception of religion then seeks to explain the 'foreign imports' and 'influences' as deviating from the 'original.'[66] Here the idea of world religions and the comparative study of religion is more relevant. Carl Ernst understands the concept of religions as ideologies competing for world domination, and evidence of dependence on foreign influences is a sure sign of weakness in this game.[67] Carl Ernst continues his argument and refutes this conventional idea and argues that this model is fine if one is engaging in missionary activities but for an analytical appreciation of the nature of religion, it is seriously flawed.[68]

The study of religion involves a study of the spiritual dimensions and experiences of man. However, the study of religion does not fit under the domain of sociology, anthropology and history. Therefore, religion has its own tools to understand society, its own methodology and principles of study which take cognizance of a higher level of reality. The study of religion requires sharp insights into the totality of life including transcendental knowledge concerning God, the universe and the human spirit.[69] For example, if we are going to study a tribe or its culture then we follow the

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63 For these questions see Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash (eds.*) Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 199, p. 307.

64 Stephen Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religions*, Asia Publication House, London**,** 1965; K.S. Singh, *Birsa Munda and His Movement 1887-1901: A Study of a Millenarian Movement in Chota Nagpur*, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 2002.

65 Yogesh Snehi, *Spatializing Popular Sufi Shrines in Punjab*, pp.2-3.

66 *Ibid*, p.2.

67 Carl, W., Ernst, "Situating Sufism and Yoga," pp. 15-16.

68 *Ibid*, p, 15-16.

69 Christopher Shackle, Gurharpal Singh, Arvind Pal Mandair, *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity*, p. 54.

ethnographic tools to understand them. Then why there are no such methods to study religion which will help us to understand spirituality, transcendent power and metaphysics?

Historical consciousness is not an immediate reaction originating at once and not just any sort of construction of past times. Romila Thapar says that the construction has a function, it claims historicity, and it implies some degree of causation.[70] Generalizations can hardly be made about a single, unified sense of history in the west; furthermore, the understanding among historians of what constitutes a historical consciousness is different now, as compared to what it was a century ago.[71] She states that ideology is the main course that carved out history and, the ideologies which influence the historiography to draw from both existing political, economic and religious concerns and the historiography changes when these change.[72] Prejudice has a negative connotation that constructed controversies. Thapar argues that "The definition of accuracy could be subordinate to the prejudices of ideology. This reminds us that reconstruction of history is always a representation and cannot be the "complete truth".[73] Singularity is the project of homogenization. In the context of historiography, Thapar argues that history as the narrative of a single voice also becomes problematic because each such text is also an articulation of its contexts: the historian has to be aware of both, and this was seldom recognized in pre-modern times.[74]

The Oriental scholarship is rooted in general religious history and particularly in Hindu and Muslim contexts. In pre-independence South Asia, Richard M. Eaton narrates the argument of compartmentalization of historiography by the reference to Gerald James Larson's *India's Agony Over Religion* and challenges the serialized 'sequence' of distinct cultural "layers" rather like the sedimentary strata successively deposited on the ocean floor.[75] The earliest and deepest layers made up from the "Indus Valey" to the "Indic (Hindu-Buddhist-Jain)", are seen as indigenous and authentically

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70 Romila Thapar, *The Past Before Us*: *Historical Traditions of Early North India*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2013, p. 8.

71 *Ibid*, p.15.

72 *Ibid*, p. 50.

73 *Ibid*, p. 51.

74 *Ibid*, p.51.

75 Gerald J.Larson*, India's Agony over Religion*, Sunny Press, Albany, 1995, p.53.

South Asian whereas the more recent layers- the "Indo-Islamic" and "Indo-Anglian"- as alien and fundamentally inassimilable.[76] From the late tenth century, we are told, "intrusion" by Muslims "became a serious threat to the independence of the subcontinent."[77] The 'clash' between civilizations denoted and constructed the vision of communalization in historiography.[78] Richard M. Eaton criticises Larson for reinstating Huntington's problematic theory of clash of the civilization and projecting it back to the tenth century, 'construing an alien Islam as intruding on an indigenous Hinduism'. [79] In the theory, that clash of civilizations faded the real essence of religious pluralism. It also obscures cultural fluidity and religious flexibility. Eaton further describes the effects of this clash on society, however, prevents him from considering how religious traditions emerge, disappear or evolve over time, how they adapt to the different cultural environments, freely assimilating some bits and pieces of those environments, but not the others.[80]

Tradition, Modernization and Methodology

Based on the deconstruction of tradition and irreconcilable opposites such as 'theism' versus 'atheism' 'sacred' versus 'secular' and 'sacred' versus 'profane', various studies have provided the much-needed corrective to the belief that we cannot think about religion except insofar and this thinking is grounded in history or that movements such as post-structuralism and anti-imperialism necessarily undermine religious and traditional perspective.[81] Sacredness is the essence of religion. N. Soderblom was the first to draw attention to the significance of this term.[82] Rudolf Otto made this notion popular with the writing *Das Heilige (The Sacred)* in 1917.[83] The first basic and general definition of the sacred is that it is the opposite of the profane. The man's

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76 *Ibid*., p. 53.

77 *Ibid*., pp. 52-53.

78 Samuel P. Huntington*, "The Clash of Civilizations?" Foreign Affairs,* 72, 3, 1993, pp. 22-49.

79 Richard, M. Eaton, "Rethinking Religious Divides," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 73, 2, 2014, pp. 306.

80 *Ibid*, p. 307.

81 *Ibid*, p.50.

82 Bleeker, C.J. The *Sacred Bridge: Researches into the Nature and Structure of Religion,* Leifen, Netherlands, 1963, p.36.

83 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of Holy-Interpretation and Analysis,* Oxford University Press, London, 1956, pp.10-15.

manifestations, emotions and faiths are very different and attached to the sacred which distinguished the profane.

Arvind Pal Mandair talks about an ontological devaluation of tradition and a denial of tradition's appeal to transcendental authority. Mandair argues over the concepts of doubt and negation to the tradition in religious studies. He states that "scepticism and disinterestedness possess a distinct ontological status of their own. Criticism is directed back towards the grounding principle of inquiry. Scepticism is a general feeling of doubt about something, a feeling that you are not likely to believe something".[84] He quotes W.H. Mcleod who comes down to the simple difference between these two approaches. On the one side stand the historians who trust traditional sources and on the other, the ones who view such sources with scepticism. It is as simple as that.[85] Mandair is not concerned with the origin of the two attitudes. He emphasizes the fact that these certainly do exist and that one must come to terms with their separate existences. Romila Thapar says that the question for the traditionalists is whether history which relies on the work of the intellect and therefore reason, is sufficient for the study of religion.[86]

W.H. Mcleod, like Descartes, believes that doubt and scepticism are already posited in relation to tradition as false opinion, as uncertain, as that which is by default doubtable. Whereas Descartes refers to the received tradition of scholastic theology as the 'false prejudice of our childhood education' Mcleod constructed a context and suggests that the Singh Sabha tradition entertains and perpetuates unexamined opinions related to material sources and opinions that must be doubted, and that cannot be regarded as factual until believable evidence can be found to support it. This is an overall strategy that involves both the simultaneous overcoming and devaluation of tradition as that which had been handed down and the search for which cannot be doubted, namely self-contrary.[87] However, doubt and scepticism are therefore linked to the project of modernity.

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84 Christopher Shackle, Gurharpal Singh, Arvind Pal Mandair, *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity*, p. 50.

85 W.H. Mcleod, "Cries of Outrage: History Versus Tradition in the Study of the Sikh Community", *South Asia Research*, 14, 2, 1994, pp. 121-35.

86 Romila Thapar, *The Past Before Us*, p.53.

87 Christopher Shackle, Gurharpal Singh, Arvind Pal Mandair, *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity*, p.52.

Arvind Pal Mandair attempts to locate the problem as part of what has been variously described as the current intellectual and methodological crisis or rupture in the human and social sciences.[88] In the areas of power, truth and dominant socio-political order classify an industry that produced and has different intellectual dissent in terms of as such tradition and religion. Mandair mentions the theories of Kant and Schleiermacher which certainly advanced the discussion beyond the deistic preoccupation with rationalized religion and they tended to leave religion confined to the private sphere of subjectivity with no connection to time or the lived world.[89] They confined the religion to a secular entity. Ashish Nandy in his critique of religion as an ideology also holds the view that secularism in India is not only irrelevant but has proved harmful to Indian society. He blames secularism and modernity for the new religious violence witnessed by the country in recent years. He characterizes secularism as a child of modernity and colonialism as a product of western science and rationality. It functions as the ideology of the modern state, which Nandy thinks of as a source of most contemporary problems. He argues that the secular state and its elite, with its instrumental rationality and a moral and manipulative technocratic managerial ethos, have been responsible for the greatest atrocities of this century from the Third Reich to the Gulags, from Hiroshima to the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi.[90] Nandy advocates that the Indian state has much to learn about morality from Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism, while Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism have nothing to learn from the secular state in this respect. [91] Romila Thapar has crystallized the method to understand religion, history and tradition. She reflects, firstly on the point in history at which the need to create and keep a tradition becomes imperative. Secondly, the social status of the keepers of a tradition. Thirdly, whether the tradition was embedded in sacred literature to ensure its continuity. Fourthly, genres emerged to record the tradition independent of the literary form. Fifthly, the social context in which the historical tradition was composed and changed. Sixthly, the audience for which any specific text of that tradition was intended

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88 W.H. Mcleod, "Cries of Outrages", pp.132-33.

89 Christopher Shackle, Gurharpal Singh, Arvind Pal Mandair, *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity*, p.57.

90 Ashish Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Toleration" in Veena Das(ed.), *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 101-17.

91 *Ibid*, p.117.

and seventhly the social groups which used or manipulated the tradition and their reasons for doing so.[92]

Modern historical writings were initiated to dump the supernatural and the divine for the sake of rational understanding of the past and explaining historical change as well. This assumption can be seen in the earliest European writings on the Sikhs. However, this historical approach can be seen in the course of Sikh history. Recently, there are some scholars trained in western universities and initiated certain controversies over the Sikh tradition and sources. Mcleod's propositions constructed the feeling of doubt and scepticism over Sikh traditions by depicting Guru Nanak as an 'aetiological legend'.[93] Interestingly, Mcleod minimizes the tradition as an 'invention'. Finally, the intellect and methods as they are known as perfect or absolute, are inadequate. Without mapping its reliability, it does not comprehend the whole to see things in the spotlight. C.S. Lewis states that every emergent religion relies on prior religious traditions as points of reference for a new vision of spiritual reality.[94] This is very true and contextual to Sikhism too.

Another problem created by western scholarship about Sikhism is in the context of the shifting paradigm of 'pacifism' of Guru Nanak and the militancy of Guru Gobind Singh. In the Indian context, this development has a peculiar bearing on Sikhism with its doctrine of Miri Piri, or the integral combination of the spiritual and the empirical life of man. There is a dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of a man in Indian religions. J.S. Grewal argues that Guru Nanak was the first man to break this dichotomy, leading logically to the doctrines of Miri-Piri.[95] The message of Guru Nanak, for Mcleod, is liberation through *Naam Simran* as the supreme purpose of human life but Daljit Singh argues that liberation in life results in altruistic social action.[96] For Mcleod, the institutionalization of the Sikh movement was a historical

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92 Romila Thapar, *The Past Before Us*, p. 5.

93 W.H. Mcleod, "The Cries of Outrages", p. 125.

94 C.S. Lewis, *Compelling Reason: Essays on Ethics and Theology*, Harper Collins, London, 2017, pp.12-38.

95 J.S. Grewal, *Sikh Ideology, Polity and Social Order*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2007; *Historical Perspectives on Sikh Identity*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1997; *Lectures on Religion: Sikh Identity and Politics in the Punjab*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2014.

96 Daljit Singh, "Origin of Sikh Faith" in Gurdev Singh (ed.), *Perspectives on the Sikh Tradition*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1996, pp.55-8; Daljeet Singh, *The Sikh Ideology*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1990, pp. 112-13

phenomenon but again Daljit Singh argues that it was inbuilt into Guru Nanak's conception of the purpose of life.[97] Mcleod places Guru Nanak within the Sant tradition and for him, Guru Nanak's successor diverged from his doctrines and at one stage even gave up his teachings in favour of militancy.[98] Daljit Singh contests his view and states that Guru Nanak's dispensation was something new in which spiritual and temporal concerns were two sides of the same coin of faith. Indeed, for Daljit Singh, no institutionalization can be attributed to any saint before this movement.[99] J. S. Grewal argues that for the other saints, liberation in life was a personal project, for Guru Nanak it was the social project for the redemption of others. According to Daljeet Singh, the men of religion feel that given the growing secularizing of modern life, and its tendency to encroach on the religious field, it is necessary to study religion with the tool of its own discipline.[100] Certain frameworks have, by default, set these concepts. As Arvindpal Mandair states that secular scholarship by its very nature will inevitably undermine the faith of ordinary Sikhs.[101]

Mcleod argues that the concept of Miri-Piri or militarization was not because of the decision of Guru Hargobind but because of the Jat influx.[102] He also refuted the traditional account of the founding of the Khalsa and states that the five K's and the Khalsa code of conduct transformed and evolved during the eighteenth century and these were not promulgated by Guru Gobind Singh on the Baisakhi of 1699.[103] He eulogizes the Sikh Gurus for denouncing the caste system but for him, they did not take sincere or serious actions to remove the caste differences. He further argues that the authenticity of the current version of Guru Granth Sahib is open to question.[104] Further,

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97 J.S. Grewal, *Historical Writings on the Sikhs*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2012, p. 500.

98 Daljit Singh, "Origin of Sikh Faith", pp. 55-8; Daljeet Singh, *The Sikh Ideology*, pp. 112-13.

99 *Ibid*. 112.

100 *Ibid*. 113.

101 Christopher Shackle, Gurharpal Singh, Arvind-pal Singh Mandair, *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity*, p. 48.

102 W.H. Mcleod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996, p. 92.

103 *Ibid*, p. 92.

104 For a critique of Mcleod see Gurdev Singh (ed.), *Perspectives in the Sikh Tradition*, pp. 15-21; Daljeet Singh, "*Origin of Sikh Faith"*, pp. 55-58, Daljeet Singh, *The Sikh Ideology*, pp. 112-13. J.S. Grewal, *The Bani of Guru Nanak: Lectures on History, Society and Culture of the Punjab*, Punjab Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2007, pp. 101-29; J.S. Grewal, '*Guru Nanak and his Panth', The Sikhs: Ideology, Institution and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 3-21.

Piar Singh's *Gatha Shri Adi Granth* produced in 1992 was the scholarly research for the genuine contents of the Granth prepared by Guru Arjun. He argues that the Kartarpuri Bir was a fake copy and not the original Adi Granth prepared by Bhai Gurdas.[105] Gurinder Singh Mann's work shows that Guru Harsahai Pothi, the Goindwal Pothi and the MS 1245 are still controversial but their evidence has provided a historical view of the process that led to the compilation of the Kartarpur Pothi. Scriptural manuscripts of the Damdami Bir, based on the Kartarpur Pothi, had come into existence in the time of Guru Teg Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh before the end of the seventeenth century, Guruship was vested in the Damdami Bir.[106] Pashaura Singh's 'draft theory' and 'power hypothesis' and his view that Maharaja Ranjit Singh made the Damdami Bir authorized version, are more conjectural than empirical and rather misleading.[107]

Noel Q. King wrote 'Essays in the Perspectives in the Sikh Tradition' which was based on his intensive travelling and field research but it is much based and influenced by the views of religious studies in the West. King holds the view that weapons developed in the study of one religion can be dangerous when turned to the study of another religion.[108] Furthermore, the scholar's personal belief or non-belief and attachment to the faith affect his attitudes towards other people's religion**.** King analyses the work of the orientalists on religion in Asia and Africa and concludes that the circumstances of the scholar and personality are very important.

In academic circles it is assumed that a scholar's motives come from 'rational intellectuality', therefore, should not be regarded as hitting below the belt. [109] King observed that in the field of Sikh studies 'not many western critically trained scholars' have turned their attention to Sikhism. This relative neglect of its study should be a concern for the Sikhs too, especially if they desire to have their religion explained to a wider world.[110] In this regard, King discusses Earnest Trump, M.A. Macauliffe and

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105 J.S. Grewal, *Historical Writings on the Sikhs: Western Enterprise and Indian Response*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2012, p. 495; See also, Pashaura Singh, *The Text and Meaning of the Adi Granth*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2013.

106 J.S. Grewal, *Historical Writings on the Sikhs*, p. 504.

107 *Ibid*, p. 504.

108 J.S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*, p. 269.

109 *Ibid*, p. 47.

110 J.S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*, p. 269.

their concerns about the Sikh religion. Then he mentions C.H. Loehlin who had a deep respect for the Sikh people. Mcleod is a leading western scholar. His meticulously carried out work is based on careful use of 'text-critical, form-critical and other-critical methods; developed in the West during the last two centuries. He assumes that a great amount of Sikh belief is based on uncritical religiosity.[111] King comments that Mcleod has ignored the oral sources to study Sikhism. Richard C. Temple rightly asserts that the folk tale is the true reflex of consciousness of the community.[112] J.S. Grewal states that there is a living, unbroken reliable tradition of the sayings and doings of 1699 quite apart from writing, which is still alive in Punjab.[113]

To over-emphasise on doctrinal precepts of Sikh tradition and critique Harjot Oberoi's emphasis on Sanatanist to argue for the fluidity of Sikh identity, Grewal accuses the former of precluding the possibility of any meaningful linkages with the past. [114] These polemics on the definition of tradition are largely dialects of methodological questions and epistemological interpretations. [115] The historians continue to habitually fabricate neat and linear narratives of Punjab's history and perpetually undervalue the multifaceted and overlapping cultural narratives of the past produced within the social history of one community. Western academia has deliberately distorted the true teaching of Sikhism thereby presenting a false picture of Sikhs and Sikh tradition to the outside world and other religions as well.

Conventional scholarship on religion, both colonial as well as scholarship produced post-reorganization of Punjab in 1966, has largely focused on the reinterpretation of core Sikh texts. A mention should be made of the contribution of W. H. Mcleod and J.S. Grewal that inspired scholars during the second half of the

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111 *Ibid*, p. 270.

112 Richard, C. Temple, *The Legends of Punjab*, Vol. I, Language Department, Patiala, 1963(Reprint), p.1.

113 J.S. Grewal, *Perspectives on the Sikh Tradition*, pp. 49-50.

114 J.S. Grewal, *Lectures on Religion: Sikh Identity and Politics in the Punjab*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2014**,** pp.297-300.

115 Tony Ballantyne, "Looking Back, Looking Forward: The Historiography of Sikhism", *New Zeland Journal of Asian Studies* 4, 1 (2002): 5-29; Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994; Pashaura Singh, "Revising the Evolution of Sikh Community", *Journal of Punjab Studies* 17, 1&2, 2010, pp. 45-74.

twentieth century. [116] During the colonial period, socio-religious reform movements and their colonial encounter shaped the controversy and created tension between religious communities and identity consciousness. The Western scholarship on Sikh studies has produced a textual scholarship that made religion (Sikhism) a textual community. This shrinks the heterogeneity of religious studies and reflects a continued legacy of colonialism in Punjab.[117] Yogesh Snehi, while discussing Cynthia Talbot, Gyanendra Pandey and Romila Thapar, addresses this problem and argues that the historians who forayed into the deconstruction of the Hindu identity in ancient India produced by colonial scholarship have sought to disentangle the problematic questions of religious and communal identity.[118] These historians understand the term Hinduism as a modern concept. At the same time, identities have been shuffling in the domain of the sect. Talking about the scholars who have studied the medieval Bhakti movement, Dominique Sila Khan argues that one could compare these attempts to the efforts of the religious leaders of the sects founded by Kabir and Dadu, and their reconstruction of history is aimed at proving that these Muslim saints were in reality Hindus.[119] But it is equally important to stress, at this stage, that the search for a clear communal identity is a fairly recent trend.[120] These identities were concretized during the colonial period. Romila Thapar adds that the reformation of Hinduism in colonial times drew more heavily from the daily routine of life and its social sources than from the philosophical content.[121]

About Muslim identity, Ishwar Dayal Gaur conceptualizes the meaning and context. He states that the term Muslim has been used simply to explain and highlight the holistic and open-ended nature and character of the socio-religious and cultural

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116 Farina Mir, '*Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Poetry',* Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir (eds.), *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Practice and Culture*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 190-221.

117 Yogesh Shehi, *Spatializing Popular Sufi Shrines in Punjab,* p. 3.

118 *Ibid*, p. 4.

119 Dominique Sila Khan, *Conversions and Shifting Identities: Ramdev Pir and the Ismailis in Rajasthan*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2003, p.19.

120 R.E. Frykenberg, "The Emergence of Modern Hinduism as a Concept and as an Institution: A Reappraisal with Special Reference to South India", in G.D. Sontheimer and H. Kulke (eds.) *Hinduism Reconsidered*, Manohar, Delhi, 1991, pp. 21-22.

121 Romila Thapar, *The Past as Present: Forging Contemporary Identities Through History*, Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2014, p. 139.

ethos of those people of Punjab who, in the context of the great Islamic Traditions (or in the colonial census reports), is situated in the standardized category of 'Muslims'.[122] The political polarization on a religious basis constructed and concretized communal identities. Gaur argues that politicization and communalization of the identity, both in the east and west Punjab, have transfigured the socio-cultural diversities into religious differences.[123] These differences shrink the ethnic plurality. In the first quarter of the sixteenth century, the discourse of identity stimulated by Guru Nanak in the Babar Bani is not religious but ethnic. Babur, the invader, and the Lodhis, the rulers of Punjab/Hindustan are not 'Muslims', but Turk and Pathan, as addressed by Nanak.[124]

The advent of the Aryans and that of Islam and its spread from the eighth to the fourteenth century, the emergence of Sikhism in the fifteenth-sixteenth century, and the establishment of the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the eighteenth century are generally significant pre-colonial historical milestones in the development of Punjabi society and culture.[125] The tendency to preset, propagate and promote Punjab's history and culture from the communitarian perspective has prevailed since the annexation of Punjab by the British in 1849.[126]

The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate was a landmark in the social and cultural history of Punjab. The conversion to Islam proved to be a kind of socio-cultural reciprocity between 'outsiders' and 'insiders'.[127] During this time, conversions were neither hegemonic nor religious in the strict sense. The medieval conversions to Islam were neither sudden nor imposed. There was a gradual process of spontaneous fusion of Islam. [128] Shaikh Farid and Guru Nanak were more cultural icons of Punjab than religious leaders. As cultural bearers, not as religious leaders, they contributed to the Punjabi language and literature. [129] The socio-cultural fabric of the Delhi Sultanate was

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122 Ishwar Dayal Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy*, p. 18.

123 *Ibid*., p.18.

124 *Ibid*., pp.18-19.

125 *Ibid*., p.19.

126 *Ibid*., p.19.

127 *Ibid*, p.19.

128 *Ibid*, p. 50.

129 J.S. Grewal, 'Historical Geography of the Punjab', *Journal of Punjab Studies*, 11, 1, 2004, pp. 11-12.

tied with Yogis, Sufis and Bhaktas both of *Nirguna* and *Sarguna* traditions. There was a huge mutual harmony and respect among them. While working on Hir Waris, Ishwar Dayal Gaur gives reference to the Pir cult, prominent in Hir Waris, which was a significant feature of popular religion in the Sultanate period.[130]

There is an absence of 'religion' in dominant historical discourses which do not provide sufficient space for a historical accounting regarding religious tradition. Twenty-first-century historiography on Punjab reflects a major paradigm shift in the field, having transitioned from idealized, linear and descriptive narrative frameworks, towards more complex and methodological nuanced narrativizations of historical processes and the unconventional use of both canonical and as well as non-canonical texts, material culture, and oral narratives, thus materializing the past and raising challenging questions about the issue of representation.[131] When the local literary sources are assigned a marginalized status in historiography, then Punjab historians dealing with mainstream religions like Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism make no mention of the works of Jogis, Sufis, Bhaktas and Qissa-kars and medieval Punjabi society is misrepresented as bifurcated based on Islam and Hinduism.[132] However, the various sects and cults established communal harmony and heterogeneity in the religious tradition.

Sect and its Formation

The sect is defined as divergent faith from the main conventional movement or the mainstream religious establishment. A sect is a group of individuals who have separated from the larger community, who are nonconformists by disposition, and who adhere to somewhat different beliefs and observances (usually labelled as heretical). Anshu Malhotra defines the 'sects' as sampradayas, panths, or deras, which are the groupings of people sutured together based on specific doctrinal and philosophical inclinations and often ritual and cultic practices and which were surely available in

130 Ishwar Dayal Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy*, p. 52.

131 Surinder Singh and Iswar Dayal Gaur (eds.), *Sufism in Punjab: Mystics, Literature and Shrines,* Akaar Books, Delhi, 2009; Surinder Singh and Iswar Dayal Gaur, *Popular Literature and Pre-Modern Societies in South Asia*; Pearson Longman, Delhi, 2008; Ishwar Dayal Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy*; Anna Murphy, *Materiality of the Sikh Past: History and Representation in Sikh Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New, Delhi, 2013; Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and Gulabdasis: Gender, Sect and Society in Punjab*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017.

132 Ishwar Dayal Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy*, p. 150.

numbers in India signalling perhaps a pattern rather than a deviation from it.[133] Most Indian languages use the word panth to denote a sort of moral collective of believers. But then any tradition could be made up of several conflicting panths and the word does not exactly fit into a uniform, centralized, religious community possessing a fixed canon and well-demarcated social and cultural boundaries. The sect has a well-defined structure that has a founder called Saint as well who is responsible for structured movement. The saint has lineages of gurus and disciples; carries sacred scripture and particular shrines. Being a part of a sect can be a lifetime commitment or part-time involvement. On the other hand, cults can be perceived as small groups of people that are having different ways of life, beliefs, and rites and are totally devoted to a particular system, object, or figure, including an intense loyalty to the leaders and founders of their group. Dominique Sila Khan simply differentiates the cult from the sect with the example of Ramdev Pir who has denied a fixed body of scripture, set of rituals, beliefs, no central cult leaders or organization and his descendants have inherited his temple as property, not as a spiritual legacy.[134] A cult can be a deviant social unit or quasi-religious organization with exclusive ideology and skewed practices, using deceitful and manipulative psycho-social strategies to recruit new members and to control the rest of its followers.[135] Although there are many similarities between sects and cults, many social analysts consider sects as mild forms of social deviance while cults as more severe, pathological, and entities.

The sects are the primary centres that were connected and preached religion. Sometimes the nature of a sect and its teachings minimize the labels of mainstream religions. In this regard, F. Staal reflecting on the question of the non-existence of differences between Hindus and Buddhists in the Himalayas argues on the futility of looking for religious communities in the Indian context: “Many differences are only due to the difference between the label ‘Hindu’ and ‘Buddhist’. For the follower of any of these traditions, the issue is not such labels, but where he received his teachings and through what kind of immediate transmission (*prampara*). The teachings may originate from his natural surroundings (i.e. family, community, or village) or a teacher (*guru prampara*). Such immediate transmission is the only identifiable feature of what we

133 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and Gulabdasis*, p. xxiv.

134 Dominique Sila Khan, *Conversions and Shifting Identities*, pp. 19-20.

135 *Ibid*, p. 20.

tend to call 'religious affiliation'. However, many such transmissions taken together may not constitute a meaningful unit. The term religious affiliation is therefore a misnomer. It reflects labels that are attached primarily by outsiders".[136]

Since the 1930s, plenteous literature has been produced on Indian sects, saints and bhakti traditions. These studies, particularly the earlier ones, have tended to focus either on the ideas, cosmologies and philosophies of these sects and cults to situate them within a linear history of religious ideas and principles[137] or have relied on detailed textual exegesis[138] to neglect the beliefs and actual practices of the followers of these traditions. Recent works on sects are characterized by a different preoccupation: they evaluate and question Dumont's influential model which conceives the relation between sect and caste as dichotomous, based on an assumed opposition between Brahman and renouncer, householder and the ascetic, man-in-the world and individual-outside-the world.[139] These works question the dichotomies by pointing out that sects do not necessarily recognize any opposition between the renouncer and the householder. They adopt different approaches - from total rejection to varying forms of acceptance - towards the rules of caste.[140]

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136 F. Staal, '*The Himalayas and the Fall of Religion*', in Deorah E. Klimburg Salter (ed.), *The Sikh Route and the Dianonde Path*, UCLA Art Council, Los Angeles, 1982, p. 41.

137 Kshitimohan Sen, *Medieval Mysticism of India*, Luzac And Co., London, 1930; Shashi Bhushan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1946; P.D. Barthwal, *Traditions of Indian Mysticism Based Upon Nirguna School of Hindi Poetry*, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, 1978; Daniel Gold, *The Lord as Guru: Hindi Sants in the North Indian Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1987; K. Schomer and W.H. McLeod (ed.) *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1987.

138 Charlotte Vaudeville, *Kabir*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1974; Linda Hess and Sukhdev Singh, *The Bijak of Kabir*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1983.

139 Louis Dumont, *Religion, Politics and History in India: Collected Papers in Indian Sociology*, Mouton Publishers, The Hague, 1970, pp.33-60.

140 Richard Burghart, "Renunciation in the Religious Traditions of South Asia", *Man* (New Series), 18, 4, 1983, pp.635-53; David Lorenzen, *'Kabirpanth and Social Protest'*, in Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod (eds.), *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, Motilal Banarsidass Delhi, 1987, pp.281-303; Saurabh Dube's work on the Satnamis of Chhattisgarh has looked at the question of caste and sect from the perspective of the members of a non-twice-born caste, all of whom were essentially householders: Saurabh Dube, *Religion, Identity and Authority Among the Satnamis in Colonial Central India, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, 1992*. For objections to the use of the term 'sect', see, W.H. McLeod, "On the Word Panth: A Problem of Definition and Terminology", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, (New Series), 12, 1978, pp.287-95.

In recent years, a new dimension has been added to religious studies with the publication of detailed and careful analyses of the role and functions of ritual specialists. [141] These works have chalked out the varied responses of religious functionaries to changing situations, their efforts to cope and negotiate with the authority of the state, law and legislation, and shifts in their fortunes and networks of support. Some of them have moved ahead further; they have drawn attention to the tendency of the legal machinery to intervene in internal strife among the members of a religious 'community'.[142]

The people of this landscape view their respective great religious traditions as evolved out of common indigenous culture, which constituted a pluralistic culture.[143] The ideas of the syncretic tradition were further spread by various cults and sects like Nath-Panthis, Kanpate Yogis, Udasis, Nirmalas, Gulabdasis, Sewapanthis, Namdharis, Niranjanias and Diwanas. There are a lot of objections to the usage of the term syncretism but in South Asia, the term has carried a positive connotation which is invested with a load of demonstration of composite cultures, shared religious sites and religiously mixed following of tombs and saints and it has acted as an antidote to the pathology of communalism.[144]

In recent years, scholars from different disciplines, working in a variety of historical and geographical contexts, have reflected on the merits of syncretism as an analytical category. Charles Stewart, for example, talks about the pejorative connotations of syncretism assumed in the European context due to the seventeenth-century 'syncretistic controversies'.[145] He suggests that its negative connotations in the context of Africa where the religious practices of local African churches were interpreted by some as impure forms of Christianity, should not prevent contemporary

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141 Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth: The Management of Religious Experience and Identity in a North Indian Pilgrimage Centre*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1989; C. Fuller, *Servants of the Goddess: The Priests of a South Indian Temple,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1991

142 Arjun Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1981, p. 22.

143 Ishwar, Dayal Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy,* p. 21.

144 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and Gulabdasis*, p. 20.

145 Charles Stewart, "Syncretism and Its Synonyms: Reflections on Cultural Mixture", *Diacritics* 29, 3, 1999, p. 40.

anthropologists or other social scientists from using the concept as an analytical tool.[146] In this context, he argues that the term syncretism is a pejorative term, one that derides mixture and it presupposes "purity" in the traditions that combine.[147] Brian Hatcher, argues that "It is not sufficient when speaking of syncretism, to refer only to the process of encounter and appropriation; one must also speak of merging, accommodation, and amalgamation."[148]

Syncretism's roots lie in religious studies. Sometimes syncretism is considered a qualitatively loose approach to religion that attempts to dilute the richness of particular practices. South Asian scholars, in particular, have relied heavily on syncretism as a descriptive and analytic term; particularly in their studies of religious practice. They have consistently used syncretism to suggest a simple mixture of two or more distinct religious traditions.[149] Stewart argues about the limitations of syncretism because religious traditions in the early modern period had not yet covered in the ways that syncretism imagines or imposes on them: the myriad forms of the concept of syncretism (when used as an interpretative, rather than strictly descriptive, category) becomes highly problematic in nearly all their applications because they uniformly read into the history the very institutional (ritual, theological, social) structures that are not yet present in an enduring way.[150] But Farina Mir argues that Stewart's criticism of syncretism is grounded in his study of early modern, pre-colonial Bengal but what of the modern, colonial period when the institutional structures of South Asia's religions were perhaps better entrenched?[151] T.R. Kassam understands syncretism as the lucid yet somewhat uneasy coexistence of elements from diverse religious contexts. She

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146 Richard Werbner, "The Suffering Body: Passion and Ritual Allegory in Christian Encounters", *Journal of South African Studies*, 23, 2, 1997, pp. 311-24.

147 Charles Stewart, "Syncretism and Synonyms", p. 41.

148 Hatcher Brian, *Eclecticism and Modern Hindu Discourse*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p. 8.

149 Susan Bayly, "Islam in Southern India: Purist or Syncretic?" in D. H. A. Kolff, (ed.), *Two Colonial Empires: Comparative Essays on the History of India and Indonesia in the Nineteenth Century*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht,1986, pp. 35-73; See also, Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1983.

150 Tony K. Stewart, "In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter Through Translation Theory", *History of Religions*, 40, 3, 2001, p. 262.

151 Farina Mir, "Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives" in Anshu Malhotra, Farina Mir, (eds.) *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture and Practice:* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2012, p. 227.

illustrates this with three facets. The first one is the coexistence of diverse elements; the second is the coherence of their combined configuration and the third is the retention of their respective self-identities whose prominence and recognition depend upon the viewer's perspectives.[152]

Many European writers look upon Sikhism as syncretism, a mixture of Islam and Hindu features. The term syncretism is often seen in the context of the Sikh faith and Guru Nanak to have blended elements of Hinduism and Islam. Guru Dharam Singh Khalsa considered that syncretism is an unhelpful, even erroneous, description of Sikh tradition, and further that anti-syncretism is far more characteristic of Sikh tradition than the opposite.[153] The Hindu and Muslim influences are assumed to be so dominant that there appears to be little new in Sikhism as a religion. The notion of syncretism originated with Christian missionaries or some other group of colonial officials. Their idea implied that Sikhism was something 'spurious' and in this context, they demonstrated the notion of Christian superiority.[154] Lewis rightly points out that Mcleod has deliberately and consciously discarded the concept of syncretism and he has emphasized the originality of Guru Nanak.[155]

Today, syncretism term is a critical term in the domain of cultural studies having concepts such as hybridity of the cultural mixture. In this context, Punjabi *qissas* are an integral part to understand the socio-cultural milieu in the domain of religious and cultural pluralism. These are helpful to understand the religious culture in colonial Punjab.[156] At the same time, Punjabi *qissa* constitutes a regional tradition, one that incorporated the local plurality and social organization of the Punjab.[157] According to Farina Mir, syncretism does not contribute to a nuanced understanding of devotional

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152 T.R. Kassam, *Syncretism on the Model of the Figure-ground: A Study of Pir Sham's Brahma Prakasa'*, in K.K. Young (ed.), *Hermeneutical Paths to the Sacred Worlds of India: Essays in Honour of Robert W. Stevenson,* Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1904**,** pp. 231-41.

153 Guru Dharam Singh Khalsa, "The End of Syncretism: Anti-Syncretism in Sikh Tradition", in N. G. Barrier and Pashaura Singh (eds.), *Sikh Identity,* Manohar, New Delhi, 2001, p. 93.

154 J.S. Grewal*, Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition,* p. 273.

155 *Ibid*, p.273.

156 Farina Mir, "Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives: Rethinking Cultural and Religious Syncretism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 48, 3, 2006, p.728.

157 *Ibid*, pp. 728.

and religious traditions and in the literary realm, syncretism leaves us with only a generic idea of the mixture.[158] In South Asian religiosity, syncretism suggests a priori conflictual relationship between religious traditions, implies that these traditions are coherent, if not pure, and privileges pre-existing religious identities as paramount. To suppose a model of thought, Farina Mir contends that "the devotional practices described and privileged in Punjabi qissas are better understood as reflecting shared notions of piety and participatory in the forms of devotion. She contends that the concept of shared piety opens up more conceptual and analytical space than that accorded by the notion of syncretism."[159]

The sects within Sikhism represent religious pluralism and more or less construct the notion of religious and cultural syncretic tradition. Joginder Singh considers that Hindusim, Sikhism and Islam and their numerous sects and cults express religious and cultural diversity.[160] But in the context of Punjab, Joginder Singh's categorization is very problematic. He states that the Punjabis comprising the Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Scheduled Castes have a common consciousness of shared origins and traditions.[161] But there are scheduled castes in every religious order. Even though in the philosophy of religion, caste does not exist but in the social structure, it has existence.

Before the partition of 1947, four major Sufi orders remained important: The Qadiri Silsilah or order which had closer links with the urban centres of Islamic orthodoxy and other orders and had centres in Lahore and Multan; the Naqshbandi order whose political importance was considerable since the Mughal period and whose influence radiated outwards from the home of its leading saint in Sirhind in the neighbouring state of Patiala; the Suhrawardy order with its major shrine of Sheikh Bahaud-Din Zakaria in Multan; and finally, the indigenous Chishti order which had its greatest influence in East Punjab. Its most important shrine was that of Baba Farid at Pakpattan. Baba Farid was acknowledged as Punjab's leading Sufi saint. [162] There were

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158 *Ibid*, pp. 228-29.

159 *Ibid*, p. 229.

160 Joginder Singh, *Religious Pluralism in the Punjab*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 2016, p. 23.

161 *Ibid*, p.23.

162 Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, Manohar, Delhi, 1988, p. 21.

several folk religious orders which also existed in the Punjab. In colonial Punjab, there were the most popular folk religious cults like Sakhi Sarwar Sultan and Panj Pir (Five Pirs). Sakhi Sarwar is also known as Lakhdata (giver of the lakhs) Lalanwala, Rohian Wala. He was the son of one Zainulabidin and his real name was Sayyid Ahmed.[163] His shrine is located at Nagaha in the Dera Gazi Khan district. The following of this cult was spread in the entire north-west and central region of the Punjab and many villages of Multan, Lahore, Jalandhar and Ludhiana districts and Kapurthala state.[164]

The cult of Panj Pir was very famous among the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs as well. Panj Pirs were represented by Khwaja Qutub-ud Din, Khwaja Mu'inuddin Chishti, Sheikh Nizam-ud-Din Aulia, or as Khwaja Khizar, Said Jalal, Zakaria, Lal Shahbaz and Farid Shakarganj.[165] Who these five saints were, was a matter of choice to be decided by the worshipper. Thus, the notion of *Panj Pir* varied in the various regions of the province. Sometimes these included five Pandavas, sometimes five personages of Shias, and sometimes five Sufi saints. In the centre and west of the province, there was a queer admixture of Hindu and Muslim objects of worship e.g Khwaja Khizar, Durga Devi, Vishnu, Sakhi Sarvar and Guru Gobind Singh.[166] E.D. Maclagan noted that in some parts of the country, Hindus were fond of representing themselves as followers of Panj Pirs.[167] So was true about the Sikhs. In 1911, 79085 Sikhs registered themselves as followers of Sakhi Sarvar.[168] The *khanqah* of the Panj Pir at Abohar is known for its annual fair and its origin is associated with a Hindu Raja, Aya Chand. There are many architectural religious buildings like memorials, mausoleums, dargahs and mosques which represent the Islamic tradition but in contemporary times, these represent the folk religion of the Punjab.

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163 H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North West Frontier Province*, Vol. I, Language Department, Punjab, Patiala, 1990(Reprint), p. 566.

164 Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, pp.139-57.

165 H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North West Frontier Province*, pp.572-3.

166 *Ibid*., 572.

167 E.D. Maclagan, *Census of India 1891, Vol. XIX. The Punjab and its Feudatories*, Superintendent Government Printing, Calcutta, 1892, p.137.

168 Harkishan Singh Kaul, *Census of India, Vol. XIV, Panjab, Part. I*, Civil and Military Gazette, Lahore, 1912, p. 39.

There are many sacred spaces where religious diversity and pluralistic culture can be seen in the Punjab. These cults represented the popular religion and constructed the vision of religious pluralistic culture. On the other hand, cults can be perceived as small groups of people with strange ways of life, beliefs, and rites, and who are totally devoted to a particular system, object, or figure, including an intense loyalty to the leaders and founders of their group. A cult can be a deviant social unit or quasi-religious organization with exclusive ideology and skewed practices, using deceitful and manipulative psychosocial strategies to recruit new members and control the rest of its followers. The word cult in English comes from the French word *culte*, which originally came from the Latin word cultus. It is a system, where an exclusive group of people, live in an obsessive-compulsive type of devotion to a principle, passion, person, or cause. Their habits and rituals can be inwardly oriented, directed toward group survival and self-preservation, or outwardly oriented toward self-propagation, promotion, and generation. [169]

Many dargahs show the religious and cultural milieu in Punjab. The Rauza Sharif in the town of Sirhind, the Dargah Hazi Ratan of Bathinda and the Dargah of Haider Sheikh at Malerkotla are the most important shrines. Rauza Sharif is also known as the dargah of Sheikh Ahmad Faruqi. The annual *urs* is celebrated in memory of the death anniversary of a Sufi saint. It has also a Gurudwara constructed over there in memory of the martyred sons of Guru Gobind Singh. The Dargah of Haider Sheikh is also known as the shrine of the great Sufi saint Mubarak Baba Hazrat Sheikh. This shrine is the symbol of faith, and communal harmony among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs.[170] At his tomb, the simultaneous presence of Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims challenges received notions concerning the definite and definable boundaries between religions and counters the prevalent images of inter-religious communal conflict.[171] It is remembered for the cry for justice by Sher Mohammad Khan the Nawab of Malerkotla in the killing of Shahibzada Fateh Singh and Sahibzada Zorawar Singh; by the order of Subedar of Sirhind, Wazir Khan. Guru Gobind Singh thanked him and blessed him with his Hukamnamha and a kirpan.[172]

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169 Naji Abi-Hashem, "Cults and Sects" in C. R. Figley (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Trauma: An Interdisciplinary Guide*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, 2012, pp. 170-173.

170 I visited the place on 24th October 2019.

171 Anna Barry Bigelow, *Sharing Saints, Shrines, and Stories: Practicing Pluralism in North India,* Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2004, p. xiv.

172 I have personally visited Sher Muhammad Khan's family and explored that narrative.

The Chilla Baba Sheikh Farid at Faridkot is also a very famous shrine. Baba Sheikh Faridudin Ganj Shakar was a great Sufi saint whose verses were incorporated into the Guru Granth Sahib. He was one of the founding fathers of the famous Chishti *Silsila* in India.[173] A Gurudwara is also built over there named Chilla Baba Farid. It contains a piece of wood on which Baba Farid had supposedly wiped his dirty hand. [174] Mazaar Pir Baba Haji Ratan of Bathinda presents a fine example of religious pluralism in Punjab. This shrine is located near the grain market and civil hospital in Bathinda. It is said that Baba Haji Rattan represented India as its spiritual ambassador in the sacred city of Mecca. There is a shared wall of this Mazaar with a Gurudwara which is also named Gurudwara Haji Rattan Sahib.[175]

In the Majha region, an Aqsa Mosque is very popular and is located in the small town of Qadian, district of Gurdaspur. There are certain others mosques and *mazaars* located in other areas of Punjab. In between, the Moorish Mosque of Jalandhar and other districts like Sunam, Sangrur and Sultanpur Lodhi and Kapurthala have various shared religious shrines and sacred spaces related to different *Pirs* and *Faqirs*. The latter towns have Piran Wadian Da Darbar (Panj Pir), Gheb Ghazi Da Mazaar, Mazaar Bandgi Shah, and Sehrianwali Khanqah.[176] The Hindus and the Sikhs of these towns even from the whole of Punjab visit these shrines and they do not have any distinction of caste and religion.

The cult of Gugga is quite popular in Punjab, especially in the Malwa region of Punjab. Gugga is a deity worshipped by diverse groups in northwestern India for snakebites and to heal the blind, deaf and the lame.[177] The lineage of the Gugga Pir is traced to the Chauhan Rajputs in the eleventh century.[178] According to the legend,

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173 The modern town of Faridkot close to Bathinda is traditionally associated with the name of Sheikh Farid. A credible story connects the name of this place Faridkot with the forced labour that he had to undergo there during the time of the local chief named Mokal, then building his fort. By a miracle, sheikh Farid's sainthood was revealed and due to his reverence by the locals, he blessed the place: Harbans Singh, *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, pp. 12,13.

174 Joginder Singh, *Religious Pluralism in Punjab*, pp. 28-30.

175 In 2015, I visited to see the shared notion of this dargah and Gurudwara.

176 Joginder Singh, *Religious Pluralism in Punjab*, p. 32.

177 Surinder Singh, *The Making of Medieval Punjab: Politics, Society and Culture (c. 1000-c. 1500)*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2020, p.206.

178 R. C. Temple, *The Legends of The Punjab*, Vol. I, Languages Department, Punjab, Patiala, 1962 (Reprint), p. 121. For Complete legend, see pp. 121-209.

Gugga killed his twin cousins during a quarrel and for penitence, his mother Queen Bachhal directed him to go to Ajmer and adopt Islam at the hands of Baba Rattan who was considered to be a venerable Muslim saint in the category of Khwaja Khizar.[179] The devotees of Gugga Pir celebrate his birthday called Gugga Naumi. Famous fairs are also celebrated in memory of the Gugga named Chhapar fair and the Fair of Lights (Raushnian Da Mela) at Jagraon. This fair attracts thousands of people of all castes and creeds. There are some other shrines that are popular and integrate some legends with Gugga Pir. The local people narrate such legends and the shrines like Jahura Naag Mandir, village Jahura, tahsil Tanda, Pir Baba Naag, village Janori, tahsil Dasuya and Hoshiarpur.[180]

Some Pirs and Faqirs are very popular in Punjab due to their cordial relations and legends attached to the Sikh Gurus in the Sikh tradition. One of them is a Muslim Saint Pir Baba Sheikhphatta whose dargah is located near Jandiala Guru(Amritsar). According to legend, he was a devotee of Guru Arjun Dev and served at the Guru's darbar in different capacities. Pleased with his services, Guru Arjun Dev blessed him to have an unending serving of kheer (sweet dish) at his Dera. Another narrative is also very popular that the Pir had some supernatural powers which helped to cure Mughal Emperor Akbar's wife when he came to pay homage at the Dera Baba Hindal at Jandiala Guru. It is said that from that day onwards, the Pir's Dera is known for the treatment of animals and serving kheer to visitors.[181]

The cult of Devi, who is said to be a consort of Shiva, has been quite popular in the province of the Punjab. This Goddess has various names such as Durga, Kali, Gauri, Asuri, Parvati, Kalka, Maheshvari, Bhiwani, Asht Bhoj and numerous others. The Hindu Shastra considers nine crores of Durgas, each with her separate name.[182] There is a Goddess called Mahadevi, the great goddess, Maharani, the great queen, and Devi Mai or Devi Mata, the goddess-mother and she has temples at Jawalaji, Mansa Devi, Chintpurni and Naina Devi. In Kangra alone, there are numerous local Devis and

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179 Surinder Singh, *The Making of Medieval Punjab*, p.129.

180 I have personally visited these shrines.

181 H.S. Bhatti, *Folk Religion: Change and Continuity*, Rawat, Delhi, 2000, pp.77-8

182 H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, p. 318.

360 of them are said to have assembled at the founding of the Kangra temple.[183] Devi is a popular object of veneration all over the Province, but her worship is most in vogue and most diversified in Ambala, Hoshiarpur and Kangra, the celebrated shrines of Devi are present in most parts of these districts.[184] At Mansa Devi near Manimajra (towards the west of Kalka) in the Ambala district, a huge fair is held twice a year, in spring and autumn, in honour of Devi. Mansa Devi, sister of Shesh Naag, counteracts the venom of snakes. She is also called Jagatgauri, the world's beauty, Nitya and Padmavati.[185] In central Punjab, Sitala Devi, the goddess of smallpox, the pustular disease was widely worshipped. She was the eldest of seven sisters, a collectivity of disease goddesses, each of whom was responsible for inflicting and curing a particular disease.[186]

Devi temples can be seen in most of the towns and cities of the Punjab. The temple of Mata Mansa Devi located in Hadiabad in Phagwara is very popular. During the days of Durga Ashtami, a huge fair is celebrated by the local people. Devi Chandi said to be the wife of Lord Shiva is worshipped in two different manners. One is her calm and poised form represented by Durga, Jagatmata, Saraswati and Maha Lakshmi and the second form is Chandi Devi, Chandika and Bhairavi which has ten arms and wears a bead of a human skeleton and snake around her neck.[187] The shrines of Sitala are found in every village, town and city of Punjab. In the Malwa region, village Seel, near Bahadurgarh; Patiala-Rajpura Road; and village Jarg in Ludhiana district are very popular for their annual fairs. Several legends are associated with these shrines. The people worship Maha Mata and Mata Rani.[188] The districts of Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Hoshiarpur, Nawanshahar and Patiala have old Shaivite and Vaishnav temples: Mahakaleshwar Temple at Kalanaur (Gurdaspur) is the only temple where the Shiv Ling is found in the horizontal position. Huge devotees gather there to celebrate the

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183 *Ibid*., p. 318.

184 *Ibid.*, p.318.

185 *Ibid*., p.318

186 Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, pp.162, 163. For more details, see H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, pp. 350-65.

187 Rachpal Singh (ed.), *Punjab Kosh*, Vol.I & II, Bhasha Vibhag, Punjab, Patiala 2004, Vol. 1, pp.364, 370, 452, 818.

188 H.S. Bhatti, *Folk Religion: Change and Continuity*, pp.177-9.

Shivratri festival. Mukeshwar Temple at Shahpur Kandi is said to date back to the time of the Pandavas.

In the Gurdaspur district, an old monastery is located at Talibpur Pandori which is popularly known as Pandori Mahanttan. It is considered to be the seat of the Vaishnava sect. A Bairagi Saint Bhagwanji was its founder. He was a contemporary of Mughal Emperor Jahangir (1605-27). Earlier, this place was under the Nath Panthi Yogis. Maharaja Ranjit Singh donated a silver Takht at this place. There are certain other temples like the Achaleshwar Temple on the Batala-Jalandhar Road which is one of the oldest temples as its origin is traced to the Satjug period. It is associated with Kartik, the son of Lord Shiva and Parvati.[189] The place is known as Achal Vatala where Guru Nanak had a discourse with the Nath Yogis led by Bhangar Nath.[190] There is a Gurudwara named Achal Sahib which confirms the happening of this discourse. In the Gurdaspur district, Shri Dhianpur Dham Temple is very popular among people of different communities. It was founded by the Dwaracharya Jagatguru Shri Bawa Lal Ji in AD 1495.[191] He is said to be the founder of Bawa Lal Sampradaya. This sect is very near to Vaishnawa's belief in practice. It is said that Guru Nanak and Dara Shikoh visited this place. Dara Shikoh was advised by Baba Lal to refrain from becoming a Sheikh or saint or wielder of miracles but rather to become a mendicant *(faqir)*, unpretentious and sincere.[192] The shrine is the representation of pluralistic religious tradition.

The Ram Tirath Temple located on the Amritsar-Chogawan road is one of the most popular shrines in Punjab. It dates back to the period of Lord Rama. It was the ashram of Saint Valmiki. According to the legend, Sita took shelter here and gave birth to her two sons Luv and Kush. Maharishi Valmiki gave training to her sons in warfare and also trained in education. A mammoth annual fair is held at this temple. A huge number of Sikhs also participate in this fair from the different rural and urban areas of Punjab.

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189 Joginder Singh, *Religious Pluralism in Punjab*, p. 41.

190 Harban Singh (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, pp.4,5.

191 Joginder Singh, *Religious Pluralism in Punjab*, p. 41.

192 Surinder Singh, *Medieval Punjab in Transition: Authority, Resistance and Spirituality (c.1500-c.1700)*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2022, p.256. For details on this dialogue, see pp.264-272.

In the Hoshiarpur district, there are many temples associated with gods and goddesses like Kamahi: historical Dholbaha, Thakurdwara, Ram Titwali and Virat Ki Nagari at Dasuya.[193] Kamahi Devi temple is supposed to be associated with the Pandavas who worshipped Durga. It is also associated with the Kamakhya Temple situated in Kamrup(Assam). In the Nawanshehar district, there is a Sanehi temple and in the village of Samundra, a Shiva Temple Maheshiana is located there. Shiva is the prime deity in these temples. Very interestingly, Shiv Mandir in Jalandhar city, Tulsi Mandir and Baba Sodhal Temple, related to Gugga Pir are very famous and prominent in the area of Doab. [194] The Panch Temple at Kapurthala and the Kali Devi Temple on Mall Road in Patiala city are also very popular in Punjab. The Kali Devi Temple was constructed by Maharaja Bhupinder Singh in 1936. These temples have much significance because these sacred spaces have still kept the continuity of shared culture and religious diversity. People come there without the distinction of caste, creed and religious boundaries.

There are certain sects and cults in Sikhism also. The Udasis, Minas, Sewa Panthis, Nirmalas, Ram Raiyas, Hindalias (Niranjnias), Dhirmalias, Nirankaris, Namdharis, Neeldharis, Dera Hoti Mardan and Nanaksarias are very significant in this sense.[195] The cults of Sodhis and Bedis also added more colour to this canvas. There are some layers in the construction of a sect which comprise such elements as opposition, acceptance, and marginalization. But in the Sikh tradition, there are two categories of the formation of sect. Firstly, there are sects which did not find respectable space within the mainstream and thus, a new sect was founded in opposition. The accession to the temporal seat was the main contradiction in Sikhism. The Mina sect is the prime example of this category. The second category comprises the community which also spread the same thought of religion as propounded by Guru Nanak. But in a particular time and space, some scholars consider these sects as different from mainstream religion. Certain sects fall in the category of having a direct clash and contestation with mainstream religion over the question of accession to the temporal seat within the Panth. Historians have conventionally put the Udasis in this

193 *Punjab Kosh*, Vol. I, pp.497-8.

194 *Ibid*, p. 426.

195 For basic information of these sects and cults, see Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, Bhai Chatar Singh Jeewan Singh, Amritsar, 1990 (Reprint).

category. Conventional historians have been analysing them from the point of view of belief and practices, rituals and external identity. Even though sects had some distinctions based on external identity. The valid basis of the analysis is the theology and religious philosophy which distinguishes and crystallizes the categorization of these sects. The theological idea of Guru Nanak is meditation which is inscribed in the Sikh scripture.

ਨਾਨਕੁ ਕੇ ਘਰਿ ਕੇਵਲੁ ਨਾਮੁ।[196]

Nanak ke ghar kewal naam.

ਅਬ ਕਲੁ ਆਇਓ ਰੇ, ਏਕ ਨਾਮੁ ਬੋਵਹੁ ਬੋਵਹੁ।[197]

Ab kalu aeo re. ik naam bovoh bovoh.

Particularly, Udasi, Nirmala and Nanak Panthis give more emphasis on this notion. Practically, the term Gurmukh denotes those who attain the path of the Guru in their life. The contemporary Sikh Panth has never been homogeneous since its formation and certain sects emerged over different times in the Panth. John Clark Archer finds that in the 18th century, the Sikh religion was a conglomeration of sects, some of them exercising political prerogatives and several minor parties which emphasised politics were the Hindalias, the Ramraiyas, the Minas, the Dhirmalliyas and Masandis.[198] Nonetheless, these sects enriched religious pluralism and diversity.

The foremost sect in the Sikh panth is Nanak-Panthis which literally means following the *Panth* or way of Guru Nanak. The term Nanakpanthi was probably used for the first time for Sikhs in Zulfiqar Ardistani's seventeenth-century work *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*.[199] The term was also used by some eighteenth and nineteenth-century writers describing the group among the Sikhs which follows the teachings of Guru Nanak and his successors but does not strictly adhere to the injunctions of Guru Gobind Singh, especially about keeping the unshorn hair. The Census report of 1891 defined the

196 *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 1136.

197 *Ibid*, p. 1185.

198 Ethne K. Marenco, *The Transformation of Sikh Society*, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, 1976, p.28.

199 Harbans Singh (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2002 (Second Edition), p.185.

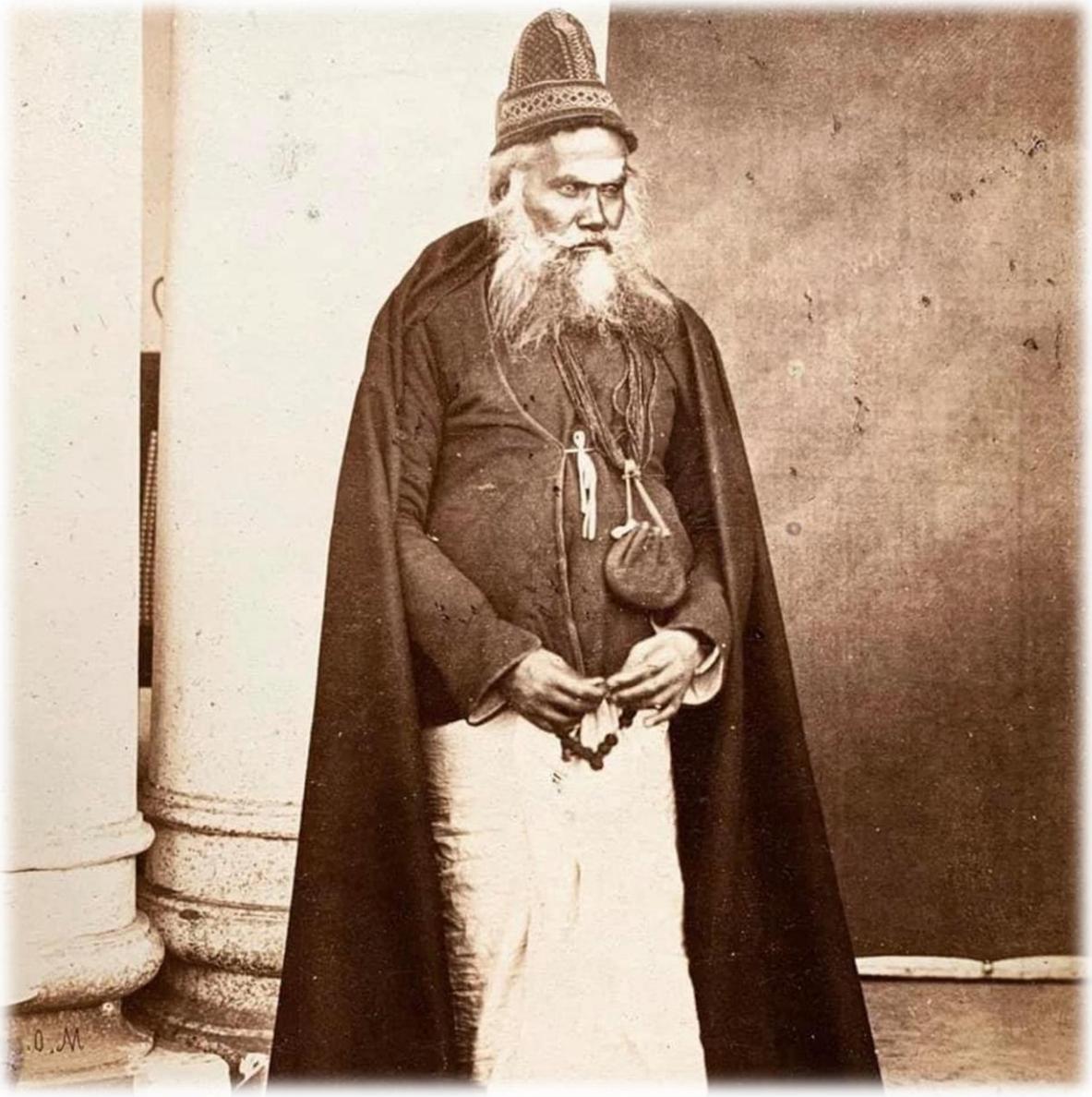

Illustration 2.1 A Nanak Panthi
Source: Amardeep Singh

Illustration 2.2 Baba Shiri Chand and Lakhmi Chand
Source: Fresco from Gurdwara Baba Atal in Amritsar

Nanakpanthis as Sikhs who were not Singhs, who follow the teachings of the earlier Sikh Gurus but not the "ceremonial and social observances" inculcated by Guru Gobind Singh. [200] Guru Nanak founded the Sikh faith and composed Bani. He spread the message of equality, fraternity and brotherhood. The public sphere of the like-minded community was called Nanak-Panthis (the panth of Guru Nanak). For them, Guru Nanak was Guru and his words were sacred. Meditation, hard work and the notion of sharing were the hallmarks of this community. Upinderjit Kaur Takhar aptly remarks that the Nanak-Panthis did not have any differences over external identities, and symbols and Sikhism did not institutionalize as a different religion in terms of its institutions, rituals and festivals. [201] Gradually, the compilation of a canon and construction of dharmasalas and sacred spaces related to the Sikh Gurus shrunk the dependency on existing religious orders. This was the initial attempt to establish Sikh thought which was started by Guru Nanak in the form of a sect and an institution. Guru Nanak was committed to the consciousness of making this flow of thought a movement.[202]

There is much disagreement among historians that Baba Sri Chand, the son of Guru Nanak, opposed the idea of handing over the Gurgaddi and he expected to receive the Guruship. Khushwant Singh, H. H. Wilson, J.S. Grewal and traditional historians say that afterwards, he established his separate Udasi sect. W. H. Mcleod explains the meaning of the word Udasi: "The word Udasi is derived from the Sanskrit language which means one who is exalted or a recluse from the world".[203] He states that "In the Janamsakhi tradition, Udasi means the four journeys of Guru Nanak to propagate the doctrines of hard work, recitation of the name of God and sharing with others."[204] The Udasis rever Baba Shri Chand as the founder and respect Sri Guru Granth Sahib. J. D.

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200 Francis Buchanan (1762-1829) also makes a distinction between the 'Church Militant' who took the title of Singh and those who confine themselves entirely to the things spiritual. H.A. Rose divides the Sikhs into two categories – the Nanakpanthis and the Singhs of Khalsa: Harbans Singh (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism,* Vol. I, p.186.

201 Upinderjit Kaur Takhar, *Sikh Identity: An Exploration of Groups Among Sikhs,* Ashgate, USA, 2005, pp. 5-7.

202 Surmit Kaur, *Sikh Rehat Maryada: Nirmal Sampardaye De Parsang Vich*, Unpublished M.phil Dissertation, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 2018, pp. 6-7.

203 W. H. Mcleod, *Early Sikh Tradition: A Study of The Janamsakhis*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980.p. 96

204 W. H. Mcleod, Daya Ram Abrol (tr.), *Janamsakhis B40*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1980 p. 96.

Cunningham mentions many sects and their differences from Sikhism and refers to Baba Shri Chand as the founder of the Udasi sect.[205] Before Cunningham, John Malcolm wrote about Guru Nanak's two sons, Sri Chand and Lakhmi Chand, and states that Baba Sri Chand's son Dharam Chand was the founder of the Udasi Panth.[206] John Malcolm's description is incorrect because Baba Sri Chand did not marry. The Dharam Chand was the son of his brother Lakhmi Chand. Baba Gurditta, the son of the sixth Guru Hargobind, led the Udasi sect and established the Char Dhunas. Sulakhan Singh also mentions these Dhunas and argues that Almast, Balu Hasna, Goind and Phool Sahib were associated with the early centres of Udasis.[207] Like the Mughals, Maharaja Ranjit Singh also patronized some Udasi mahants, Deras and Akharas and granted them 'Madad-e-Muash' Jagirs. Braham Buta Akhara Amritsar and Dera Baba Nanak received 18000 and 12000 jagirs respectively.[208]

The close association of the Udasi sect with Sikhism can be traced through Udasi literature which was available in Punjabi/Hindi in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Udasi literature contains the writings of Surat Ram Udasi's '*Ustat Dasan Mahila Ki'* which is composed in praise of the ten Gurus and the Udasis'' respect for them and their acceptance as their deities. Baba Sri Chand Ji suggested composing twenty-four *Ashtpadis* from sixteen *Ashtpadis* of 'Sukhmani Sahib' composed by Guru Arjun Dev. In this context, Prof. Nirmal Singh writes that when Guru Arjan Dev Ji expressed his desire to have these started by Baba Sri Chand Ji before writing the next Ashtpadis, Baba Ji made a slight difference in the current Salok of Japji Sahib in Sihari, Bihari.[209] Thus Guru Arjan completed 24 Ashtpadis of Sukhmani at the behest of Baba Ji.

Anandghaan's commentary on Japji and Siddha-Gosht shows that its basic vision is monotheism. His thinking is neither connected with the *Nirgun* stream nor with *Sargun*. Anandghan is in accordance with the wisdom of Guru Nanak. Evidence of

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205 J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011(Reprint), p. 56.

206 John Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs: Their Origin, Customs and Manners*, Vinay Publications, Chandigarh, 1981(First Published in 1812), p. 1070.

207 Sulakhan Singh, *The Udasis Under Sikh Rule (1750- 1850A.D)*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1985, p.148.

208 *Ibid*, p. 149.

209 Gurdev Singh (ed.), *Udasi Sampardai Ate Sikh Panth*, Gobind Sadan Institute for Advanced Studies in Comparative Religion, New Delhi, 2007, p. 9.

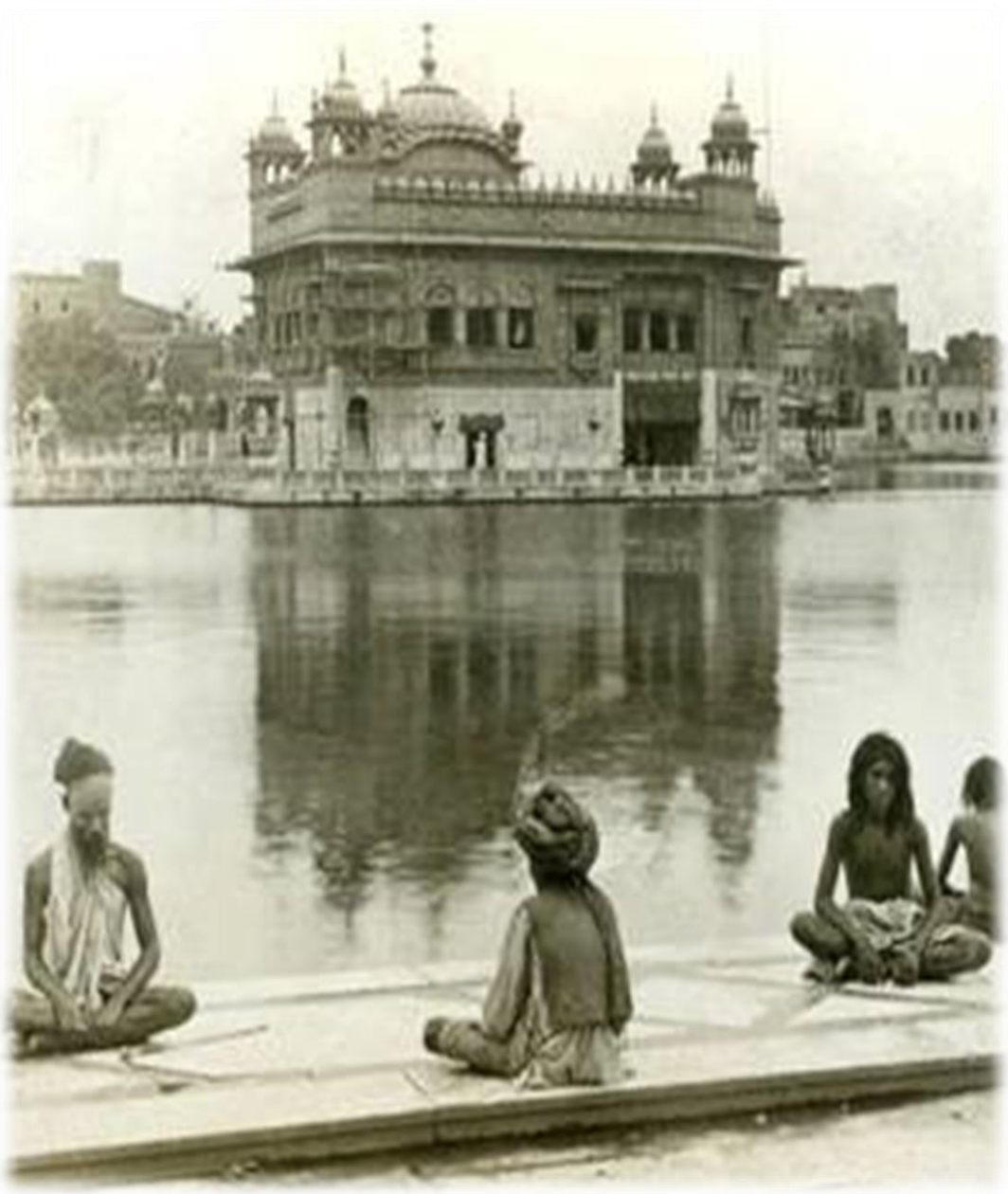

Illustration 2.3 Udasi Sikhs in the Precinct of Harimandir Sahib Amritsar
Source: Redit.com

monotheism is found in his commentary which proves the ideological similarity of the Udasi sect with the Sikh Panth. The poet Sant Rain has not made any unique impression in his literature but has only repeated the qualities introduced by Sadhu Anandghan. Some Udasi compositions like Udasi '*Matras'*, '*Nanak Sahansarnama'* and the biography of Baba Sri Chand Ji are also available which are ideologically synchronised with Nanak Bani.

Under the influence of the Singh Sabha movement, the Gurdwara Reform movement and the Gurdwara Act (1925), a Central Board was set up to manage 160 gurdwaras. These were described as Sikh shrines and listed in the Act. In 18 districts, 120 venues were declared as akharas, mostly under the jurisdiction of Udasis.[210] These scheduled akharas were beyond the jurisdiction of the Central Board.[211] As an outcome, Udasis stopped placing the Guru Granth Sahib in protest of this marginalization and followed the orthodox traditions instead of the Gur-Maryada.

After the Udasis, Minas, Dhirmalias and Ramraias had contestations over the claims to Guru-gaddi. It is also believed that they introduced heterogeneity in the religion of the Sikh Gurus.[212] Probably, heterodoxy is the right term as it denotes pluralism and religious diversity but these were the oppositions that distorted the idea and essence of Sikh tradition. W.H. Mcleod narrates that these three rival lineages belonged to Khatris of the Sodhi sub-caste. Minas were the descendants of Pirthi Chand, elder brother of Gurur Arjun and they were branded by the orthodox Sikhs as the Minas or 'scoundrels'. Dhirmallias were the descendants of Dhir Mal, the eldest son of Baba Gurditta, who was the eldest son of Guru Hargobind (the Dhirmalias).[213] Ramraiyas were the descendants of Ram Rai, the elder son of Guru Hari Rai. All of these were the eldest sons in the direct line of succession and all maintained that they had the prior right to the title of Guru.[214] For personal greed, they were demeaning Sikhism under the influence of Turkish/ Mughal rulers. For that Sikh community

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210 Surmit Kaur, *Sikh Rehat Maryada:Nirmal Sampardaye de parsang Vich,* p. 9.

211 Neil Krishan Aggarwal, "Violations of Parole: Language, Religion, and Power Among the Modern Udasi Movement and the SGPC", *Sikh Formation,* Vol. 6, No. 1, June 2010, pp. 77-93.

212 Joginder Singh, *Religious Pluralism in Punjab,* p. 48.

213 *Ibid*, p. 49.

214 W.H. Mcleod, *Sikhs of the Khalsa: A History of the Khalsa Rahit,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 36-7.

rejected them and abstained from having any relations with them. However, they sustained their identity and establishments on the patronage given by the Turko-Afghan rulers during the eighteenth century and the British in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Sikhism was advancing in continuous development. Due to the composition of Bani, Dharamsalas, establishment of Baolis, religion began to get institutionalized. It is during this time that the battle for succession begins, from which the Minas emerge directly and established their own sect. Mina literally means 'dishonest'. The word came to be used as an adjective because the Minas were against Guru-Ghar. Mina means "hypocritical, secretive, mean-natured and deceitful".[215] Mina was the name of a tribe that had been declared a criminal tribe and is found in southwestern Punjab.[216] But the adjective Mina was used for Prithi Chand and his followers for their deceitful role against the Sikh Gurus. In Mina's literature, they rejected the adjective Mina and declared themselves Sikhs. Bhai Gurdas opposed Minas in his Vars. In the 36th Var, Bhai Gurdas writes that

ਕਲਾ ਰੂਪ ਹੋਏ ਹਸਾਨੀ ਮੈਗਲੁ ਉਮਾਹੇ, ਤਿਉ ਨਿਕਟ ਪੰਥ ਹੈ ਮੀਣਿਆਂ ਮਿਲ ਨਾਲ ਨਿਬਾਹੈ।[217]

Kla roop hoye hasani maigloo umahai, teo nikat panth hai minian mil naak nibahai.

One and a half centuries later, Bhai Chaupa Singh's Rahitnamas, written in the middle of the eighteenth century as Khalsa Rahitnama, mentioned five *manmatiyas* which are forbidden to be used. Sikhs have been warned about,

ਜੋ ਗੁਰੂ ਕਾ ਸਿੱਖ ਹੋਵੇ, ਪੰਜਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਨਾ ਨਾਤਾ ਕਰੇ, ਵਰਤਨ ਭੀ ਨਾ ਕਰੇ ਪਹਿਲੈ ਮੀਣੇ,

ਦੂਜੇ ਰਾਮਰਾਈਏ, ਤੀਜੇ ਕੁੜੀ ਮਾਰ, ਚੌਥੇ ਭਾਦਵੀ, ਪੰਜਵੇਂ ਮਸੰਦ।[218]

Jo guru ka Sikh howe, panja naal na nata kre, wartan bhi na krai pehlai mine,

Duje Ramraiye, teeje kudi maar, chauthe bhadvi, panjwe masand.

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215 Harbans Singh, *Encyclopedia of Sikhism,* Vol. III, p.88.

216 Jeevan Deol, "The Minas and Their Literature", *Journal of the American Oriental Society"*, Vol. 118, No.2 (Apr.-Jun.1998), pp.172-184.

217 Hira Singh Pandit (ed.) *Varaan Bhai Gurdas,* Bhai Vir Singh Sahit Sadan, New Delhi, 2016, p. 192.

218 Piara Singh Padam (ed.), *Rehatname*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 2005, p, 79.

There was a continuous conflict between the Minas and Sikh Gurus over the possession of Gurugaddi. Prithi Chand, the founder of the Mina sect (1558-1618), was the eldest son of Guru Ram Das. He was deeply embittered and turned hostile towards Guru Arjun, his younger brother who was preferred over him as the next Guru. He set up his rival seat at Hehar in the district of Lahore declaring himself to be the rightful successor.[219] He made several efforts to raise a parallel Guruship with the help of the then officials. He instituted a separate tradition of his minstrels *ragis*, *rababis*, *masands* and scribes for spreading and establishing his religious ideological superiority. It is believed that Prithi Chand consciously sent his son Miharban to spend his childhood at Ramdaspur. He expected Miharban to be declared as the future Sikh Guru by Guru Arjan Dev. Miharban gained proficiency in the interpretation of Gurbani; classical music and could perform kirtan according to the tradition of classical music.[220] However, the desires of Prithi Chand came to an end when Guru Arjan Dev appointed his son Hargobind as his successor. When Miharban died, then his son Harji became the head of the Mina sect in 1640. In the absence of Guru Hargobind from central Punjab, Harji consolidated his hold over the control of Darbar Sahib, Amritsar and expanded the network of the Mina establishment with the patronage of the Mughal government.[221] Harji did not allow Guru Tegh Bahadur to pay his obeisance at Darbar Sahib and showed his authority over there. Harji produced poetry also under the pen name of Nanak. After his death in 1696, his sons (Niranjan Rai, Har Gopal and Kanwal Nain) contested for Guruship of the Mina sect but failed to impress upon the Sikh Sangat in the wake of the rise of the Khalsa order.[222] Guru Gobind Singh had already made it mandatory for the Sikhs not to have any dealing with the Mina sect.[223]

Sakhi literature written by Miharban and Harji produced religious divergences. There are major writings that are found in the manuscript entitled 'Miharban Janam Sakhi'. It comprises 'Pothi Sachkhand', 'Pothi Harji' and 'Pothi Chaturbhuj'. The analysis of respective *Pothis* brings forth serious religious differences between the ideas of Guru Nanak and Miharban. However, this analysis illustrates that the followers

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219 Harbans Singh, *Encyclopedia of Sikhism,* Vol. III, p.88.

220 Joginder Singh, *The Religious Pluralism in Punjab*, pp. 23.

221 *Ibid*, p. 54.

222 *Ibid*, pp. 54-55.

223 Piara Singh Padam**,** (ed.), *Rehatname*, p. 65.

of Miharban were also the protagonists of Divine Name Theology. Their *Sakhi* literature was projected to enable this tradition too. It is argued that "The difference between the teachings of Nanak and the theology of the Miharban sect can certainly be detected, but they represent no more than a period of one hundred years. Their sin plainly was a schism, not heresy.[224] Miharban and his successors remained successful to sustain their following among the Nanak-Panthis. The latter did not subscribe to the beliefs and practices of the Khalsa brotherhood.[225] They took the opportunity of the conflict between Mughal/Afghan rulers with the Khalsa to expand and consolidate their influence among the Nanak-Panthis.

During the 19th and the mid-19th century, in the Rehatnamas Sikhs were ordered to avoid any relation with them: "*Mina aur masandiya, mona kudi maar, Hoye sikh wartan kre, ant krega khuaar".*[226] Despite this prohibition, the Mina sect was very popular in the Malwa region of southwestern Punjab in the mid-19th century. Literary works have also been produced by the Mina sect, including the commentary on Gurbani and the *Pothi Sach-Khand* composed by Miharban. Meharban was the author of significant works like 'Goshtan Kabir Kian', 'Goshtan Sabhna Guran Kian' (first five), and the 'Gurbani Parmarth'.[227] Meharban was the first who introduced the proverb form in hermeneutics. Harji wrote the Parmarth of the Banis which included '*Onkar'*, '*Patti'* (Asa), '*Barhamah Tukhari'*, '*Sidh Goshti'* and '*Japji'.* The hermeneutics of Gurbani which was done by the Minas is called '*Parmarth Parnali'*. Minas founded another sect called Diwana which is considered to be a part of the (Diwana) Mina sect. It has been highly regarded in the Malwa region.

The main reason for not considering the Minas as Sikhs and their marginalization was their hypocritical life and literature which did not meet the criteria of Sikh ideology or Sikh tradition. In the early 18th century, in the mainstream Sikh tradition, it is known that the Minas started composing literature under the name of Guru Nanak, which they called Bani. A contemporary work *Bhagatmala of the Sikhs* mentions Minas in their literature portraying Guru Nanak as a devotee of a Hindu king. 19th-century Sikh sources point out that Miharban, who formerly worked at the court

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224 W.H. Mcleod, *Sikhs and Sikhism*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1999, pp. 43-66.

225 *Ibid*, p. 35.

226 Piara Singh Padam, (ed.), *Rehatname***,** p, 65.

227 Jeevn Deol, "Minas and Their Literature", pp.172-184.

of Guru Sahib, was named Manohardas. After his death, his sons Hariji and Niranjan Rai were his successors. Niranjan Rai's influence over the Golden Temple and Amritsar had waned. Poet Seva Singh wrote in *Shaheed Bilas Bhai Mani Singh* that at the request of the Sangat of Ramdaspur, Guru Gobind Singh sent Bhai Mani Singh and several Sikhs to Ramdaspur on the Baisakhi day of 1755 v.s. (1698 C.E.), and a chastened Niranjan Rai left for the village of Gharacho in Malwa (which he passed on to his son Dakkhani Rai).[228]

The claim over the Guruship was the primary reason for differences between the Mina sect and Sikhs. Their literature is also contrary to Sikh philosophy. Many contemporary Sikh accounts mention and give a detailed account of their expulsion from the Panth. The Guruship could not be conferred without the attainment of the title of spiritual guru. By attacking the institution of the Guru, the Mina sect got marginalized in the Rahitnamas and Hukamnamamas and orders were issued to the Sikh Sangats not to keep any relation with them regarding marriage and dining (*Roti-Beti*). One of the reasons for the emergence of Rahitnamas was that there should be no adulteration in the spiritual tradition of Sikhism. The Minas had begun to make efforts in this regard. The Rahitnamas came into being to preserve the authenticity of Gurbani and to keep Sikh Rahat pure.

In the early eighteenth century, Minas shifted their centre of activities to the Malwa region. Niranjan Rai's son and successor Dakhani Rai merged his followers into the sect of Udasi Sikhs and was able to enjoy the patronage of the rulers of Patiala.[229] Later on, Kanwal Nain shifted his headquarters to Dhilwan (Kot Kapura). After his demise, his grandson Abhey Ram gifted Guru Gobind Singh two horses and a white dress. It is said that Abhey Ram got baptized at the hands of Guru Gobind Singh and later on became Abhey Singh. Consequently, Abhey Singh and his followers joined mainstream Sikhism. Afterwards, his brother, Hargopal also left Amritsar and settled in the village Mehandipur (Tehsil Chunia, District Lahore) which was their ancestral place. His son Gurditta further continued the Guruship. Jiwan Mal was the son of Gurditta who founded a new village near Ferozepur named Har Sahai which became

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228 *Ibid.*, pp.172-184.

229 Joginder Singh, *Religious Pluralism in Punjab*, p. 56.

his centre.[230] During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sodhis of Guru Har Sahai got high positions in the royal court. As a result, they became owners of big landed property. After Punjab's annexation by the British, they were counted among the prominent families of Punjab and were granted revenue-free land assignments which went a long way to consolidate their sect.[231]

Dhirmalias also had a contradiction with Sikh gurus. Dhir Mal, the eldest son of Baba Gurditta and grandson of Guru Hargobind, was born at Kartarpur in 1627. When Guru Hargobind shifted his headquarters from Kartarpur to Kiratpur, Dhir Mal occupied Kartarpur and took possession of Adi Granth which is known as Kartarpuri Bir.[232] Dhir Mal considered that it was his right to be the next Guru but Guru Hargobind did not consider him a suitable candidate but rather nominated his younger brother Har Rai as the next Guru.[233] With the possession of Kartarpur and Bir, Dhir Mal acclaimed or established his Gurgaddi. He was granted revenue-free land at Kartarpur by Shah Jahan.[234] He appointed his own *masands* to collect 'tithes', befriended Ram Rai and together they opposed the succession of Guru HarKrishan; conspired against Guru Tegh Bahadur and continued to be unrepentant and formed his own sect.[235] However, Guru Gobind Singh condemned Dhirmal as Guru being an ally of the Mughal state against his predecessors.

Later on, Wadbhag Singh, a descendant of Dhir Mal, approached Jassa Singh Ahluwalia to get rid of old contradictions. They debated and in the end, Dhirmallias were allowed to join the Sikh fold again. Guru Sadhu Singh, another descendant of Dhir Mal, had consolidated his estate yielding revenues of Rs. 63,000 in the Jalandhar Doab. For his positive behaviour during the Mutiny of 1857.[236] In 1877, Sadhu Singh was succeeded by his son Jawahar Singh.[237] He had a bad character and was inefficient.

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230 *Ibid.,* pp. 56-62.

231 *Ibid*, pp. 57-63.

232 Harbans Singh, *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism,* Vol. I, p. 579.

233 Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs,* Vol. I, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 2000 (Reprint), p. 173.

234 J. S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab,* p. 66.

235 Harbans Singh, *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism,* Vol. I, p. 580.

236 Joginder Singh, *Religious Pluralism in Punjab*, p. 47.

237 *Ibid*, p. 50.

He died in 1882 and Nau Nihal Singh became his successor. At present Karamjit Singh is the head of Dhirmalias institutions like Kartarpur's historical gurdwara, Tham Sahib, and other such places in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. He challenges the popular narratives established against Dhirmalias, in one of his interviews. He says that there has never been a contradiction between the Sikhs and Dhirmalias and no edict was ever issued by the Sikh Gurus against them.[238] He further says that all religious places managed by them are visited by thousands of Dhirmalias and Sikhs alike.[239]

Among the contemporary Sikhs and even historiography, the Hindalias also have contestations and are considered to be dishonourable. This cult was founded by Baba Hindal of Jandiala Guru located near Amritsar. In his early life, he was a devotee of Sultan Sakhi Sarvar but later on, he became a Sikh under the influence of Guru Amar Das. Guru Amar Das gave him the responsibility of langar (community kitchen) and collection of Daswand (one-tenth of the earnings). He preached Sikhism rigorously in the area of Jandiala. Gradually, he became very popular among the people. Rattan Singh Bhangu says that Hindal's successors established their gurudom and spread it in the 20-30 villages around Jandiala (Amritsar).[240] That phenomenon strengthened the idea of discontentment between Hindalias and the Sikh Gurus and ultimately, they established their own headquarters.

Baba Hindal invoked God by the name of Niranjan. His devotees followed pursuit and styled themselves as Niranjanees. When he became a personality cult then he asserted the status of Guru. On the behalf of his popularity, the village of Jandiala came to be known as Jandiala Guru. His son Bidhi Chand committed sacrilege with Guru Nanak's Janamsakhi tradition and drifted away from the Sikh ideology. He replaced Guru Nanak's name with his father's and added several heretical anecdotes. He also compiled a Granth and a Janamsakhi in which he endeavoured to exalt Hindal to the rank of chief apostle and relegate Guru Nanak to second place, representing him as a mere follower of Kabir.[241] After the death of Bidhi Chand in AD 1654, Devi Das

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238 *Ibid*, p. 52.

239 *Ibid*, p.53.

240 Manpreet Kaur, *Baba Hindal and Hindalia Sect*, Unpublished M.Phil dissertation, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, 2007, pp. 35-52.

241 Joginder Singh, *The Religious Pluralism*, pp. 48-54.

succeeded and under Muhammadan persecution, the Hindalias denied that they were Sikhs of Nanak. Thus, subsequently, Ranjit Singh deprived them of their lands".[242] It is also believed that the Hindalias, along with Udasi Sikhs and members of the Bhatra community, corrupted the Banno recension of the Adi Granth.[243] W.H. Mcleod states that "Within the earliest extant Janam Sakhis of the Bala tradition, there are several episodes that seek to exalt Baba Hindal at the expense of Nanak. These references vary in emphasis. At one point there is propounded a threefold apostolic succession which begins with Kabir, continues through Nanak and reaches its climax in Hindal. Elsewhere Nanak and Hindal are both accorded earlier incarnations in the court of King Janak, with Nanak cast in the humble role of oil-bearer (*teli*). Finally, there occurs in some of the manuscripts a story which seems to suggest that Nanak once requested Angad to grant him seigniorial rights over his daughter".[244]

Hindalias or Niranjanias became more and more Islamic taking part with the Muslims in the destruction of Sikh properties and documents.[245] Commenting on their role, Harbans Singh gives reference in The *Encyclopedia of Sikhim* and states that "the most notorious among them was one of Hindal's lineal descendants, Haribhagat, who was instrumental in the arrest and murder of scores of Sikhs including the reverend Bhai Taru Singh of the village of Poohla".[246] Condemning their role during Sikh persecutions by Ahmad Shah Abdali, especially during the Ghalughara, Ratan Singh Bhangu in his famous work Panth *Parkash* called them chandalas (butchers of the Sikhs) and Panth-Nindaks (back-biters of the Panth). Bhangu also accused them of their interpolations and plagiarism in the Janamsakhis.[247] Bhangu observed that the Hindalias established their gurudom and had a substantial number of followers (Sangat)

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242 H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, Vol. II, Language Department, Punjab, Patiala, 1990 (Reprint), pp.325-6.

243 Pashaura Singh, *The Guru Granth Sahib: Canon, Meaning and Authority*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2000, p. 286.

244 W.H. Mcleod, *Early Sikh Tradition, Sikhs and Sikhism*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1999, p. 17.

245 Ethne K. Marenco, *The Transformation of Sikh Society*, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, 1976, pp. 28-29

246 Harbans singh (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1997, p. 231.

247 Harjinder Singh, *Bhai Vir Singh, Editing of Panth Prakash by Ratan Singh Bhangu*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1990, pp. 254,256-7.

in the 20-30 villages around Jandiala.[248] Later, they were penalized and dispossessed by Maharaj Ranjit Singh.[249]

In the late nineteenth century, the Niranjanees observed their own marriage and death rites. They did not revere the Brahmins.[250] The Niranjanias are also very near to the Muslim fold. Even though, they resorted to diverging from the Brahmins as well. They rejected all Hindu rites and rituals related to birth, weddings and funerals. They have a distinction in the rite of marriage. They do not perform *kiria karam* or *phul* (funeral rites). In the texts of Niranjaniass, we can see the influence of Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam. In his verses, Baba Hindal mentions many gods related to Hindus, Muslims Pirs and Auliyas. Niranjanias or Hindalias have constructed their own Ardaas(daily prayer).

The Hindalias Niranjanias remained aloof from socio-religious and cultural symbols of the Sikhs and avoided the word 'Singh'. They used the word 'Das' as their last name. But it is a paradox that the paintings and murals depict Hindali gurus and mahants with kesh (hair), beard and turbans which constitute the cultural identity of the Singhs.[251] The census reports (1881-91) corroborate this fact when they enumerated Hindalias both as Keshdharis and Sehajdharis.[252] The devotees of Baba Hindal come from different creeds, castes and occupations. According to a recent survey, the majority of the devotees belong to Jat Sikh families. Next to them are shopkeepers, traders, professionals and workers. They are found in Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Bathinda, Mansa, Moga and Ludhiana districts of Punjab. Several devotees have moved to countries like England, Canada, America, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand and they send huge donations to the shrines of Baba Hindal.[253]

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248 *Ibid*, p. 256.

249 Ethne K. Marenco, *The Transformation of Sikh Society*, p. 29.

250 A.H. Bingley, *Sikhs*, Language Department, Punjab, Patiala, 1970 (Reprint), p. 88.

251 Joginder Singh, *Religious Pluralism in Punjab*, p. 52.

252 *Census of India 1931*: *Punjab*, Part I, vol. XVII, Lahore, 1933, p.309

253 Manpreet Kaur, *Baba Hindal and Hindalia Sect'*, Unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, 2007, pp. 86-7.

There is another important cult named Ramraiyas. Ram Rai was the eldest son of Guru Har Rai (1630-61). When Aurangzeb summoned Guru Har Rai to Delhi, Ram Rai was sent by the Guru with a reminder of Guru Arjan Dev's conduct at Jahangir's court and a warning to avoid flattery.[254] He deliberately misread and misinterpreted the verses of Guru Granth Sahib for appeasing Emperor Aurangzeb. The Guru anathematized him for the sacrilege he had committed in altering what was unalterable.[255] Guru Har Rai declared him unfit for guruship and immediately excluded him from the succession. [256] On the contrary, Aurangzeb encouraged him in his pretensions to guruship and granted him land.[257] With the grant of imperial *jagir*, he established his missionary centre at present-day Dehradun and preached the gospel of Guru Nanak but the Sikhs by and large shunned him and his followers.[258]

In 1687, before his death, Ram Rai met Guru Gobind Singh at Paonta Sahib. Though, Guru Gobind Singh showed mercy and grace during the meeting and later on helped his widow Panjab Kaur. But Ramraiyas continued to remain outside the fold of the Khalsa. When Panjab Kaur died in 1741, Ramraiyas merged into the religious establishment of Balu Hasna which is the branch of Udasis. As per their tradition, they paid obeisance to the Guru Granth Sahib and Baba Sri Chand. During the Agitation of Akalis in the early twentieth century, they removed the Khalsa flag and Guru Granth sahib from the Ramraiya establishment at Dehradun. Later on, they appointed a *Sajjadanashin* and established it as a non-Sikh shrine. But with the Udasi merger, it became the centre of Udasi rituals because they organized langar, performed ritual worship with lighted lamps of Baba Sri Chand and recited religious discourse (*katha*) of Bhagwat Purana and other Hindu texts. Therefore, Dehradun became the Udasi centre and the Udasi version of Sikhism was practised there.

In the Census of 1891, 52,317 Hindus and 30,396 Sikhs returned themselves as Ramraiyas.[259] However, contemporary Mahants Indresh Charan Das and Davendra Das

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254 Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs,* Vol. I, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 2000(Reprint), p.179.

255 Harbans Singh, *Encyclopedia of Sikhism,* Vol. III, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2002(Second Edition), p.461.

256 Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs,* Vol. I, p.180.

257 Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs,* Vol. I, OUP, New Delhi, 2017(First Published 1963), p.66.

258 Harbans Singh, *Encyclopedia of Sikhism,* Vol. III, p.461.

259 E. D. Maclagan, *Census of India 1891,* Vols. XX and XXI, *The Punjab and its Feudatories,* Parts II and III, Calcutta, 1892, pp. 826-9 and 572-3.

have disassociated Ram Rai's establishment from the Sikh past and declared it an organization of the Udasi sect.[260] They have transformed it into a centre for the propagation of the traditions, ideals and philosophy of Hinduism.[261] People of all classes, castes and creeds visit the Darbar Sahib.[262] This organization is also running Shri Guru Ram Rai Institute of Medical and Health Sciences, Dehradun and looks after 122 schools and technical colleges and it is building many more educational centres in remote areas. The temporal pursuits of these mahants show deviations from the old Udasi concept.[263]

Several descendants of the Sikh Gurus claimed themselves the spiritual and temporal leaders of the Sikh community. Bedi Sujan Singh was a descendant of Guru Nanak and his spiritual representative in the country between Satluj and Beas. Kala Dhari (the great-grandfather of the present Bedis), having disciples at Una, migrated there from Dera Baba Nanak and received a grant of 72 *ghuman* from Jaswal Raja Ram Singh. His grandson, Sahib Singh, was a man of great influence among the Sikhs; his chief exploits were the religious wars against the Afghans of MalerKotla in 1794 and the Rajputs of Raikot in 1798.[264] Raja Umed Singh gave Sahib Singh the whole of Una taluka. This grant was confirmed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He also received the Noorpur taluka from Sardar Budh Singh. Sahib Singh was succeeded by Bikrama Singh whose jagirs were valued to the amount of Rs. 86,813 per annum at the time of the annexation of the Punjab. Subsequently, Bedi Bikrama Singh lost favour with the British and as a result, his annual pension was reduced to Rs. 2,000 per annum. Bedi Bikrama Singh was succeeded by his son Surat Singh. The latter was succeeded by his son Sujan Singh. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Bedi Sujan Singh was able to win the trust of the British and became Honorary Magistrate, President of the Una Municipal Committee and Viceregal Darbari.[265]

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260 Joginder Singh, *Religious Pluralism in Punjab*, p. 54.

261 *Ibid*, p. 54.

262 *Ibid*, p. 70.

263 *Ibid*, p. 5.

264 *District and States Gazetteers of Undivided Punjab: Punjab District Gazetteers*, Vol. xiii, Part A: Hoshiarpur District, Part A, 1904, Low Price Publications, Delhi, 1993 (Reprint), p. 422.

265 *Ibid*, p. 422.

Bedis of Rawalpindi district too enjoyed a special spiritual and temporal status among the Sikhs of that area. In the post-annexation period of Punjab, Baba Khem Singh Bedi emerged as a powerful leader. He was born at Kulgram, district Hoshiarpur on 21 February 1832. He was the son of Baba Attar Singh Bedi. The family claimed to be the descendants of Guru Nanak Dev and carried an aura of a spiritual leader. He inherited huge landed property comprising 8,000 acres of land and was awarded 14,000 acres of land in Montgomery and 3,000 acres out of it were revenue-free land. He was also awarded the membership of the Provincial Darbar by Lord Lawrence for the loyal services rendered by the family during the Uprising of 1857 and even before that occupied the 14th position in the hierarchy of the Provincial Darbaris.[266]

Baba Khem Singh was baptized by Baba Bir Singh of Naurangabad who, it is stated, took three vows from him: (a) to awake at quarter to sunrise (b) recite Japji Sahib 25 times and (c) undertake the task of *amrit-parchar* regularly. Khem Singh was one of the founder members of the Singh Sabha, Amritsar in 1873 but was opposed by leaders like Prof. Gurmukh Singh, Singh Sabha Lahore, for his self-proclaimed exalted spiritual position and religious orthodoxy. He was a strong protagonist of British loyalty and ensured that the Singh Sabha, Amritsar could formally propagate this task. He was a crusader of social reforms and harbinger of women's education: he established more than 100 schools and 50 of them were recognized by the government. He looked after hundreds of orphans during the epidemics of 1896-7. He donated lakhs of rupees for social and charitable purposes and was appointed a Magistrate of Montgomery in 1877 and Honorary *Munsif* in the following years. He was awarded CIE for his military services rendered in 1875 and with the highest title of KCIE in 1898. He was a nominated member of the first legislative council and was one of the representatives sent from Punjab to attend the coronation celebration in London. He expired at Montgomery in April 1905.[267] Baba Khem Singh undertook tours for *amrit-parchar*, particularly in the Pothohar area of Punjab and baptised thousands of Sehajdharis. He was opposed by the Singh Sabha reformers on the issue of Rahit Maryada. After his death his son, Baba Gurbax Singh carried on the socio-religious traditions of his family and *Raj-bhagti*.[268]

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266 Joginder Singh, *Religious Pluralism in Punjab*, p. 78.

267 Joginder Singh, *Sikh Leadership*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1999 p. 246.

268 *Ibid*, p. 245

The Bari, Dusri, Tisri and Chauthi Sarkars were the branches of Sodhis who enjoyed state patronage and received pensions from the British Government. According to the Hoshiarpur District Gazetteer (1904), Ram Narayan represented Bari Sarkar.[269] He was Honorary Magistrate and Civil Judge. He was married to the daughter of Baba Khem Singh Bedi of Rawalpindi. A major source of income for the Anandpur Sodhis came from offerings at various shrines. As we shall note, these Sodhis were custodians of the Khalsa traditions, which they claimed, were received from Guru Gobind Singh's times. It was for these reasons that they refused to entertain Namdhari Guru Ram Singh when the latter visited Anandpur in 1872 and questioned the Khalsa Maryada initiated by him.[270]

The Sodhis of Anandpur enjoyed socio-religious and political hegemony in the Anandpur region. The Sodhis controlled some of the major sacred shrines in the town They lived in grandeur on the offerings made by Sikh devotees and extensive revenue-free land grants from the Lahore state as well as from the Sikh rulers of Patiala and Faridkot. At the time of the sacred festivals, the Sodhis would personally receive thousands of pilgrims, instruct them in their faith, bless those seeking boons, particularly barren mothers and occasionally seek to cure the sick.[271]

Several Guru lineages had established their religious 'establishments to impart religious instructions, dispense charity and take care of the holy relics in the family's possession.' Prominent among them were Sodhis of Guru Har Sahai (Ferozepur) and Kartarpur. The latter were descendants of Dhirmal and possessed a manuscript of the Adi Granth. They started celebrating seasonal festivals and showed these sacred relics to the people. Such celebrations enhanced their socio-religious status as well as the volume of offerings. For instance, every Baisakhi Sodhis of Kartarpur had a huge celebration at their opulent headquarters. Approximately 20,000 pilgrims take bath in the Gangsar tank and then offered homage at the Thamji Sahib shrine as well as to the Adi Granth in the family's possession. Later the Sodhi guru, the head of the lineage,

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269 *District and States Gazetteers of the Undivided Punjab: Punjab District Gazetteers*, Vol. xiii, Part. A, Hoshiarpur, Part A, 1904, p. 423

270 Surmit Kaur, *Sikh Rehat Maryada: Nirmal Sampardaye de Parsang Vich*, p.39.

271 Joginder Singh, *Religious Pluralism in Punjab*, p. 60

would arrive with much pomp at the Damdama Sahib shrine, where he would read from the holy scripture and expound on the Sikh traditions.[272]

The already existing sects and cults reclaimed the space in the realm of the mainstream. It paved the way and space for other orders and little faiths to emerge which reinterpret the religious tradition with their own style and placed themselves within the shared religious tradition. The religious contestations, cultural disagreements and resistance created contradictions that led towards the emergence of new faiths. In this context, a new sect emerged which was known as Gulabdasis which came into prominence in the colonial period.

[272] Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries,* p.111.

CHAPTER-III

GULAB DAS: CANONIZATION AS A SAINT

Conventional scholarship classifies Gulab Das as a Bhakti poet. This tag obscures the wholistic personality of Gulab Das and puts him into fragmentation. In this context, Jon Keune argues that the definition of bhakti is deceptively familiar, uncritically understood and historiographically overburdened.[1] Precisely because of Gulab Das's apparent idiosyncrasies and divergence from the early nineteenth to late-nineteenth-century conduct as a disciple of Udasi and Nirmala Sects, he is a compelling subject of historical investigation. Therefore, we need to think about and re-envision these contexts in different manners and analyse them in the light of south Asian religious tradition. The existing literature is focused on examining the elements of resistance of sects and challenges to dominant and mainstream monotheistic religions. The sect of Gulab Das stood for the dignity, solace and new social space it provided to its primarily low-caste following in colonial Punjab. This chapter tries to explore the vernacular religion, non-elite society, and the social landscape of the 'mainstream' in colonial Punjab.

The pre-modern scholarship on early history in south Asia has denied or negated devotional or bhakti materials as sources. In the context of Sikh tradition, Harjot Oberoi has deeper concerns and he states that the historiography of the Sikh experience in the nineteenth century is based on two principles: silence and negation.[2] The categorization of a sect and its alienation from religious tradition is the subject of investigation. However, there are some perceived notions and contestations about Gulab Das and his sect. According to the first, Gulab Das was a scholar, a learned man of his age with great writing skills, who gathered around himself lettered and literary disciples.[3] He extended the culture of learning and writing which was earlier started by

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1 Jon Keune, "Eknath in Context: The Literary, Social and Political Milieu of An Early Modern Saint-Poet", Rosalind O'Hanlon, Christopher Minkowski and Anand Venkatkrishan (eds.), *Scholar Intellectuals in Early Modern India*, Routledge, New Delhi, 2015, pp. 23-27.

2 Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1995, p.30.

3 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 4.

the Udasis and Nirmala Sikhs. Another source presents Gulab Das as an independent rebellious guru who was condemned by the religiously orthodox elites and the so-called intermediaries of social modesty. He was not only criticized for his ideas but also for his new vision of social composition and cultural frames in his Dera at Chathianwla village in Kasur, near Lahore, now in Pakistan. This makes it an interesting study to get a peep into the multi-coloured nature of the cultural landscape and religious traditions in nineteenth-century Punjab. The existing studies show how someone like Gulab Das, with his ideas that challenged the dominant social and religious system, set new discourses and changed the socio-cultural and religious prism in society.

A variety of sources on the Gulab Das are available which are helpful to understanding the attitude of different scholars towards Gulab Das, the founder of this sect. The sectarian Nirmala scholars had contradictory views and disowned Gulab Dassin the Sikh tradition. Most of them are hesitant to consider his ideas and the established praxis of his sect at Chathianwala. In the colonial period, there were different perspectives toward Gulabdasis. A glimpse of the colonial accounts will be given, looking at sources that unambiguously condemn Gulab Das and his apparently 'epicurean ways'.[4] Actually, they make the reason to justify and support the sectarian Sikh sources which condemned Gulab Das. But the defensive remarks came forth from the writings of disciples of Gulab Das for their Guru.

Therefore, to understand these contestations we have to revisit Gulab Das's work and ideas which led to crystallizing his base and his theological position. One needs to focus much more on the intellectual base and superstructure and then only should revisit his radical thoughts. Contemporary scholars criticized him for moral obligations. Anshu Malhotra tries to understand this criticism in the light of *Shara*, which denotes a violation of moral codes.[5] These moral codes or *Shara* consciously and subconsciously have become a part of public memory. The public sphere and its memory are much more important in the concerned period. Christian Lee Novetzkeaptly contextualizes this term to study Namdev and his literary tradition.[6]

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4 *Ibid*, p. xvi.

5 *Ibid*, p. 19.

6 Christian Lee Novetzke, *History, Bhakti and Public Memory: Namdev in Religious and Secular Traditions*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2008, pp. 1-31.

History, Journey and Life of Gulab Das

Usually, Gulab Das is worshipped by his followers as a saint. Some sources depict him as a Pir. The scholars use the term 'saint' as a translation of Arabic, Persian and Urdu pluralistic terms. Most scholars use the terms *wali, sheikh, darvesh,* Sufi, Pir, or Marabout[7] as synonyms for the saint. P.M. curie argues that it obscures the considerable diversity which underlies these terms.[8] The terms have cultural differences. Turner clarifies this situation: "Arabic terms Marabout, Darvesh, Sufi, Wali cannot be translated into the Christian term of the Saint because the history, institutions and cultural frameworks of these religions are distinctive. The centralized, complex, and stringent process of canonization is crucial to the Christian understanding of saintship. Precisely because no such centralized, ecclesiastical machinery exists in Islam, there is no official homogenous terminology of Maraboutism (Saintship in Islam). When Western anthropologists talk about Muslim saints, they use the term as a shorthand for a diversity of roles."[9]

Gulab Das is also called a Pir by his followers. Sometimes, the term Pir and Murshid confuse as it is used in various contexts and general subject matter. Mayer distinguishes the term Pir and Murshid and considers Pir a healer and the Murshid a guide.[10] Piro, the foremost disciple of Gulab Das; called his Guru a Pir for Muslims. She diversified the image of his Guru:

> ਪੀਰੋ ਸਾਈਂ ਮੈ ਮਿਲਾ ਗੁਲਾਬਦਾਸ ਅੰਬਿਰਾ, ਗੁਰ ਹਿੰਦਨ ਕੋ ਆਪ ਹੈ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ਕੋ ਪੀਰਾ।[11]
>
> *(Piro sai main mila Gulab Das ambira, Gur hindan ko aap hai musalman ko pira).*

But in North Indian tradition, Pir and Murshid have both qualities. Murshid can guide and also a healer like Pir as well.[12] It is believed that the saint's proximity to Allah led

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7 A shrine marking the burial place of a Muslim holy man or hermit.

8 P.M. Currie, *The Shrine and Cult of Mu'InAl-Din Chishti of Ajmer*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, p. 1.

9 B.S. Turner, *Weber and Islam*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1975, p. 61.

10 A.C. Mayer, "Pir and Murshid: An Aspect of Religious Leadership in W. Pakistan", *Middle Eastern Studies,* 3, 1966-7, pp.161-4.

11 Piro, *Ik Sau Sath Kafiyan*, Manuscript No. 888, Bhai Gurdas Library, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar.

to the primary reason to receive Baraka.[13] The purpose of the saint cult is to mobilize the Baraka embodied in the saint for either esoteric or mundane purposes.[14] P.M. Curie defines an individual saint who has certain qualities, but these qualities are the consequence of his being a saint.[15] Guru Granth Sahib defines a saint whose actions are similar to those of God.

> ਸੋਈ ਸੰਤੁ ਜਿ ਭਾਵੈ ਰਾਮ॥ਸੰਤ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਕੈ ਏਕੈ ਕਾਮ ॥
> *Soi sant jo bhawe ram. Sant Gobind ke eko kaam.*[16]

In this verse, the saint is the substitute for the prophet. The accepted signs of this relationship (eccentricity, asceticism, descent, learning, spiritual, discipline, expertise in ecstatic techniques, etc.) are visible and sufficiently all-embracing and elastic enough not to disqualify any individual on the ground of the personality and if these are absent, those can soon be supplied.[17] Gulab Das remained under the training of these types of asceticism, descent and learning spirituality which produced certain domains of sainthood. There are many legends and stories which corroborate historical facts. It has also been recorded in the earliest sources. The major source materials for this period are Sikh sources associated with the sect of Nirmalas. These include Giani Gian Singh's Panth Prakash (1880), Mahant Ganesha Singh's Bharat Mat Darpan (1926) and Kahn Singh Nabha's Mahan Kosh (1930). These Sikh scholars have given valuable information and opinions regarding GulabDasis. These works also give information about many sects and the contemporary history of Punjab. These historical works defined the Sikh tradition especially thought how it out to be a tradition. They describe and organize the new thought of knowledge which initiated with colonialism.[18] Thus, a new debate started about Sikh tradition in the historiography of religion in general and Sikh tradition in particular. Harjot Oberoi sees it in the domain of 'identical' fluidity,

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12 P.M. Currie, *The Shrine and Cult of Mu'InAl-Din Chishti of Ajmer*, p. 2.

13 Bryan S. Turner, *Weber and Islam,* Vol. VII, Routledge, New York, 1998, p.65.

14 Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1971, pp.50-51.

15 P.M. Currie, *Mu'in al-din Chishti of Ajmer*, p. 12.

16 *Guru Granth Sahib Sahib*, p. 867.

17 Aubrey O'Brien, "Saints of the Western Panjab", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 41, 1911, pp. 510-11.

18 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, p.19.

pluralism and homogeneity.[19] Oberoi defines Sikhism as far more inclusive of Sikh diversity rather than being exclusively focused on Khalsa identity which was generalized by the Lahore Singh Sabha.[20] These authors were concerned with what ought to be understood as falling within a Sikh tradition when the urge to outline such a tradition was emerging.[21]

Panth Prakash was written by Gian Singh who studied Vedanta and other studies in the Nirmala sect. He was the first to consolidate thoughts regarding the life of Gulab Das. In this regard, Anshu Malhotra states that though shaped by newer concerns, it did not shed its link with earlier knowledge forms, whether the hagiography or the genealogy, thus maintaining a link with the well-established *tazkirah* biographical form, and creating a pastiche of forms. [22] *Panth Prakash* is a detailed history of eighteenth-century Punjab and contains narratives on the first and tenth Sikh gurus. It was published seven years after the death of Gulab Das in 1873. That is why it is a much important source for our inquiry. Gian Singh was a renowned Sikh scholar and historian, who took education in the Nirmala sect and acknowledged Tara Singh Narottam as his mentor.[23] This manuscript has been written in Braj verses. Punjabi and partially Urdu words are used in this historical writing. At the end of this book, Gian Singh gives accounts of the various Sikh sects including the Nirmalas, Udasis, Hindalis, Nanakpanthis, Namdharis, Gulabdasis and Hiradasis. In this writing, the Sect of Gulabdasisis is seen to be a part of the Sikh tradition.

Another important Sikh scholar Ganesha Singh's work *Nirmal Bhushan: Itihas Nirmal Bhekh* was a history of the Nirmala sect which was completed around 1937. The sect, with its emphasis on Vedic and Sanskrit learning, was meant to have started during Guru Gobind Singh's time and he is said to have sent three disciples to Benaras for Sanskrit learning.[24] They were distinguished by their celibate status, white or

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19 Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of the Religious Boundaries,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994, p. 53.

20 *Ibid.,* pp.39-62.

21 *Ibid,* p. 62.

22 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and Gulabdasis,* p. 14

23 For details on Giani Gian Singh, see Harbans Singh (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism,*Vol.2, Punjabi University, Patiala 1996, pp.82-83.

24 See John Malcolm, *Sketch of The Sikhs; The Origin, Customs and Manners,* p. 107, H.H. Wilson, *Essays and Lectures on the Religion of the Hindus, Society for Resultation of India Literature,* p. 196. See also, H.A. Rose, *Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province,* Language Department, Patiala, 1970 (Reprint).

saffron garments and uncut hair.[25] Mahant Ganesha Singh was a historian of the Nirmala order and he served as secretary in the famous Panchaiti Akhara in Amritsar.[26] Ganesha Singh wrote this work in conventional prose narrative. He often goes with Gian Singh's words and phrases. But this work is unique for giving fresh details about Gulabdasis which he gets from Piro's autobiographical work *Ik Sau Sath Kafian*. Therefore, the foremost source regarding Gulab Das is the *Ik Sau Sath Kafian* of Piro. Thus, through the texts of these two authors, we have ideas about the contemporary narratives regarding the Gulabdasis and the early twentieth century.

The most important scholar in this category is Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha who was a very prominent scholar, prolific pen and learned exegesis of different Sikh texts, including the Adi Granth.[27] He became famous when he published *'Ham Hindu Nahi'* in 1898, served the interest of the Singh Sabha Movement and pushed his ideological agenda of separate Sikh identity. It was the counterwork against the narrative that the Sikhs are part of the Hindu faith which was propounded by Hindu fundamentalists of the Arya Samaj Movement. He contested that Sikhism was a separate religion different from Hinduism.[28] Both these currents need re-analysis in the light of 'religion' as a monotheistic entity. Kahan Singh tried to homogenize and reformulate the Sikh tradition which was the core ideological line of the Singh Sabha Movement. In the Sikh tradition, various heterodox sects remained aloof from this kind of homogeneity. Kahan Singh directly never raised questions over these sects but there is a reference where he felt privileged to edit a document name *Dastur-ul- Amal*[29] which is a code of conduct to run the administration in the Nirmala centres. It has nine clauses but Giani Gian Singh added two clauses which he mentioned in his book named *Nirmal Panth Pardipika*.[30] Interestingly, Kahan Singh reinterpreted and added eighteen more clauses and extended these up to thirty which he mentions in *Mahan Kosh*. In the beginning, Kahan Singh

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25 Surmit Kaur, *The Sikh Rehat Marayada (Nirmala Sampardaye De Parsang Vich)*, Unpublished M.Phi. Dissertation, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 2019, p. 24.

26 See R.A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province*, Languages Department, Patiala, 1970.

27 Harbans Singh, (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, pp. 409-10.

28 Kahan Singh Nabha, *Ham Hindu Nahi*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 2015 (First Published 1898).

29 The copy of this code of conduct has given at the end of *Nirmal Panth Pradepika* by Giani Gian Singh.

30 Giani Gian Singh, *Nirmal Panth Pardipika*, p. 78.

Nabha wrote that the head Mahant and four other members will be appointed with the advice of three princely states and with an assurance to wear 5 K's.[31] He gives a brief account of Gulab Das's life and literature here in a serious manner, in contrast to the earlier scholars who gave a gossipy narrative of Gulab Das. Giani Gian Singh's account is the most significant of these accounts because he was the closest to the time of Gulab Das. He had witnessed the contemporary events which shaped Gulab Das's life and his journey from Gulab Singh to Saint Gulab Das. He was also contemporary to the fall of Sikh power after the two Anglo-Sikh wars were fought between 1845 and 1849 and thus, he gave the virtual experience of the upheaval between the two empires, the Sikh and the British.[32]

Based on these sources, an inference is drawn that Gulab Das was born in 1809 in the village Ratol in the Tarn Taran district of Punjab, in a *jat* family. His father was Hamira and his mother was Deso. These authors also stated that he served as a soldier in the army of the Pohuwind chiefs. Subsequently, his spiritual and philosophical journey was initiated. Gian Singh writes that Gulab Das became a disciple of Brahm Das, stayed with some faqirs, then studied Vedanta with Deva Singh Nirmala and remained in the company of one Haridas Girdhar. Ganesha Singh gives more details and differs slightly from Gian Singh. According to him, Gulab Das began his spiritual training with the Udasis (but does not mention the name of his guru), in particular, their sub-branch of Sangat Sahiban and like the *Nagas* or the naked sadhus among them, he smeared ashes on his body.[33] The Udasi sect was founded by Baba Sri Chand, the eldest son of the first Sikh guru, Nanak.[34] Many scholars believe that Udasis had a close resemblance to Hindu ascetic practices, including being celibate, and smearing ashes on the body, particularly their naga sadhus. They also recruited from all castes.

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31 *Ibid*,76-77.

32 Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, pp. 1542-52.

33 James Hastings, (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 12, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1958, pp. 504-5.

34 For more details, see, Harbans Singh, (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2004, pp. 376-379, Madanjit Kaur, *Udasis in Colonial Punjab*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2011, pp, 1-11., Sulakhan Singh, *Heterodoxy in the Sikh Tradition*, pp. 3-9, Pashaura Singh; and Louis E. Fenech, *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 375–376, J. S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1998, p. 116, John Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs: Their Origin, Customs and Manners*, p.1070, M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, p.245.

After leaving the Udasis, Gulab Das went to Dhanaula village which is located in the Malwa area. There he met one Dhyandas and learnt his lexical and prosodic studies.[35] Ganesha Singh further notes that being a restless character he then gave up rubbing ashes on himself, started wearing good clothes, and kept the company of Bulleh Shahi faqirs.[36] Giani Gian Singh criticized his intellectual activity as just he learnt to insult the ways of both the Hindus and the Muslims.[37] Gian singh, in his effort to both own and disown Gulab Das, accuses certain faqirs of introducing *khulasa* living to him:

> ਰਿੰਡ ਫ਼ਕੀਰ ਖੁਲਾਸਿਓਂ ਕੀ ਉਨ ਸੰਗਤ ਕਰੀ ਬਧੇਰੀ।
> *Rind faqir khulasiayon ki un sangat kari badheri.*[38]

These faqirs are named Bullehshahi by Ganesha Singh, apparently referring to a group of Bulleh Shah's followers based in Kasur,[39] and Shamsher Singh Ashok names the particular faqir Khaki Shah with whom Gulab Das kept company. He also calls Gulabdasis Sufiana in their orientation and states that the Gulabdasi sect spread as ferociously as a dust storm at a particular time in Punjab.[40]

Later, Gulab Das went to Deva Singh of Kurukshetra and studied Vedanta there. He also spent time in nomadic life with Haridas Girdhar.[41] Haridas Girdhar was born in a village named Jhingran which is located in the Hoshiarpur district of the Punjab.[42] For

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35 Kahan Singh Nabha, *Gur Shabad Ratnakar: Mahan Kosh*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2008 (First published 1930) p. 1515.

36 Bulleh Shah (1680-1752) was the famous Qadiri-Shattari Sufi of Punjab, whose *kafis* or verses challenged established religious authorities and accepted social norms and his ideas continued to be popular in contemporary Punjab, both Indian and Pakistani. His establishment was also in Kasur, where Gulab Das made his base: Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash,* pp, 1292. Bulle Shah critiqued the formalism of both Islam and Hinduism. He boldly renounced the rituals and pilgrimage and advocated love thus raising the status of *Takhat Hazara*, the village of Ranjha to the level of Islamic pilgrimage: Ishwar Dayal Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy: Exploring Medieval Punjab Through Hir Waris,* Manohar, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 166,194.

37 Navratan Kapoor, Sadhu *Gulab Das: Jivan Te Rachna*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 1-8.

38 Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash,* p. 1293.

39 Ganesha Singh, *Bharat Mat Darpan,* p. 127.

40 Shamsher Singh, Ashok, *Shirin Farhad,* Punjabi Sahit Academy, Ludhiana, 1963, p. 5.

41 Ganesha Singh, *Bharat Mat Darpan,* p. 127.

42 *Ibid*, p. 127.

Kahan Singh, after being in the service of some specified Sikhs, Gulab Das became a disciple of Hiradas Udasi of Kasur, and then in Dhanuala village, near Nabha, he learnt prosody with Dhyandas and with Haridas Girdhar he began writing poetry and studied Vedanta with Dewa Singh Nirmala and became an atheist.[43] While there is no agreement on the name of the Udasi preceptor of Gulab Das, the other two names Deva Singh Udasis and the Bulleh Shahis, are not mentioned by Gian Singh.[44] Kahan Singh remains silent regarding Gulab Das's learning and indirectly denied any influence of the faqirs of different orders. Vijender Das, who is the head of the Gulab Dasi dera in Hansi and is trying to expand and centralize the centres of the Gulabdas sect, also sketches Gulab Das as an independent-minded person, who never became a part of any sect, neither Udasi nor Nirmala.[45] But Sant Singh Sekhon, while discussing Gulabdasi poet Kishan Singh Arif in his *History of Punjabi Literature*, refers to his guru as Gulab Singh Nirmala.[46] This is the only reference regarding his close affiliation with the Nirmalas.

Another view was given by a follower of Gulab Das named Seth Vishandas. He lived between 1843 and 1929. He was a rich Sindhi follower of Gulab Das. His biography titled 'Ratanjot' was compiled by members of his family. Therefore, it is assumed that he was still alive at the time.[47] In this account Vishndas acclaimed that Gulab Das died after the long age of hundred and fifty-one years. According to Vishandas, he was born in 1723 and died in 1874, though the name of his village and district remains identical to Sikh narratives.[48] Gulab Das's birth in 1723 is also given in the work of Bir Singh, a disciple of Gulab Das.[49] Here the narrative of a long life consolidates a symbol of establishing the miraculous and mythical powers of the guru who was beyond mortality. More significantly, the long span allows the guru's interlocution with a variety of mystics of the past, including the eminent Sindhi Sufi,

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43 Kahan Singh Nabha, *Gur Shabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh*, p.1515.

44 Navratan Kapoor, *Sadhu Gulab Das: Jivan Te Rachna*, pp. 1-5.

45 Sant Vijender Das, *Maa Kaviytri Piro*, Satluj Prakashan, Mohali, 2011, pp. 5-19.

46 Sant Singh Sekhon, *A History of Punjabi Literature*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1993, Vol.2, p. 136.

47 Khadim Hussain Soomro, *Seth Vishandaas: A Great Philanthropist* (Translated by Zafar Iqbal Mirza), Sain Publishers, Sehwan Sharif, 1997, p.22.

48 *Ibid*, pp. 31-9.

49 Bir Singh, *Sri Sahaj Bilas*, Wazir Hind Press, Amritsar, p. 7.

Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai (1689-1752), whose spiritual verses inscribed in the Risalo still echo in Sindh.[50] Vijender Das of Hansi's account also talks about Gulbdas's life of one hundred and fifty years (1723-1873). But he acknowledges that most narratives fix his birth year as 1809.[51]

The above account gives the same narrative that Gulab Das left home at the age of eleven and spent forty years in contemplation and austerity. He came under the influence of many sects and sometimes stayed naked, smearing his body with ashes. He learned a lot from these sects and saints. Vishandas speaks of the Guru's dialogue with Shah Abdul Latif in Sindh, and also with one Meghraj Brahman.[52] In addition, returning to Kasur after his travels in 1814 (Bikrami 1871), he also met Buller Shah (1681-1752), the famous Qadiri- Shattari Sufi from Kasur.[53] In this account Gulab Das is said to have travelled to religious places in India and Europe, besides Islam's sacred sites of Mecca and Medina, making his journey through the sea, but returning through the land route. In Vijender Das' estimation, the miracle-working Gulab Das must be considered among the best of Indian sages.[54]

These narratives which were adopted by these authors have a lot of objections and contestations related to Gulabdas's journey of earlier life. Gian Singh's work discusses aspects of Gulabdasi thought and ways. It also appreciates the intellectual prowess of Gulab Das. The fact remains that this sect gains much popularity during that time and these authors could not ignore the sect. This sect attracted many followers. At a point, Ganesha Singh also mentions that efforts were made to put down the sect. Later on, many Gulabdasis took to call themselves Udasis and Nirmala's, indicating closeness to their own sect which despite their disapproval they conceded.[55] Even, Giani Gian Singh begins his narrative on the Gulabdasis by making a curious observation:

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50 Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Yoda Press, New Delhi, 2007, pp.390-93.

51 Sant Vijender Das (ed.), *Sant Kaviytri Ma Piro*, pp. 35-6.

52 Khadim Hussain Soomro, *Seth Vishandas*,pp. 28-34

53 *Ibid*, pp. 37-38.

54 Sant Vijender Das, *Sant Kavyitri Ma Piro*, pp. 37-42.

55 Ganesha Singh, *Bharat Mat Darpan*, Bhai Boorh Singh Ji Soni Vaid Tarn Taran, Giani Madan Mohan Singh Ji, Amritsar, 1926, p.129.

ਜੈਸੇ ਭਏ ਵਰਨ ਹੋ ਤੈਸੇ ਨਾਸਤਕ ਇਨੇ ਲਖੀਜੋ [56]
(Jaise bhaye varan ho taise nastak ine lakhijo).

This reference also shows attempts to put down the popularity of this sect in his writing. Literally, the term Varan is used for the fourfold caste hierarchy. Anshu Malhotra argues over this categorization. She states that by the reiteration of caste as a normal that society produces consent to its inequalities and disturbing denunciation of caste norms, in theory as in practice by challenging its normative status, therefore, made the Gulabdasis anomalous, creating categorizing problems for Gian Singh.[57] She considers that Gian Singh was giving consent to inequality through this statement.

In Punjab, numerous sects do not have any classification regarding *Varan*, *Jati*. Partha Chatterjee classifies some institutions during the colonial and post-colonial periods those outside the Varnashramdharma and the varna-caste nexus.[58] The Gulabdasis were one of those who occupied this domain. Gulabdas clears this in his verse:

ਸਾਂਝ ਨਾ ਬਰਨ ਆਸ਼ਰਮ ਕਿਸੇ ਸਿਓਂ ਭੇਖ ਨਾਹੀ ਕੋਈ ਕੀ ਤਾਰੇ ।[59]
(Sanjh naa barn ashram kise sion bhekh nahi koi kita re).

In the Sikh religion, Guru Granth rejected the supremacy of the four varans system. In one of the verses of Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Nanak said:

ਵਰਨਾ ਵਰਨ ਨ ਭਾਵਨੀ ਜੇ ਕਿਸੈ ਵਡਾ ਕਰੇਇ ॥[60]
(Varna varn na bhawni je kisse wadda kre).

In another verse Guru Arjun Dev stated that:

ਖਤ੍ਰੀ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣ ਸੂਦ ਵੈਸ ॥ ਉਪਦੇਸੁ ਚਹੁ ਵਰਨਾ ਕਉ ਸਾਝਾ॥[61]
Khatri Brahman sood vais. Updes chau varna kau sanjha.

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56 Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, p. 1517.

57 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, pp. 47-49.

58 *Ibid*, p. 175.

59 Gulab Das, *Pothi Gulab Chaman*, Lahore, N.D., *Pad*, 319.

60 *Guru Granth Sahib*, p.53.

61 *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 748.

The Sikh scholar Giani Gian Singh gave a new category Nastik (atheist) for Gulbdas which is equal to four varans. The connotation of the term '*nastik'* for Singh is from atheism, unbelief, apostasy, to godlessness which depicted the Gulabdasi beliefs and underscored their heterodoxy. He underscores his theology and projected him as 'Dry Vedanta Nastik' (*khushak bedanti nastak*) and at the same time, he compared Gulab Das with *Ma uji* Panth. The categorization is challengable in the domain of Sikh Panth. In this context, Sikh scholars are expected to use the terms like '*Gurmukh'* and '*manmukh'*; the same as '*kafir'* and '*momin'* in Muslim tradition. Giani Gian Singh put this sect under the category which does not have any restrictions on sensual hedonism and follows the path of atheism.[62] Guru Granth has a stance on atheism. Guru Nanak says:

ਆਸਤਿ ਨਾਸਤਿ ਏਕੋ ਨਾਉ ॥[63]
Asat Nasat Eko Nao.

Significantly one of the texts attributed to Gulab Das is '*Mauj Vilas'*, literally 'Sensuous Surge'. Giani Gian Singh specified two other pleasure seeker gurus named Maghi shah of Manusurpura and Man Shah of Rameshwrpuri.

ਉਸੀ ਜ਼ਮਾਨੇ ਮੈਂ ਇਸ ਮਤ ਕੋ ਮਦਦ ਮਿਲੀ ਇਕ ਔਰੈਂ ਜੀ ।
ਮੱਗੀ-ਸ਼ਾਹ ਮਨਸੂਰਪੁਰੇ ਮੈਂ ਬਿਦਤਯੋ ਯੋਂ ਹੀ ਗੋਰੇਂ ਜੀ ।[64]
Usi Zamane Mein Mat Lo Madad Mili Ek Auren Ji.
Maggi-Shah Mansurpure Mein Bidatiyo Yon Hi Goaren Ji.

There is a cross-reference of Maghi Shah given by Navratan Kapoor towards the end of the text of Gulab Sagar.

ਗੁਲਾਬਦਾਸ ਪਯਾਰੇ, ਮਾਘੀ ਤਿਨ ਕਾ ਨਾਮ ।
Gulab Daspyare, Maghi tin ka Nam.[65]

Thus, it was the fundamental belief of the Gulabdasis that put them on the margin of acceptability and respectability, identifying them in common parlance with perhaps the

62 Vijender Das, *Sant Kavyitri Ma Piro*, p. 39.

63 *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 953.

64 Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, p. 1523.

65 Navratan, Kapoor, *Sadhu Gulab Das: Jeewan Ate Rachna*, p. 7.

left-hand, tantra-like sects, or the materialist *Charvak t*ype.[66] But Gulab Das describes himself as *ajat*, a word that has connotations of being casteless or having lost caste.

ਸਾਈਂ ਹਮੇ ਅਜਾਤ ਹੈ ਨਾ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਤੁਰਕਾ ।
Sain Hamein Ajaat hai na Hindu Turka.[67]

Piro said that Gulab Das may be said to have declared himself without caste from his own viewpoint, but also may be considered to have lost caste based on the strictures of society, through degenerated practices.

ਆਤਮ ਸੱਤਾ ਸਰਬ ਮੈਂ ਘਟ ਘਟ ਰਹੀ ਸਮਾਏ, ਸੱਮ ਹੈ ਊਚ ਨੀਚ ਮੈ ਉਪਜੈ ਨਾ ਮਰ ਜਾਏ

Atam Satta Sarab Main Ghat Ghat Rahi Samai, Samm hai Uch Neech Mai Upje na Mar Jai.[68]

Saint Kabir signified Gyan and refuted caste in his verses when he states:

ਜਾਤ ਨਾ ਪੂਛੋ ਸਾਧੂ ਕੀ ਪੂਛ ਲੀਜੀਏ ਗਯਾਨ [69]
Jaat Naa Pucho Sadhuk ki Pooch Lijiye Gyan .

Navratan Kapoor in his study of Gulab Das's life and writing traces the influence of the Sarbhangi sect on him, which he understands as Aghori.[70] The literal meaning of *Aghori*[71] is unclean and foul, and they claim to be integrated with the Shaiva community. However, Sarbhangi ascetics are those who believed to reject caste. Kapoor specifically traces the influence of Sarbhangi through Gulab Das's association with Haridas Girdhar and the chant *Soham* (also sometimes called *Sohang*), the mantra explicated by an important Sarbhangi called Kina Ram and his disciple Gulab Chand 'Anand'.[72] Gulab Das gives a reference in his verse about this sect. he said that:-

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66 Shaharyar called Gulabdasis Charvakis. See, Shaharyar, 'Kalaam Mata Piro ka', *Hun*, January-April 2009, 166.

67 Piro, *Kafian Likhyate Mata Piro Kia*, Manuscript, Kafi no. 27.

68 Gulab Das, *Gulab Sagar*, pp. 16-17.

69 Kabir, *Doha*, 5.

70 Navratan Kapoor, *Sadhu Gulab Das*, pp. 13-16.

71 Ron Barrett, *Aghor Medicine: Pollution, Death, And Healing In Northern India*, University of California Press, California, 2008, p. 33.

72 Navratan Kapoor, *Sadhu Gulab Das* p. 14.

ਮੁਕਤ ਬਿਦੇਹ ਭਇਓ ਇਕ ਅੰਗੀ, ਨਾਮ ਰੂਪ ਯੇਹ ਹਉ ਸਰਭੰਗੀ [73]
Mukt bideh bhayio ik angi, naam roop yeh hau sarbhangi.

There is another verse which refers to Sarbhangis:

ਦੇਹਾਂ ਪ੍ਰਤੀ ਭਿਨ ਭਿਨ ਆਤਮਾ ਹੈ, ਜੋ ਸਰਵਾਂਗੀ ਹੈ ।
Dehan prati bhin bhin atma hai. Jo sarvangi hai.[74]

Kapoor does not give the period of Sarbhangis though it seems to be the eighteenth century. Baba Kina Ram Aghor Peeth Ramshala in Ramgarh, district Chandauli, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh gives information that Kinaram lived from 1601 to 1771 and is said to have lived for 177 years.[75]Anshu Malhotra also verifies this through the reference of Anil Nauriya, a lawyer for the marginal farmers who had been given land from the Ramshala under land ceiling laws, which the Ramshala is contesting.[76] Like Sarbhangi sadhus, Gulabdsas also chanted a mantra of *Soham* or *Sohang*. Anshu Malhotra signifies the mantra '*Soham'* (I am He) in Gulab Das's writing and points out that the chant was apparently, part of the spiritual repertoire of later bhakti saints like Paltu Das.[77] In many of his verses, Gulab Das mentions the mantra *Soham*.

ਵਹੀ ਪਰਮੇਸ਼ਵਰ ਸੁਤੇ ਮਹੰਤਾ
ਸ਼ੀਸ਼ ਮਹਿਲ ਜਯੋਂ ਹਰ ਪਰਕਾਰਾ
ਵਹੀ ਦਸ਼ਾ ਵਹੀ ਦੇਖਣਹਾਰਾ
ਖਾਲਕ ਹੈ ਯੇਹ ਖ਼ਲਕ ਨਜ਼ਾਰਾ
ਸੋਹੰ ਦੇਖੋ ਹਰ ਪਰਕਾਰਾ।[78]

Wahi parmeshwar sute mahanta.
Sheesh mahal jayon harparkara
Wahi dasha wahi dekhanhara.
Khalak hai yeh khalk nazara
Soham dekho har parkara.

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73 Gulab Das, *Gulab Sagar*, p.100.

74 *Ibid*, p. 114.

75 Navratan Kapoor, *Sadhu Gulab Das*, pp. 13-14.

76 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and Gulabdasis*, p. 18.

77 Navratan Kapoor, *Sadhu Gulab Das*, p. 14.

78 Gulab Das, *Gulab Sagar*, pp. 149-50.

There is another verse regarding Soham:

ਯੇਹ ਫਲ ਕਹੇ ਗਯਾਨ ਕੋ ਨਿਰਵਿਕਲਪ ਹੈ ਸੋਈ।
ਸੋਹੰ ਸਰਬ ਪਛਾਣ ਕੇ ਇਹ ਭਿਮਾਨ ਨਾ ਹੋਈ।
Yeh fall khegyan ko nirviklphai soi.
Soham sarbpchan key eh bhiman na hoi.[79]

This North-Indian Bhakti genre shaped and sharpened the poetic personality of Gulab Das and Bhakti ethos made Gulab Das a saint or Guru. Giani Gian Singh describes that Gulab Das declared himself the Supreme Being (Brahm), and for that, he gave the mantra of *Soham* to his followers. Brahm is the concept and elaboration of the Advaita philosophy of the unity of *Brahm* and *Jeev*. Gulab Das considered that the divine is located within the self. However, Giani Gian Singh also does not make the distinction of the divine (Brahm) located in the self but claimed that Gulab Das just called himself Divine (Brahm) or Brahm Gyan (knowledge of the Brahm).

ਸਤ ਸੰਤੋਖ ਧਰਮ ਜਪ ਤਪ ਤਜਿ
ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਆਪ ਕੋ ਭਾਸੈਂ ਜੀ।[80]
Sat Santokh Dharam Jap Tap Taj.
Braham Aap Ko Bhase Ji.

Anshu Malhotra minimizes the caste or creed and gender under the theoretical implication of the concept of Braham. She argues that if God was within all, then theoretically caste or creed, and even gender differences amounted to little (though gender always proved to be a greater hurdle), along with popular understandings of heaven, hell or sin.[81] The concept of *Brahm* was also integrated into Sufi tradition and verified the connection found in the Gulabdasis with Sufi groups that adhered to the heterodox philosophy of *Mansur-al-Hallaj*, the mystic martyr from Baghdad who gave to the world his singular expression *an 'al haq*–I am the Absolute Truth or I am God-which was considered blasphemous and pantheistic by the orthodox who tortured and hanged him in 922 CE.[82] The concept of *Brahm* is the same as what was discussed by Gulab Das. We have *ahambrahmasmi* in Upnishads which denotes the same as the

79 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman*, *Pad*, 252-258.

80 Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, p. 1522.

81 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and Gulabdasis*, p. 19.

82 Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 62-77.

concept of Brahm. As per the concept of Brahm God is visible in every creation of nature or the world. Annemarie Schimmel also puts it in the same manner through the example of Islam and compares it with the Upanishadic tradition.[83] Another concept of *Kalmia* refers to a basic belief in *Tauhid,* the unity or oneness of God. Anshu Malhotra contextualizes this concept and relatively tries to adjust it with Gulabdasis and its conceptual transmission. She states that groups like the Gulabdasis invoked this equivalence, revelling in cultural conversations and absorbing and incorporating similar elements from different traditions.[84] Certainly, Bulleh Shah's poetry has multiple references to both Mansur and *An'AlHaq,* as did many other Sufi verses in Punjab and it is also a known fact about him that he challenged caste- *zat*- practices.[85]

For Giani Gian Singh, the ideas and practices of Gulab Das were found to be much radical and deviating. Anshu Malhotra places it into the monist theory. She says that the episode of identity-making by Gulab Das depicted by Giani Gian Singh rather could be radical thought but for Gulabdasi's perspective and logical conclusion it was the implication of their monist thought.[86] The followers of the Gulab Das did not have any restrictions and bounded external identity and they were allowed as they wish to retain uncut hair or the shorn, shaven look (*kes* or *mund*), no sectarian garb or clear distinction (*bhekh or abhekh*). The Gulab Dasi ideas and practices were refuted and questioned by Gian Singh. Ganesha Singh's tone of disapproval is flagrant, even as he paraphrases Gian Singh:

> ਨਾਹੀ ਕੋਈ ਭੇਖ ਦਾ ਚਿੰਨ. ਆਪਣੀ ਮਰਜੀ ਤੇ ਕੇਸ, ਆਪਣੀ ਮਰਜੀ ਤੇ ਰੋਡ ਭੋਡ ਰਹੋ। ਖਾਣਾ ਪੀਣਾ ਆਪਣੇ ਮਨ ਭਾਉਂਦਾ ਕਰੋ। ਚੇਤਨ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਖੁਦ ਖੁਦਾ ਇਹ ਸਰੀਰ ਆਮ ਨਹੀ ਹੈ। [87]
>
> *Na hi bhekh da chin, apni marji te kes, apni marji te rod bhod raho. Khana pina apne man bhaunda karo,Chetan braham khud khuda ih sareer aam nahi hai.*

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83 Tony K. Stewart, "In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim Hindu Encounter Through Translation Theory", *History of Religions*, 40,3, 2001, pp. 260-87.

84 Anshu Malhotra, "Panths and Piety in the Nineteenth Century: The Gulabdasis of Punjab", Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir (ed.), *Punjab Reconsidered*, pp. 189-220.

85 *Ibid*, pp.22-25.

86 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, pp. 19-20.

87 Ganesha Singh, *Bharat Mat Darpan*, pp. 128-9.

Giani Gian Singh wrote:

> ਗੁਰੂ ਪੀਰ ਨਿਜ ਇਸ਼ਟ ਦੇ ਵਲੋ ਸ਼ਰਨ ਕੋ ਰਖਵਾਏ। ਆਪਣੀ ਮਰਜੀ ਕੇਸ ਰਖ ਕੇ ਚਾਹੋ ਮੁੰਡ ਮੁੰਡਾਓ;
> ਖਾਨ ਪਾਨ ਮਨ ਭਾਵਤ ਖਾਵੇ ਭਖ ਅਭਖ ਨਾ ਕੋਈ; ਮੁਲਜ਼ਮ ਜੋ ਨਾ ਬਨੇ ਸਰਕਾਰੀ ਬੇਸ਼ਕ ਕੀ ਜੋ ਸੋਈ ।[88]
> *Guru Pir nij ishat de walon sharan ko rakhwaye, apni marji kes rakh ke chaho mund mundao.*
> *Khan paan man bhawat khawe bhakh abhakh na koi, mulzam jo na bane sarkari beshak ki jo soi.*

Giani Gian Singh's last line accused Gulabdasis of degenerating into criminals, who could not become 'legal' or of the shariah/shara in their behaviour. He calls them '*muljam-mulzim'*- a criminal/accused as against *Sarkari* or a *mulazim*, a government employee. The Gulabdasis broke the identities and morality which was the core concern of the Sikh scholars. Anshu Malhotra argues that the Gulabdasis were seen as breaking existing norms of monastic order like shunning *bhekh* or sectarian distinctive garb, accoutrements and praxis of some ascetic orders like the Udasis or the Nirmalas. These sects also had some distinctions in objects, dresses, ornaments and practices: Followers of some sects used ashes over their bodies and some used to wear white garments and set the norms of celibacy for monks of both orders.[89] Ganesha Singh also objects to Gulab Das's stance on sensuous pleasure and he clinches his relationship with a prostitute (*veswa*) who was further connected with the story of his travels and his unearned wealth. He travelled to Mashka Mandi of Dwarka where a beautiful prostitute lived:

> ਨੂਰ ਸ਼ਹੂਰ ਰੂਪ ਪਿਖਿ ਜ੍ਵਾਨੀ, ਆਸ਼ਕ ਇਸ ਪਰਥਾਈ। [90]
> *Noor shahoor roop pikhi jawani, ashak is par thai*.

Literally a bright, famous beauty and he fell for his charms.

> ਦੌਲਤ ਹੁਤੀ ਤਾਂਹਿ ਢਿਗ ਭਾਰੀ,
> ਆਯੋ ਸੰਗ ਲਵਾਈ।

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88 Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*,p.1294.

89 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, p. 19.

90 Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, p. 1518.

ਮਗ ਮੈਂ ਮੁਈ ਬਿਮਾਰ ਹੋਇ ਵਹਿ,

ਧਨ ਇਸ ਪਾਸ ਰਹਾਯੋ । [91]

Daulat huti tahin dhig bhari,
Ayo sang lawayi.
Mag main muyi bimar hoi veh,
Dhan is pas rahao.

Giani Gian Singh also narrates Gulab Das's personality as a charismatic- good looking young man, with an inconstant heart and, godly gifted with sweet speech and proficiency in poetics:

ਚੰਚਲ ਚਿੱਤ ਚਤੁਰ ਥਾ ਚੋਖਾ, ਸੁੰਦਰ ਰੂਪ ਜ੍ਵਾਨੀ

ਸ਼ੀਰੀਂ ਸੁਖਨ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਰੀ ਭਾਰੀ, ਮੋਹਿਤ ਬਾਕ ਬਖਾਨੈ ।[92]

(Chanchal chit chatur tha chokha, sunder roop jwani
Shiri sukhan parkari bhari, mohit bak bakhane).

Later, after travelling to Chathianwala village in the Kasur district of Punjab, according to Gian Singh, Gulab Das often sat on horseback and was addressed by his followers with the honorific '*shastarbastar*', his turban topped with an aigrette (*kalgi*).

ਸ਼ਸਤਰ ਬਸਤਰ ਪਹਿਰੈ ਨੀਕੈ, ਕਲਗੀ ਜਿਗਾ ਸਜਾਵੈ।

ਚਡੇ ਤੁਰੰਗ ਢੰਗ ਗੁਰੂਓਂ ਕੇ, ਸਾਹਿਬ ਲੋਕ ਸਦਾਵੈ।[93]

Shaster baster pehre nikai, kalgi jiga sjawai.
Chade turang dhang guruon ke, sahib lok sdawai.

Interestingly, Gian Gian Singh used the word '*randi'* for the prostitute which has a negative connotation in Punjabi society. Anshu Malhotra consciously writes that the '*randi* of *mandi'*, to whom Singh had referred, then fell ill and died on the way (back to Punjab) leaving behind considerable wealth which the rich disciples and many Sikh soldiers deposited with him (for safe-keeping) while they went and fought in the Anglo-Sikh War of 1845-46, referred to as the Satluj shores by Giani Gian Singh.[94] Anshu Malhotra argues that the word '*randi'* was the common word in the contemporary society in which Giani Gian Singh wrote. But there were so many words

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91 *Ibid*, p.1518.

92 *Ibid*, p. 1517.

93 *Ibid*, p. 1518.

94 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and Gulabdasis,* p. 22.

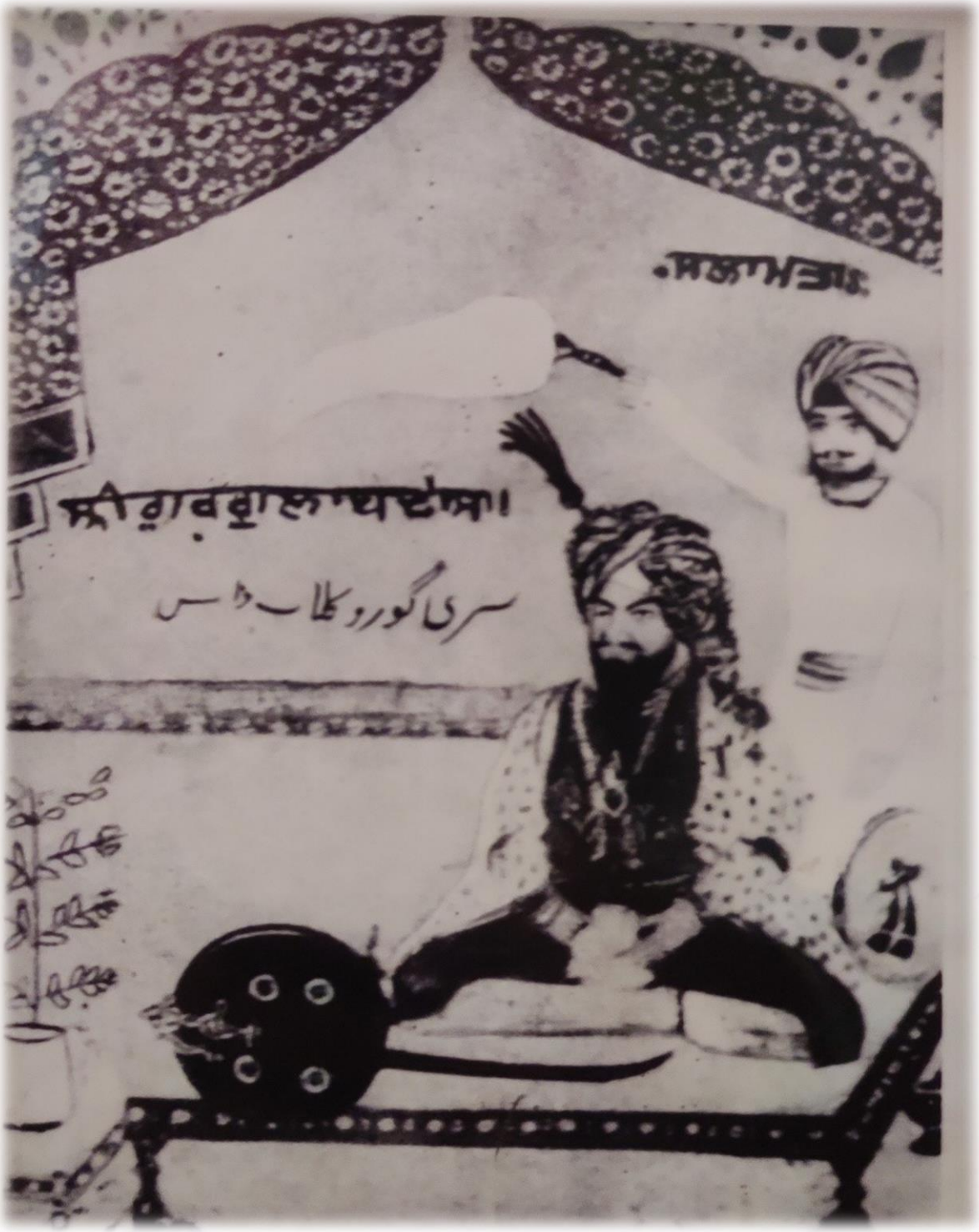

Illustration 3.1 Gulab Das attired as Sant Sipahi (Warrior)
Source: Author

to describe a prostitute at that time like Ganika, Veswa. But Giani Gian Singh and other Sikh scholars consciously used the word '*randi'* in a derogatory sense.

The war was fought on the shores of the southernmost of Punjab's rivers, the Satluj which was the border between the Sikh state and the British-controlled territories or the princely states under their protection to the south of the river since the Treaty of Amritsar in 1809.[95] The historical episode narrated by Gian Singh is much more evident and significant regarding the historical background when Gulabdasis were flourishing. Further, Giani Gian Singh refers to Gulab Das and Piro as having already settled in Chathianwala village before the Satluj war.

ਚੱਠੇ ਗਾਮ ਗੁਲਾਬ ਦਾਸ ਤਬਿ, ਲੈ ਪੀਰੋ ਕੋ ਆਯੋ।
ਰਹਯੋ ਹਮੇਸ਼ ਬਿਸ਼ੇਸ਼ ਤਹਾਂ, ਨਿਜ ਡੇਰਾ ਖੂਬ ਸਜਾਯੋ।
ਤਬਿ ਲੌ ਜੰਗ ਭਯੋ ਸਤਲੁਜ ਕਾ, ਸਿੱਖ ਮਿਲਾਪੀ ਤਾਂਕੇ।[96]
Chathegaam Gulab Das tab, lai Piro ko ao.
Raheo hmesh bishesh tahan, nij dera khoob sjao.
Tab lou jang bhaeo Satluj ka, sikh milapi tan ke.

This war was the culmination of succession war, killings, and factionalism after the demise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1849. When the powerful state of Ranjit Singh (1799-1839) was in decline and the British Raj was being established in 1849, the Gulabdasis were gaining popularity, followers and wealth in the unsettled conditions, in Giani Gian Singh's estimations. The state by the end of the Maharaj's reign alienated a substantial seven per cent of the revenue in *dharmarth* grants or endowments to religious institutions, the unprecedented growth of the Udasis being a case in point, but the Gulabdasis were outside this reticulate field.[97] We do not have any reference to the grants given to Gulabasis. Gulab Das's establishment was a contentious affair that took place during Ranjit Singh's time.[98] According to Ganesha Singh, Gulab Das's men

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95 J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2002 (Reprint), p. 101.

96 Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, p. 1520.

97 J. S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, pp. 116-17; Ian Kerr, "Sikhs and State: Troublesome Relationships and a Fundamental Continuity with Particular Reference to the period 1849-1919**"** in Pashuara Singh and N.G. Barrier, (ed.) *Sikh identity: Continuity and Change*, Manohar, New Delhi 1999, pp. 147-74.

98 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, pp. 56-91.

clashed with Ilahi Bakhsh (a general of Maharaja Ranjit Singh) in Lahore near the tomb of Mian Mir, and the conflict was resolved only with the intervention of Ranjit Singh himself. A direct clash between Gulab Das and Maharaja Ranjit Singh is also archived in his writing:

ਥਾ ਜਰਨੈਲ ਇਲਾਹੀ ਖਾਂ ਭੀ, ਦੋਸਤ ਪੀਰੋ ਕੇਰੇ।
ਪੀਰੋ ਕੇ ਭਾਈਆਂ ਕੋ ਤਿਸਨੈ, ਦੀਨੀ ਫੌਜ ਬਧੇਰੇ।
ਮੀਆਂ ਮੀਰ ਕੇ ਵੀਚ ਮਕਬਰੇ, ਘੇਰੇ ਉਨ ਇਹੁ ਆਈ।
ਦਾਸ ਗੁਲਾਬ ਪਾਸ ਭੀ ਦੋਸੌ, ਸਿੰਘ ਅਏ ਸੁਨਿ ਧਾਈ।
ਚਲੀ ਬੰਦੂਕ ਤਹਾਂ ਤਿਯ ਬਦਲੇ, ਜ਼ਖਮੀ ਕੇ ਤਿਕ ਥਾਏ।
ਮਹਾਰਾਜ ਨੈ ਖਬਰ ਪਾਇਕੈ, ਲਰਨੇ ਉਭੈ ਹਟਾਏ।[99]

Tha jarnail Ilahi Khan bhi, dost Piro kero.
Piro ke bhaian ko tis nai, dini fauj badhero.
Mian Mir ke Veech maqbare, ghere un iho ayi.
Das Gulab paas bhi do sau, singh aye sun dhae.
Chali bandook tahan tia badle, Jakhmi ke tik thaye.
Maharaj nai khabar payeke, larno ubhai htaiye.

Subsequently, Gulab Das and Piro settled in Chathianwala.[100] Gulab Das recorded his discord with Ranjit Singh in some of his works, including the Gulab Chhati.[101] Sewak mentions these autobiographical references in Gulab Das's 'Gulab Chhati', 'Anubhav Khanda', and 'Mauj Bilas'. Here, he refers to two blameless disciples, Dewa Singh and Gulab Singh, being killed in the skirmish, ostensibly with Bakhsh's men.[102] Indeed, Gulab Das exercised his saintly prerogative and cursed Ranjit Singh. Gulab Das stated that Ranjit Singh's clan was finished, referring to the expiration of Ranjit Singh's empire along with the unnatural deaths of many of his sons and nobles by 1849, because of the ruler having attracted the saint's curse: *kana sant sarape sariya* (the one-eyed putrefied because of the saint's curse).[103] At another place, he apportioned the blame on Ranjit Singh's ministers who were in bad company. He states that:

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99 Giani Gian Singh, *Path Parkash,* P. 1520.

100 Ganesha Singh, *Bharat Mat Darpan,* p.128.

101 Giani Inder Singh Sewak, '*Gulabdasi Sampardaye'*, pp. 98-99.

102 *Ibid*, p. 99.

103 Ranjit Singh was one-eyed, having lost an eye to smallpox.

ਕਾਣਾ ਨਰਿਪ ਰਿਦੈ ਕਾ ਕੋਮਲ, ਕਾਗ ਮੰਤਰੀ ਮਿਲੇ ਕੁਸੰਗੀ ।[104]

Kana nrip ride ka komal, Kag mantri mile kusangi.

However, there is no historical record that registers Gulab Das's direct conflict with the state of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The primary fact is that the establishment of Gulabas was quite close to the centre of power of Ranjit Singh. If he had any clash then he would have to leave Lahore. Giani Gian Singh wrote in his account that earlier many religious men (who later became gurus) were recruited into the army and they preached there. The army of Maharaj Ranjit Singh's state was a pride for him. His army consisted of 85000 men[105] and later on, it consisted of 120,000 men after his death.[106] He cites the example of Gulab Das and states that he started his spiritual career in the army of Ranjit Singh as a soldier and preached in the army of the state as many soldiers played a dual role in the military. They worked also as a religious preacher in the army:

ਸਿੰਘਨ ਕੀ ਫੌਜ ਮੈਂ, ਸੇਵਾ ਸਤਿਸੰਗ ਹੋਤ ਮਹਾਂਹੀ ।
ਗਿਰਧਰ ਮਲ- ਸਿੰਘ ਅੱਛਰਾ, ਸਰਬਗ-ਸਿੰਘ ਲੈ ਕੇਤੇ ।
ਰਹਤੇ ਸੰਤ ਅਨੰਤ ਰੂਪ, ਹਰਿ ਚਰਚਾ ਰਖਤੇ ਤੇਤੇ ।
ਰਹਿਨ ਲਗਯੋ ਗੁਲਾਬ ਦਾਸ ਭੀ, ਫੌਜ ਸਿੰਘਾਂ ਕਿ ਮਾਹੈਂ ।[107]

Singhan ki fauj mein, sewa satsang hot mahanhi.
Girdhar Mal-Singh Achra, sarbag-singh lau kete.
Rehte sant anant roop, har charcha rakhte tete.
Rehan lagyo Gulab Das bhi, fauj singhan ke mahain.

The phenomenal relationship between monks and soldiers is established by many historians in the early and pre-modern periods. William Pinch has scholarly collaborated '*warrior ascetics'* as the primary component of the military labour market.[108] Even though Gulab Das was recruited into the army as a soldier but as Anshu Malhotra states that in the end, he came back as an ascetic.[109] He became a saint and soldier as well who wore weapons. There was already a well-established tradition

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104 Gian Inder Singh Sewak, '*Gulabdasi Sampardaye'*, pp.98-99.

105 J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, pp.103-6.

106 Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol.II, 1839-2004, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2008, p.6.

107 Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, p.1518.

108 William R. Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2006.

109 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, pp. 19-21.

of saint-soldier. But there is a huge difference between an ascetic warrior and a saint-soldier. Anshu Malhotra uses the terms asceticism and soldiery.[110] David N. Lorenzen traced back the history of warrior ascetics to the period of the Delhi Sultanate. The earlier existence of violent conflict between kings and temples is documented for Kashmir in Rajatarangini. Most of them were Sanyasi fakirs.[111] The soldier is the one who is a militant follower of an organization and the warrior exhibits bravery and courage under the given circumstances. In the Sikh Panth, the Khalsa is the religious military organization whose members are called Khalsa Fauj and soldiers.

After the war and political chaos, many disbanded soldiers joined Gulab Das as his followers. Giani Gian Singh gives similar information regarding the sect of Hiradasis which was inter-connected with the Udasis. Even many Sikhs of the Udasis and the Nirmala sects remained aloof and became a part of these sects. Again, he asserts that even when the Sikh state of Lahore was powerful, many monks preached in the army:

ਰਹਿਤੇ ਸਾਧੂ ਅਨਕ ਫੌਜ ਮੈ।
Rahite sadhu anak fauj main.[112]

The satsangs (religious congregations) were quite the norm within the army. He goes on and again refers to the Anglo-Sikh was of 1845-6 in the manner he does about Gulab Das:

ਥੀਓ ਜਬਿ ਜੰਗ ਫੇਰ ਸਤਲੁਜ ਕੇਰ ਢੇਰ,
ਸਿੱਖ ਤਬਿ ਰੱਖ ਗਏ ਤਾਹੀਂ ਪੈ ਈਮਾਨ ਤੈਂ।
ਅਧਿਕੈਂ ਸ਼ਹੀਦ ਤੈਹੈਂ ਥਏ ਗਏ ਭਾਗ ਕੈਂਹੇਂ,
ਭਏ ਸਾਧੁ ਕੇਤਿਕੈ ਯਾਹੀਂ ਪਾਸ ਆਨ ਤੈਂ। [113]
Thio jab jung fer Satluj ker dher,
Sikh tab rakh gaye tahin pai imaan tain.
Adhikai shaeed taihen thaye gaye bhag kaihen,
Bhaye sadhu ketike yahin pas an tain.

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110 *Ibid.,* p. 20.

111 David N, Lorenzen, "Warrior Asceticcs in Indian History", *Journal of the Amercian Oriental Society*, Jan,- March; 1978, Vol. 98, No.1, pp. 61-75

112 Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, p. 1295.

113 *Ibid.,* pp. 1295- 96.

During the time of anarchy and chaos, the sect of Hiradasis also gained popularity. Another contemporary, Naurang Devi, who was a companion and disciple of Wazir Singh, a low-caste saint with strikingly similar ideas to those of Gulab Das, who settled in the village Lahuke, near Patti, in central Punjab, also refers to the Anglo-Sikh war, referring to it as the war with the *firangi*.[114] She too drew the same conclusion, that the war drove many into being faqir, or mendicancy:

ਬਹੁਤੇ ਫ਼ਕੀਰ ਹੋਏ ਹਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ, ਫ਼ਿਰੰਗੀ ਦੀ ਵੇਖੀ ਲੜਾਈ ਜੀ
ਕਹੇ ਨੁਰੰਗ ਦੇਵੀ ਬਹੁ ਹੋਏ ਫ਼ਕੀਰ, ਹੁਣ ਗਿਣਤੀ ਗਿਣੀ ਨਾ ਜਾਇ ਜੀ ।[115]
Bahute faqir hoye han Singh ji, firangi di vekhi larai ji
Kahe Nurang Devi bahu hoye faqir, hun ginti gini na jaye ji.

Gulab Das had opportunities to interact with ascetics in Ranjit Singh's time. Many soldiers, in the ensuing chaos after his death, more so after the Sikh defeat in the first Anglo- Sikh War, found asceticism with its promise of refuge from worldly cares, or as temporary shelter, an attractive option.

Giani Gian Singh gives information regarding another episode of prostitution in his account. Through this event, Singh seems to establish Gulab Das's sensuous character. He states that a Muslim prostitute named Piro with a charming beauty (*pekharujnamujrupbadh*), fell for Gulab Das's charms and further they lived together in intimacy (*abhed*) in Chathe village for the rest of their lives.

ਪੇਖਿ ਅਰੂਜ ਨਮੂਜ ਰੂਪ ਬਡ, ਪੀਰੋ ਨਾਮ ਇਕ ਕਸਬੀ ।
ਆਸ਼ਕ ਭਈ ਗੁਲਾਬ ਦਾਸ ਪੈ, ਥਈ ਗਲੇ ਕੀ ਤਸਬੀ । [116]
Pekh arooj smooj roop bad, piro naam ik kasbi.
Ashaq bhae Gulab Das pai, thaye gale ki tasbi.

Ganesha Singh also gives the same reference in prosaic language. He states that they both believed in *jog* (asceticism) and *bhog* (sensory pleasure).[117] Further, Gian Singh gives a narrative that because of Piro's influence, other prostitutes became his disciples

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114 For more details on Wazir Singh, see Raj Kumar Hans, "Devotion and Dissent of Punjabi Dalit Sant Poets", in Vijaya Ramaswamy (ed.), *Devotion and Dissent in Indian History*, Foundation Books, New Delhi, 2014, pp. 188-215.

115 *Siharfi Satarvin (Kafian Sant Wazir Singh te Nurang Devi Dian Sanjhian)* in Shamsher Singh Ashok (ed.), *Siharfian Sadhu Wazir Singh Kian*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1988, p. 72.

116 Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash,* p. 1519.

117 Ganesha Singh, *Bharat Mat Darpan*, p. 129.

Illustration 3.2 Gulab Das on Horseback with his followers
Source: Author

and in his establishment, spiritual singing and commentary (*kirtan, katha*) gave way to the *mujra*, a dance form associated with dancing girls, performed in an appropriate mood (*sama*).

> ਕੀਰਤਨ ਕਥਾ ਠੈਰ ਨਿਤ ਮੁਜਰਾ, ਹੋਇ ਕੰਚਨੀ ਕੇਰੈਂ ਜੀ ।[118]
> *Kirtan katha thaur nit mujra, hoi kanchani kerain ji.*

Giani Gian Singh and Ganesha Singh both further narrate the story after the death of Gulab Das and Piro. They narrate that during the spring festival of Holi such performances continued over several days. Evidently, Ganesh Singh picked up this same story from Giani Gian Singh. These two Sikh scholars have some primary objections to the lifestyle of Gulab Das. For both of them, many followers were attracted to Gulab Das for his libertine lifestyle. Gian singh specifically uses the term '*khulasa'* which denotes breaking the barrier of morality (*shara*). Literally '*shara'* or '*shariah'* in the Islamic canonical law but in this context, it occupies the domain of morality, ethics and behaviour in particular Punjabi society. Sikh scholars interpreted the social behaviour of Gulab Das as preaching and breaching social morality. Religiously, they also perceive Gulab Das and his followers as breaking the bounds of both Hindus and Muslims; he said:

> ਰਚੀ ਗੁਲਾਬ ਦਾਸ ਜੋ ਪੋਥੀ ਸੋ ਪੜ੍ਹ ਹੋਤ ਖੁਲਾਸੇ ।[119]
> *Rachi Gulab Das jo pothi so parh hot khulase.*

Giani Gian Singh argues that through his writing Gulab Das diverted or spoiled (*bigare*) the youth and focused on bodily attraction (*Banke*) in contemporary society:

> ਬਾਂਕੇ ਟੇਢੇ ਪਹਿਨ ਪੁਸ਼ਾਕੇ, ਬਨੇਂ ਰਹੈ ਸ਼ੋਕੀਨੇ ਜੀ ।[120]
> *Banke tede pehan pushake, bane rhe shokene ji.*

Interestingly, he claims that the libertine character of this sect was utilized by thieves for their fun and muddied his name by this act. According to Giani Gian Singh, the disciples of Gulab Das went to villages of the Punjab playing music and singing songs whether devotional or folk songs. Ganesha Singh adds further clarifies the cause of his

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118 Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash,* p.1522.

119 *Ibid*, pp.1522.

120 *Ibid*, p. 1522.

disapproval as he states that "women and men have stripped themselves of shame and went about free without a care".[121] Ganesha Singh practically himself feels ashamed and pretended this act full of shame. But at this point, Giani Gian Singh has a contradictory view. He wrote in his account that

> ਗੁਲਾਬ ਦਾਸ ਜਦਪੀ ਸਹੀ ਗਯਾਨ ਉਪਦੇਸਿਯੋ,
> ਪਰ ਚੇਲਿਓਂ ਨੇ ਤਾਂਕੀ ਰਮਜ਼ ਨਾ ਸਮਝੀ ਉਨਕੀ ਗਹਿਰੀ ਅੰਜਨ ਕੀਨੋ ਫਾਕੀ । [122]
> *Gulab Das jadpi sahi gian updesiyo,*
> *Par chelion ne tanki Ramaj na samjhi unki gehri anjan kino faki.*

Though he preached the right knowledge, the disciples did not understand its depth and sophists spread fraud. Thus, Giani Gian Singh is seen to free Gulab Das and puts the responsibility on some of his followers. In the end, Gian Singh can be seen praising Gulab Das a little and accusing his followers whose conduct was condemnable. Anshu Malhotra understands it as this hesitation in outright condemnation of Gulab Das can be interpreted as an appreciation of his poetical talent.[123] Gulab Das was trained in the sects of Udasis and Nirmala and it could be seen in Ganesha Singh's account where he mentions many Nirmala preachers in the Sikh army along with Gulab Das. These generally given names are Girdhar, Mal Singh, Achhra Singh and Sarbag Singh.[124] But, primarily, he does not give specific names that they were Nirmalas. Both Sikh historians depicted the behaviour of Gulabdadas as intolerable in their accounts. Ganesha Singh gives a reference in his account that the Prince of Patiala, Narinder singh and that of Faridkot, Wazir Singh, held Gulabdasis and strictly made them respect acceptable morality (*shara mana ke chore*). Ganesha Singh even mentions that the British also started arresting the followers of the Gulab Das between 1855 and 1857.

> ਤਯੋਂ ਹੀ ਅੰਗ੍ਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਏਲਾਕੇ ਮੈਂ,
> ਜਮਾਨਤਾਂ ਥਾਈਂ ਜੀ । [125]
> *Tayon hi angrezi elaake mai,*
> *Jamantan thaeen ji.*

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121 Ganesha Singh, *Bharat Mat Darpan*, p. 129.

122 Gian Singh, *PanthParkash*,pp. 1294.

123 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, p. 25.

124 Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, p.1293.

125 Ganesha Singh, *Bharat Mat Darpan*, p. 129.

Then the egotistical and arrogant attitude of Gulabdasiswas was disbanded and ironed out (nek chaal chalan).[126] Interestingly, they started claiming themselves Udasis and Nirmalas and turned back to the spiritual path.[127]

ਡਰਤ ਗੁਲਾਬਦਾਸੀਏ ਮੌਜੀ,
ਇਸ ਮਤ ਕੋ ਤਜਿ ਰਾਸੀ ਜੀ।
ਲਗੇ ਨਿਰਮਲੇ ਸਾਧੂ ਸਦਾਵਨ,
ਸੰਨਜਾਸੀ ਉਦਾਸੀ ਜੀ।

Dart Gulab dasiye mauji,
Is mat ko taji raasi ji.
Lage nirmale sadhu sdawan,
Sanyasi Udasiji.

There are other sources which information about GulabDasis. Farina Mir talks about the folk archive which comprises Punjabi literary formation of performing, reading and listening to Punjabi literary texts, *qisse* in particular; the very obvious new ethnographic impulse as some native informants and social mediators began to compile their own compendia.[128] In the colonial period, its print culture and other public sphere invested a lot of information regarding GulabDasis. Bernard S. Cohn states that the colonial ethnographic accounts grew out of the need of the state to enumerate, catalogue and mark the ruled in particular ways, as scholars have shown.[129] They collected information to understand the culture, caste and religion, and make their own form of knowledge to rule over the country/state. Both the sectarian and colonial sources have their own versions, visions and contestations but these sources linked the events, information, other gossip and news. The period of Gulabdas was quite interesting. Colonial modernity and religious tradition were going to mingle at that time. Unlike the complex understanding of the Gulabdasis in the Sikh sources and their sect's own tangled relationship with them; the colonial sources are more unidimensional. They mark the Gulabdasis as epicurean, the term that came to define

126 Ganesha Singh, *Panth Parkash*, p. 1294.

127 *Ibid*, p. 1293.

128 Farina, Mir, *The Social Space of Language*, pp.17-18, 97-103.

129 Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter Van der Veer, (ed.), *Orientalism and the Post-Colonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadephia, 1993, p. 29.

them, describing them in a conceptual language of Christian and European provenance that made the Gulabdasis comprehensible to the colonialists.

The earliest mention of Gulab Das is in the Revised Revenue Settlement of the Lahore district that was compiled by Leslie Saunders between 1865 and 1869, when Gulab Das was still alive, as explicitly stated in the report places the date of the compilation of this report and sources even earlier than the Panth Prakash.[130] Saunders describes Gulabdasis as Deists. He interpreted theological thought that they "believe in the immortality of man, and that man will be absorbed in the Deity, being of the same substance as Him and that they did not believe in a future state".[131] He described *Updesh Bilas* as their primary work. According to him, there was no caste barrier between them. Though we know of Piro, a Muslim woman who became a Gulab Dasi, here is another example of Gulab Das's openness to all creeds and castes.

Saunders described that he carried some sweetmeats to Gulab Das he became happy and prayed for the knowledge of the 'right faith'; declared a belief in immortality, and repeated '*sohang'*. Saunders noted that they had no peculiarity of dress, but they were not strict in abstaining from tobacco (banned by the Khalsa).[132] Nor were they averse to 'immorality' as their guru, Saunders asserts, was living in open 'adultery' without causing any scandal among his followers, who were most numerous in the Kasur parganah (district). Saunders wrote that Gulabdasis admitted people of all castes but they did not eat or intermarry among them.[133] They saw no harm in incest. Elsewhere, he mentions that Sikhs and Gulabdasis permitted the marriage of widows.[134] Basically, the ideas like Deism, right faith, the immortality of man, and the substance of man and deity were influenced by Protestantism and eighteenth-century European ideas of nature worship.[135] These concepts could be seen as strengthening the roots of the Advaita philosophy of the Gulabdasis.

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130 Leslie S. Saunders, *Report on the Revised Land Revenue Settlement of the Lahore District of the Punjab 1865-69,* Central Jail Press, Lahore, 1873, pp. 53-4.

131 *Ibid.*, p.58.

132 *Ibid*, pp.57-8.

133 *Ibid*, p, 58.

134 *Ibid*, p.59.

135 For Deism, see Wayne Hudson, *Enlightenment and Modernity: The English Deists and Reform,* Routledge, 2015.

Piro was her foremost follower. The Sikh or Gulabdasi sources do not mention marriage between them, but they all acknowledge intimate relations between them. Though, we do not have any reference to incest in the Sikh sources. Again, the colonial sources claim that they avoided inter-dining or inter-marriage which was against the stand of speaking against Varnashramadharma, as Gulabdasis did vocally. In any case, as Giani Gian Singh made it very clear in his exposition of the sect. Gulab Das chose Har Gobind the son of Sahib Singh Ghumar (potter)as his successor and made him marry into a jat family.[136] Significantly, some of Saunder's perceptions regarding Gulabdasis were new and were rapidly repeated in every colonialist ethnographic study.

The most comprehensive account of the Gulabdasis appeared in the Glossary compiled by H.A. Rose, the Superintendent of the Census in Punjab in 1901, based on notes made by earlier census officers and ethnographers, D.C.J. Ibbetson (1881) and E.D. Maclagan (1891).[137] A.H. Bingley's *Sikhs* (1899), a handbook of the Army, had a concise account of the GulabDasis, mostly carrying the flavour of Saunders' report, but looking at the Gulabadasis as a form of modern dissenting Sikh sect along with the Nirankaris and Kukas.[138] It is evident that this Glossary incorporated the facts which are also given by Giani Gian Singh in his account. During the colonial period, Mufti Ghulam Sarwar Qureshi Lahori's *Tarikh Makhan-i-Punjab* (1877) was also very important. This is written in Urdu and it is an encyclopedia in its own right. In this account, the author also mentions the Gulabdasis when he discusses religious sects.[139] It is the foremost account that remarked on colonial perception. But there are some misguided facts about Gulabdasis. For example, he states that it was a modern religion, initiated under the British. Qureshi believed that the Gulabdasis followed their own heart as a guide in everything and they were not afraid of anyone.[140] Sarwar wrote that "*aagmukhi se daren aur jo ji chahe so Karen".*[141] They did not have a taboo between *halal* (lawful) and *haram* (forbidden) in food or drink, or indeed in discerning the

136 Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, p. 1295.

137 H.A. Rose, *Glossary of Tribes and Castes*, pp. 319-20.

138 A.H. Bingley, *Sikhs* Languages Department, Patiala, 1970 (Reprint), p. 91.

139 Mufti Ghulam Sarwar Qureshi 'Lahori', *Tarikh Makhzan-i-Punjab*, Dost Associates, Lahore, 1996, p. 568.

140 *Ibid*, p. 559.

141 *Ibid*, p. 568.

women they can have sexual relations with them.[142] Significantly, Mufti Ghulam Sarwar talks about Gulabdas's theological position as monotheistic and considers Gulabdasis as pantheistic in belief. Sarwar also importantly gives information about a Sayyid Shia Muslim, Shah Mohammad, who became so impressed with the written work of Gulab Das that he read it all the time, keeping it closer to him than the *Quran*. Thus, his family broke off all ties with him.[143] This instance establishes the popularity of Gulab Das and his works at that time. Sarwar's brief account is also another telling tale of the Gulab Dasis' loose morals, as also of the Gulab Dasis' apparently dissipate attitude.

H.A. Rose describes Gulab Das of Chattha village as originally an Udasi, giving up that affiliation about seventy years ago when he fell under the influence of one Hiradas.[144] Haridas Girdhar of the Sikh accounts became Hiradas in colonial sources, who motivated Gulab Das to give up asceticism and live an ordinary life. According to Rose, the sect of Gulabdasis had been started by an Udasi called Pritam Das whose disciple was Gulab Das.[145] Pritam Das supposedly started a new sect because he suffered a slight at a Kumbh fair on the Ganges. The unlikelihood of this story is underlined by the name of the sect, Gulab Dasi, for one does not come across a sect named after a disciple. Furthermore, the Udasi Pritam Das who in fact had a conflict with the Gosains at a Kumbh fair on the banks of the Ganges in the last quarter of the eighteenth century (a date that would not fit Gulab Das's time), was an important leader of the sect, credited with changing many practices along with the garb of the Udasi, and Gulab Das is not mentioned as a disciple.[146] Evidently, a mixing up of different stories seems to have occurred here. Bingley and Rose also state that Gulab Das was a trooper (*ghorchara*) in the army of Maharaja Sher Singh, and joined the new sect after the collapse of the Sikh monarchy.[147] Sher Singh was a son of Ranjit Singh who succeeded to his throne after the death of his stepbrother Kharak Singh in November 1840.[148] He

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142 *Ibid*. p. 568.

143 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, pp. 268-270.

144 H.A. Rose, *Glossary of tribes and Castes*, pp. 319-20.

145 Ibid, pp. 30.

146 Ganesh Singh, *Bharat Mat Darpan*, pp. 3-5.

147 J. S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of Punjab*, pp. 120-22.

148 *Ibid*, p.120.

ruled till September 1843 when he was killed in ongoing court intrigues. This fact establishes Gulab Das as an Udasi till 1849, even though, all other Sikh accounts, and foremost disciples of Gulab Das inform that Gulab Das had settled at Chathianwala in Ranjit Singh's time.

Bingley and Rose called the Gulabdasis 'epicurean'. This term is not found in Saunders. Rose called Gulab Das an atheist and one who declared himself God (Brahm), believed as he did that 'man is of the same substance as the deity'. Bingley and Rose both quote from Maclagan underlining the hedonism of the Gulabdasis: "Pleasure alone is their aim; and renouncing all higher objects they seek only for the gratification of senses, for costly dresses and tobacco, wine and women, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. They are scrupulously neat in their attire and engage in all worldly pursuits, some of them being men of considerable wealth".[149] Rose again quotes Saunders when he notes that 'they admit any caste to the sect, but the different castes admitted do not eat with each other or intermarry.[150] Rose also mentioned the *Updes Bilas* which was written by Gulab Das. Rose gave information about a fair that was held for six days during the Holi in the sect of Gulabdasis and the followers would gather at the tomb of Gulab Das at Chathianwala. This information was already registered in Giani Gian Singh's *Panth Prakash* thus in all probability he gathered it from there.

G.S. Chhabra and Niharranjan Ray also quoted Rose's statement regarding Gulab Das.[151] The Sikh sources talk about sensuous pleasures amidst an ascetic sect. Although Rose does not mention incest, Bingley does mention it. Rose further analyzed that the Gulab Dasi attire could be related to the Nirmalas and Udasis. Significantly, he states that they were clean-shaven. While Lahore and Jullundur were the main places where they were found according to the censuses (the 1891 census reports their number as 4820), they were also present in Amritsar, Ferozepur, Ambala and Karnal.[152] Bingley reported them as declining in number, with only 300 followers. But it was problematic

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149 A.H. Bingley, *Sikhs* Languages Department, Patiala, 1970, p. 91, Rose, *Glossary of Tribes and Castes*, pp. 319-20

150 Rose, *Glossary of the Tribes and Castes*, pp. 319-20

151 G.S. Chabbra. Social *and Economic History of the Panjab*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1962, p. 128; Niharranjan Ray, *The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society: A Study in Social Analysis*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1970, p. 168.

152 Anshu Malhotra, Piro and the Gulabdasis, p. 29.

in the census operation that one could be a member of a sect and also counted as Hindu, Sikh or Muslim. Thus, relying on census figures for Gulabdasis, numbers would be inadequate. It is evident that they were a popular sect between the empires and at least into the 1870s in Punjab.

In discussing Quentin Skinner's well-known 'contextualist' approach, Jonardon Ganeri highlights a major problem for scholars of pre-colonial South Asia, 'when it comes to India, its all texts and contexts."[153] Although this may be true for much classical mainstream literature, vernacular religious literature often raises a quite different challenge. In the case of Gulab Das, there are many texts and many contexts to trace his earlier life and thoughts. In fact, there is an *over-abundance of contexts*, since the personality and significance of the defined character were reinterpreted to suit different goals at different times and places and these historiographical layers piled nearly undistinguished on top of each other.[154] Similarly, Gulab Das's personality and perceptions changed over time, and places and the historiographical trends contradicted each other and every point. Jon Keunehas discusses the trend of individuality in historiography. He situates Eknath and has noted different entangled perceptions and courtly abundant sources which led the cause to lose the audacity of the individual in the society.[155] The case of Gulab Das, as discussed by different historians and colonial records, they have left us with many entangled perceptions of Gulab Das that must be sorted out before trying to envision this individual in history.

Text, Theological Position and Themes of Gulab Dasis:

> ਸਤਗੁਰ ਨੰਗੀ ਤੇਗ ਜਹਾਨ, ਰਾਜੇ ਯੋਗੀ ਸਭ ਗਮ ਖਾਵੇਂ। ਤੋੜੇ ਸਭ ਕਾ ਗੁਮਾਨ ।
>
> ਗਯਾਨੀ ਗਯਾਨ ਕਰੇਂ ਗਮ ਖਾਵੇਂ, ਪੰਡਤ ਕਾਜੀ ਡਰੇ ਆਵੇਂ। ਵਾਚ ਸੁਨਾਵੇਂ ਵੇਦ ਕੁਰਾਨ ।[156]
>
> *Satgur nangi teg jahan, raje yogi sabh gam khaven. Tode sabh ka guman.*
> *Gyani Gyan Karen gam khawen, pandit qazi dre avein. Waach sunavein ved Quran.*

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153 Jonarden Ganeri, *Contextualism in the Study*, p. 553.

154 Jon Keune, "Eknath in Context: The Literary, Social and Political Milieus of An Early Modern Saint-Poet", *Christopher* Minkowski, Rosalind O' Hanlon and Anand Venkatkrishnan (ed.), *Scholar Intellectuals in Early Modern India*, Routledge, New York, p. 71.

155 *Ibid*, p. 71.

156 Gulab Das, *Raag Sagar,Dohra*, 22

These verses are of Gulab Das's female consort Piro which portrays her Guru's intellectuality and displays his sharp knowledge of Advaita Vedanta tradition. Gulab Das was highly trained in great religious traditions. Gulab Das studied Vedanta philosophy from the sect of Udasis and Nirmala and also became proficient in prosodic. He had a prolific pen and gradually, he became a literary Guru. There he has similarities with other groups where he was supposed to learn. Monika Horstmann deliberately traces the larger North Indian Saint tradition and she states that such diverse inheritance was not a peculiar repository of Gulab Das and there were other similar groups in Punjab and elsewhere, for instance, the Sewapanthis[157]

Gulab Das wrote many works. Gian Inder Singh Sewak writes that Gulab Das is attributed to more than twenty works, though his *Gulab Chaman* (Rose Garden/Garden of Gulab) and *Updesh Vilas* (Revealing in Teaching), also available as *Gulab Sagar* (Gulab's Ocean), were the most significant.[158] In *Gulab Chaman* alone, he uses over twenty metres, including *doha*, *chaupai*, *kabit*, *sortha*, *korda*, *jhulan* , *tribhangi*, *savaiyya* and *davaiyya*.[159] He also composed in the *siharfi* genre, literally thirty (*si*) letters (*harf*), referring to the popular acrostic poetic form that followed the Indo-Persian alphabet, each verse beginning with the successive letter, the Gurmukhi variant of which was the *Painti*, following thirty- five alphabets of the script.[160] In the nineteenth century, the *siharfi* form was quite famous and popular in Punjab

Scholars agree that Gulabda's *GulabChaman*is his most significant work. Navratan Kapoor considers *Gulab Sagar* of the same importance as Updesh Vilas with exegesis and feels that it should be seen as a supplement to *Gulab Chaman*.[161] *Gulab Sagar* is in prose in the form of a *samvad* or a conversation between Gulab Das and his adopted son/successor, Hargobind, who poses philosophical questions that are

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157 Monika Horstmann, "Parasbheg: Bhai Addan's Translation of Al- Ghazali's Kimiya-yisa' Adat" in Heidi R.M. Pauwels (ed.), *Patronage and Popularisation, Pilgrimage and Procession: Channels of Transcultural Translation and Transmission,* Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2009, pp.9-22.

158 Giani Inder Singh Sewak, *Gulabdasi Sampradaya: Rachna Ate Vichar*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1984, pp. 170-1; Navraratan, Kapoor, *Sadhu Gulabdas*, pp.5,24,105-13, Sant Vijender Das, *Sant Kavitry Ma Piro*, Satluj Prakashan, Panchkula, 2011, pp.39-40.

159 Navratan Kapoor, *Sadhu Gulab Das*, pp. 44-46.

160 Sant Singh Sekhon, *A History of Punjabi Literature*, Vol.2, Publications Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1993, pp.132-55.

161 Navratan Kapoor, *Sadhu Gulab Das*, pp. 44-46.

answered by Gulab Das and this acts as an exposition of Gulab Das's ideas. Thus, in this work, Gulab Das shed light on various philosophical questions. The compiling of *Gulab Sagar* seems like an effort of a strong following of the Gulabdasisin Haryana after the partition of India and it was published by the Sachdev family disciples-descendants of Nand Lal-Dr Parmanand and his son Devendra Kumar at Rohtak in 1968. It also attributes a very significant role to Sant Vishan Das and his wife, Jamma Devi, themselves in the line from Gulab Das's disciple Seva Singh. Later on, the Hansi seat was attributed to two Gulabdasis saints who archived more than fifty works to Gulab Das.[162]

Gulab Das usually used mixed languages mostly the popular Sadhukari or Sadh Bhasha which remained the lingua franca of the North Indian saint tradition. It is interlocutor with Braj, Punjabi and Urdu. Sometimes it comprises a greater part of the Sikh inheritance in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries in relation to Sikh scripture. On the other hand, many Sufis employed the West and Central Punjabi dialects of Multani and Majhi.[163] The public sphere of Gulab Das was enriched with the knowledge of religious tradition. He clarifies his theological position through his poetry. He states that:

ਤੁਰਕ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਕਾ ਬਾਦ ਨ ਹਮਰੇ ।[164]
Turk hindu ka baad na hamre.

He gave up worldly things and gained currency in intellect and wisdom as he wrote in his work *Rag Sagar:*

ਛੋਡ ਫਕੀਰੀ ਕੀਰੀ ਤਨ ਕੀ, ਮਤੋ ਅੰਬੀਰੀ ਪਾਯੇ ।[165]
Chod fakiri kiri tan ki, mato ambiri paye.

But the wisdom of Gulab Das attracted criticism from Sikh scholars. The Sikh scholars and colonial sources highly objected to and questioned Gulabdasis's theological understanding and practices. When these scholars depicted Gulab Das as Dry Vedantic then it meant that Gulab Das did not follow the right path of religion. Interestingly,

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162 *Ibid.,* pp. 44-46

163 Denis Matringe, "Hir Varis Shah, A Story Retold", in Vasudha Dalmia and Theo Damsteegt (eds.), *Narrative Strategies: Essays on South Asian Literature and Film,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998, p.19.

164 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman*, *Pad* 32.

165 Gulab Das, *Raag Sagar*, *Dohra* 77.

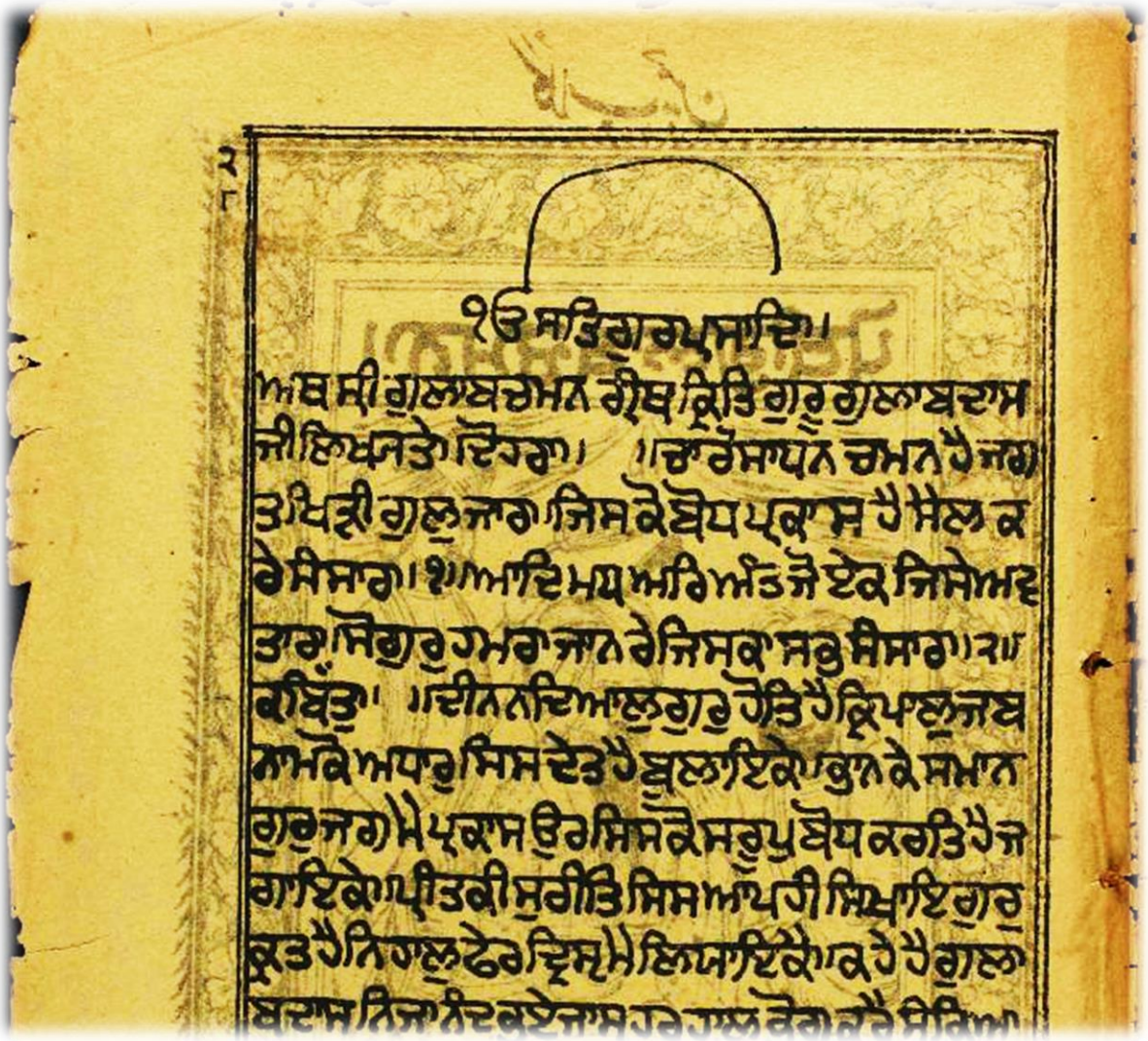

Illustration 3.3 Page of Pothi gulab Chaman
Source: Panjab Digital Library

Sikh scholars are very curious to criticize Gulabdasis's theological position. Gulab Das himself was aware of his criticism. Some of his verses show that he was very conscious of that. He states in one of his verses:

ਕਰਿਯੇ ਨਿੰਦ ਹਮਾਰੀ ਲੋਗੋ ਨਿੰਦਯਾ ਹਮੇ ਪਯਾਰੀ ਰੇ ।[166]
Kriye nind hmari logo nidhya hame pyari re.

Gulab Das further theorised and contextualized the criticism. He spoke:

ਸੀਸ ਮਹਿਲ ਕੇ ਕੁੱਤੇ ਨਿੰਦਕ ਕਯੋਂ ਕਰ ਭੋਂਕੇ ਨਾਹੀਂ ਰੇ ।[167]
Sees mehal ke kutte nindak kayon kar bhonke nahi re.

Based on his writing and theological position, Gulab Das has been described as *nastak* (atheist), *mauji* (pleasure-seeking), *Charvaki* (materialists), *Sarbhangi* (against caste and pollution), *Aghori* (tantra-inspired sect), and even Sufi. Anshu Malhotra argues that all these assessments of Gulabdas may be correct or coloured by the observer's biases; there is no doubt that most commentators were impressed by Gulab Das's philosophical sophistication and poetic capability.[168] Gulab Das was trained in various heterodox sects where he learnt philosophy under the influence of the great religious traditions. During the nineteenth century, the intellectual culture of this sect constructed its own public sphere which attracted many followers towards this sect.

Gulab Chaman is the seminal work of Gulab Das which sheds light on his thoughtful mind as a religious intellectual scholar. In this work, he touches on many philosophical concepts like *Brahm* and *Jiv* and in between the idea of self. Basically, Brahm is a concept as per which God is everywhere. In his verse he states:

ਅੰਤਰ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਏਕ ਰਸ ਜੋ ਚੇਤਨ ਭਰਪੂਰ। ਵਿਭੁ ਨਭ- ਸਮ ਸੋ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਹੈ, ਨਹਿੰ ਨੇਰੇ ਨਹਿੰ ਦੂਰ ।[169]
ਅੰਗ ਅਨਕ ਸਰੀਰ ਜਯੋੜੀ, ਨਿਕਟ ਡੋਰ ਨਹੀਂ ਕੋਈ ।
ਐਸੇ ਈਸਰੁ ਸਰਬ ਮੇਂ, ਨੇਰੁ ਦੂਰ ਨਾ ਹੋਈ ।
Anter bahar ek ras jo Chetan bharpoor. Vibhu nabh-sam so brahm hai, neh nere neh door.
Ang anak sarir jyori, nikat dur nahin koi
Aise isar sarab mein, ner dur na hoi.

166 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman*, *Pad*, 301.
167 *Ibid*, *Pad*, 300.
168 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, p. 39.
169 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman*, *Pad*, 35.

So, God resides in all, what to say of near or far.[170] Non-dualism for Gulab Das, as for many others, developed along with bhakti ethos in a variegated Punjabi tradition that saw a close relationship between the creator and the creation (*Brahm* and *Jiv* for Gulab Das) and included a strong strain of Sikh as well as Sufi literature. In the North Indian religious tradition, non-dualism is the core essence. But this is the stage which is attained after the practice of meditation.

Gulab Das touches upon the issue regarding the thoughts and model of knowledge of South Asia. There is an ideological difference between intellectual knowledge (knowledge) and righteous knowledge (Gyan of Braham). These two currents carry a deep meaning, essence and ideological domain. The notion of intellectuality denotes the materialistic ideology based on objective reality; which further leads toward Marxist philosophy. The righteous knowledge constructs the discourse of the philosophy of religion and religion itself as philosophy. It comprises some other concepts like metaphysics, the discourse of transcendence and truth which are needed in particular to be studied in the historiography of religion. Gulab Das says:

ਤਿਆਗ ਗਿਆਨ ਦੇ ਪੂਰਬੇ ਸੀ, ਕਛ ਪੱਛਮੇਂ ਨਾਂਹ ਤਿਆਗਣਾ ਵੋਇ ।
ਗਯਾਨ ਪੂਰਬੇ ਹੋਇ ਨਵਿਰਤਹ ਸੀ, ਪੱਛਮ ਨਾਂਹ ਪਵਿਰਤ ਤੇ ਭਾਗਣਾ ਵੋਇ ।
ਪੂਰਬ ਵਿਧੀ ਨਖੇਧ ਗਿਆਨ ਦੇ ਸੀ, ਪੱਛਮ ਨਾਂਹ ਤਿਯਾਗਣਾ ਲਾਗਵਾਂ ਵੋਇ ।
ਕਛੁ ਹੋਇਸ ਹੋਇ ਗੁਲਾਬ ਦਾਸ, ਪੱਛਮ ਸੋਵਣਾਂ ਤੇ ਤੁੱਲ ਜਾਗਣਾ ਵੋਇ ।[171]

Tiaag gyan de purbe si, kach pachame nah tiagna voye.
Gyan purbe hoi navirtha si, pacham nah pavirt te bhagna voye.
Purab vidhi nkhedh gyan de si, pacham nah tiagna lagwan voye.
Kachu hoyes hoye Gulab Das, pacham sowna te tull jagna voye.

But his thoughts are not scattered. He clarifies his path of knowledge. His philosophical inspiration was the Vedas and Vedanta which is visible in the following verse, where he sees for himself a role in liberating mankind by propagating the Vedas:

ਜਨਮ ਲੀਯੋ ਪੁਰਕਾਰਤ ਕੇ ਹਿਤ, ਇੱਛਾ ਔਰ ਨਾ ਕਾਈ ਰੇ ।
ਸੁਧਾ ਰਸਤਾ ਬੇਦ ਬਨਾਇਯੋ, ਪੜ੍ਹ, ਸੁਣ ਭਵ ਤਰ ਜਾਇ ਰੇ ।

Janm lio purkarath ke hit, isha aur na kayi re.
Sudha rasta bed bnaeo, parh sun bhav tar jaye re.[172]

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170 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman, Pad*, 223.

171 Gulab Das, Piro, *Sanjhi Siharfi*, 17

172 See, Giani Inder Singh Sewak, *Gulabdasi Sampradaye*, p.148.

Gulab Das gave significance to the path of righteous knowledge (*Gyan*):

ਜਯੋਂ ਕਰ ਆਤਮ ਏਕ ਹੈ ਤੈਸੇ ਕਹੋ ਬਿਬੇਕ ।[173]

Jyon kr atam ek hai taise kaho bibek.

Further, he situates illiteracy and its impact on the society when he puts it in the following way:

ਭਾਨ ਉਦੋਤ ਭਯੋ ਜਗਤ ਹਮ ਮੇ ਜਰੀਤ ਮਨਾਸੇ। ਚੰਦ੍ਰ ਆਦਿ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ ਜਿਤੇ ਜਗ ਭਾਨ ਉਦੋਤ ਬਹੋਤ ਉਦਾਸੇ ॥

ਆਤਮ ਬੋਧ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ ਭਯੋ ਜਬ ਤਾਹਿ ਸਮੈ ਪਰਮਾਦ ਬਿਕਾਸੈ ।

ਤਾਪ ਨ ਤੀਨ ਜਰਾ ਇਸ ਕੇ ਨਰ ਦਾਸ ਗੁਲਾਬ ਗਯਾਨ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ ।[174]

Bhan udot bhaeo jagt ham me jarit mnase. Chander adi parkash jite jag bhaan udot bhot udase.
Atam bodh parkash bhaeo jab tahe same parmad bikase. Taap na tin jra is ke nar Das Gulab gyan parkase.

Gulab Das declares that knowledge is the primary source to evaluate self:

ਸੂਰਜ ਤੁੱਲ ਗਯਾਨ ਭਯੋ ਯਹਿ ਨੈਨ ਅਨੇਕ ਸਭੀ ਕੁਛ ਦੇਖੇ ।

ਆਪ ਕੋ ਦੇਖਤ ਆਪ ਬਿਖੈ ਜਿਸ ਖਾਬ ਵਿਖੇ ਨਿਜ ਆਪ ਵਲੇਖੇ ।[175]

Suraj tull gyan bhaeo yeh nain anek sabhi kuch dekhe.
Aap ko dekhat aap bikhai jis khaab vikhe nij aap wlekhe.

For him, those who have realized this aspect can have the vision to live and understand the world:

ਯਾ ਕੇ ਉਰਿ ਅਗਯਾਨ ਬਸੇ ਹੈ। ਆਤਮ ਕੇ ਵਹੁ ਜਗਤ ਲਖੇ ਹੈ ।

ਉਰੁ ਜਾ ਕੇ ਬੋਧ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸੇ ਹੈ। ਜਗਤ ਹਿ ਭਾਸੇ ਹੈ ।[176]

Ya ke ur agyan base hai. Atam ke wahu jagat lakhe hai.
Ur ja ke bodh parkase hai. Jagat he bhaase hai.

Religion is a practice. When it comes under the garb of theory then it loses its sense as religion. The nucleus of Gulab Das's philosophy was the practice and experience (*Anubhav)*:

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173 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman, Pad,* 239

174 *Ibid, Pad,* 82

175 *Ibid, Pad,* 344

176 *Ibid, Pad,* 252

ਪੰਛੀ ਖੋਜ ਅਕਾਸ ਜਯੋਂ ਨੀਰ ਖੋਜ ਜਿਉ ਮੀਨ
ਗਯਾਨਵਾਨ ਕੋ ਖੋਜ ਤਯੋਂ ਕਯੋਂ ਕਰਿ ਕੋਊ ਚੀਨ
ਗਯਾਨਵਾਨ ਕੋ ਜਾਨਹੇ ਅਨਭੈ ਜਾ ਕੋ ਹੋਇ ।
ਅਨਭੈ ਲੋਚਨਵਾਨ ਕੀ ਲੋਚਨਵਾਨੁ ਪ੍ਰਖੋਈ ॥[177]

Panchi khoj akaas jayon neer khoj jiyon meen.
Gyanwaan ko khoj tayon kyaon kar kou cheen
Gyanwaan ko janhe anbhai ja ko hoi.
Anbhai lochan wan ki lochanwan parkhoyi.

In his writings, Gulab Das favoured the path of knowledge against foolishness. Assuming the significance of knowledge (*gyan*), he speaks of science (*bigyan*) as even more important than ignorance (*agyan*).[178] He said that: *Paar brahmparmatma, gyan pre vigyan.* But here Gulab Das does not deny the supremacy of God as Brahm. That narration obscures science as a concept in religion. Here is an example from Guru Granth which would help us to clarify the style of this verse and could clarify the meaning of this verse differently. *Raj bina na dharm chale hai*[179]. In this manner, it can be read that religion can not work without the aid of state power. But the correct meaning of this verse is the pro-people state can not work in a good manner without the guidance of religion. But in both these currents, the ideology or essence of religion is the primary component that clarifies the meaning. In the context of Gulab Das, he talks about the soul, God and righteous knowledge (knowledge of Braham). In light of these concepts, it can be said that he used the term *gyan* (realization or knowledge of Brahm) to swipe out the *agyan* (ignorance).

Further, he clarifies the nature and mood of the righteous knowledge after attaining which he preferred to stay quiet and not utter a word. He said that:

ਦਾਸ ਗੁਲਾਬ ਗਈਆਂ ਜਿਸੇ ਯਹੀ ਮੌਨ ਗਹੇ ਫਿਰ ਬੋਲਟ ਨਾਹੀ ।
Das Gulab gyan jise yahi maun gahe phir bolat nahin[180]

Most likely after experiencing the ultimate truth in the knowledge of the Brahman. Gulab Das notes that the saints, the truly holy, are above considerations of

177 *Ibid*, *Pad,* 315
178 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman, Pad*, 257.
179 Guru Gobind Singh, *Krishan Avtar*, p. 436.
180 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman, Pad*, 263.

caste and the worldly norms of society. He underscores that saints are beyond the garb of varnashrama and the considerations of family, the world and the Vedas, an indictment of worldly interest on the part of a holy man.:

> ਸੰਤਾਂ ਕੇ ਭੇਖ ਪਾਛ ਬਰਨ ਆਸਰਮ ਨਾਹੀਂ ਕੁਲ ਹੈ ਨਾ ਲੋਕ ਲਾਜ ਬੇਦ ਲਾਜ ਪਰੇ ਹੈ।
> *Santan ke bhekh pachh baran asram nahin kul hai na lok laj bed laj pare hai*[181]

He rejected the constructed differences based on religious identities. He strongly refutes the four varna system which comprises discrimination and hierarchy. He wrote that:-

> ਤੁਰਕ ਹਿੰਦ ਕਾ ਬਾਦ ਨਾਹ ਮੇਰੇ ਬਰਨ ਆਸਰਮ ਨਾ ਕਾਯੀ ਰੇ।
> *Turak Hind ka bad naha mere baran asram na kai re.*[182]

Gulab Das emphasized the elimination of communal boundaries in society. For him, sacred spaces, *mantras* were not barriers between communal harmonies. Even though, the sacred spaces construct the vision of heterogeneity. The spaces have never been a homogenous entity. Even the tenth master, Guru Gobind Singh said:

> ਦੇਹੁਰਾ ਮਸੀਤ ਸੋਈ ਪੂਜਾ ਔ ਨਿਵਾਜ ਓਈ ਮਾਨਸ ਸਬੈ ਏਕ ਪੈ ਅਨੇਕ ਕੋ ਭ੍ਰਮਾਉ ਹੈ ॥[183]
> *Dehura Maseet Soyi Poja Aou Nivaj Aoe Manas Sabai Ek Pai Anek Ko Bharmau Hai.*

Similarly, Gulab Das believed that these boundaries keep away us from true liberation:

> ਗੋਰ ਮਸੀਤਾਂ ਮੁਸਲੇ ਪੂਜੇ, ਜਾਬਾ ਰਹੀਮ ਉਚਾਰੇ ਹੈ।
> ਮੜ੍ਹੀ ਮਤ ਕੋ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਪੂਜੇ ਰਸਨਾ ਰਾਮ ਪੁਕਾਰੇ ਹੈ।
> ਗੰਗਾ ਕੋ ਸਬ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਜਾਇ ਹੈ ਮੱਕੇ ਤੁਰਕ ਪਧਾਰੇ ਹੈ।
> ਇਕ ਨੈਨ ਉਤੇ ਕਾਣੇ ਮੁਸਲੇ, ਹਿੰਦੂ ਅੰਧੇ ਸਾਰੇ ਰੇ
> ਗਯਾਨਵਾਨ ਨਾ ਆਂਕੇ ਕਾਣੇ ਤੁਰਕ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਯਾਰੇ ਰੇ
> ਦਾਸ ਗੁਲਾਬ ਬਿਹਾਦ ਭਏ ਵਾਹੁ ਹੱਦਾਂ ਮਾਹੀ ਨਕਾਰੇ ਰੇ।
> *Gor masitan musle puje, jaba Rahim uchare hai*
> *Mari mat ko Hindu puje rasna Ram pukare hai*
> *Ganga ko sab Hindu jae hai Makke Turak padhare hai*
> *Ek nain ute kane Musle, Hindu andhe sare re*
> *Gyanuvan na anke kaneTuruk Hindu te yare re*
> *Das Gulab bihad bhaye vahu hadan mahi nakare re.*[184]

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181 *Ibid, Pad,* 275.

182 *Ibid, Pad,* 313.

183 Guru Gobind Singh, *Dasam Granth,* p. 285.

184 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman*, Pad, 312.

In the religious tradition, Guru is the prime person who enlightens and guides to the right path. Religious historians relatively suppose a guru as a chief identical symbol of the Bhakti tradition. Based on this argument, most of the scholars who are working on the study of Gulabdasis, integrate them with Bhakti'sthought. As Daniel Gold argues that the later Bhakti saints, defined their path as outside and distinct from the ways of Hindus and Turks, where the guru became the conduit for reaching the divine.[185] Some scholars have interrelated the influence of Bhakti ideas on them, particularly the influence of Kabir, Paltu Das and the Dadupanthi Rajab.[186] Ashu Malhotra further stretches and contextualizes this argument and states that the guru himself was concurrently both human and divine, the accessible and immanent aspect of the transcendent, more so a guru like Gulab Das who claimed to be Brahm.[187] Gulab Das writes:

ਗੁਰ ਹੀ ਚਰਨ ਸਰਨ ਪਗ ਹੀ ਜਨਮ ਮਰਨ ਭ੍ਰਮ ਹਰ ਹੀ ।

Gur hi charan saran pag hi janam maran bhram har hi.[188]

Even Piro, the disciple of Gulab Das speaks of the significance of his guru who shed light on the right path and made her conscious about herself:

ਗੁਰਾਂ ਦਿਵਸ ਬਤਾਈ ਯਾ ਰੈਂਨ ਮੈਨੂੰ, ਸੰਕ ਮਨ ਮੋਂ ਨਾਹ ਲਿਆਈਯਾਂ ਮੈਂ।
ਘੋਲ ਘੁਮਾਇ ਪਿਆਰਿਆਂ ਤੇ, ਜਿਨੋਂ ਆਦ ਹੀ ਅੰਤ ਦਸਾਈਯਾਂ ਮੈਂ।
ਪੀਰੋ ਤਿੰਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਦਾਸ ਕਹਾਵਸਾਂ ਮੈਂ, ਜਿਨੋਂ ਆਪਣਾ ਆਪ ਜਣਾਈਯਾਂ ਮੈਂ।[189]
Guran diwas btayi ya rain mainu, sank man mo nah leayian main.
Ghol ghumai piarian te, jino aad hi ant dasayian main.
Piro tina di das kahawsan main, jino apna aap janaeyian main.

Piro and other disciples of Gulab Das invoke him to take incarnation on earth for the well-being of the people and under his guidance, they will attain salvation. In his

185 Daniel Gold, *The Lord as Guru,* in Jacob Copeman and Aya Ikegame (eds.), *The Guru in South Asia: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives,* Routledge, New York, 2017, p.4.

186 Navrattan Das Kapoor, *Sadhu Gulab Das*, pp. 86, 98. See also, Anshu Malhotra, "Bhakti and the Gendered Self: A Courtesan and a Consort in Mid-Nineteenth Century Punjab", *Modern Asian Studies,* 46, 6, 2012, 1503-39.

187 Anshu Malhotra, "Panth and Piety in the Nineteenth Century: The Gulabdasis of Punjab", in Ashu Malhotra and Farina Mir (eds.), *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture and Practice,* pp.189-220.

188 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman, Pad,* 276.

189 Gulab Das, Piro, *SanjhisiharfiLikhyate, Kafi,* 12.

understanding of the composition of the universe and the human body- the former made of twenty-five *prakritian* (natures), and the latter of five elements- scholars have traced the influence of Sankhya philosophy on Gulab Das.[190] The notion of birth and the process of reproduction creates life; cereal provides nourishment, the source of all energy, and human life:

ਖਤ ਨਰੁ ਨਾਜ ਕੇ ਖਾਤ ਹੈ ਫਿਰ ਬਿੰਦ ਉਪਾਵੇ
ਰਕਤ ਬਿੰਦ ਕੇ ਮੇਲਤ ਏ ਯਹੀ ਬਨੇ ਸਰੀਰਾ
ਚਿੱਤ ਜਲਤੇਜ ਅਕਾਸ ਕੋ ਪੁਨ ਮਿਲੇ ਸਮੀਰਾ [191]

Janani khave naj ko tab rakte ave
Naru najke khat hai phir bind upave
Rakt bind ke melt e yahi bane sarira
Chhit jaltej akas ko pun mile samira.

Gulabdasi poet Bahadar Singh's verse makes this plain: -

ਮੱਲ ਮੂਤ ਔਰ ਲਹੂ ਪਾਕ ਮੈਂ ਮਤ ਗਰਭ ਮਹਿ ਆਵਤ ਹੈ
ਨਾਉ ਮੈਨੇ ਕੁੰਭੀ ਵਾਸਾ ਪੁੱਠਾ ਹੋਈ ਟੰਗਾਵਾ ਥਾ।
ਮੱਲ ਮੂਤ ਝਾੜ ਮੁੱਚ ਮੈਂ ਪਰ ਹੈ ਦਿਨ ਐ ਹੀ ਕਹਾਵਤ ਹੈ।
ਜਨਮ ਮਰਨ ਕਟ ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗ ਮਿਲ ਬਹਾਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਸੱਚ ਗਾਵਤ ਹੈ. [192]

Mal mut aur lahupak main mat garabh main avathai
Nau mainekumbhi vasa putha hoi tangavathai
Mal mut jhar much main par hai nis din aehikhavathai…
Janam maran kat sadh sang mil Bahadar Singh sachugavathai.

Bahadar Singh sings the truth, to break the cycle of birth and death by keeping the company of the virtuous.[193] Bahadar Singh uses words similar to those of Gulab Das in describing the nurturing of the body in its own waste and blood.[194] In this understanding of human birth, the womb represents *kumbhinaraka*, the hell of being confined to the pot. Anshu Malhotra tries to understand it through the argument of Veena Das[195] and declared it a Brahminical idea but it is the metaphor which describes

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190 Navratan Kapoor, *Sadhu Gulabdas*, p. 21.

191 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman, Pad, 55-57.*

192 Sant Bahadur Singh, *Amritsar Granth,* Yantralya Chasmanur, Amritsar, 1898, Verse 7.

193 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman, Pad,* 55.

194 *Ibid, Pad,* 4.

195 Veena Das "On Female Body and Sexuality", *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 21,1 (New Series), 1987, pp. 57-66.

that before taking birth a human remembers God all the time but as he safely takes birth, he forgets his name.

ਮਾਤਾ ਕੇ ਉਦਰ ਮਹਿ ਪ੍ਰਤਿਪਾਲ ਕਰੇ ਸੋ ਕਿਉ ਮਨਹੁ ਵਿਸਾਰੀਐ ॥
ਮਨਹੁ ਕਿਉ ਵਿਸਾਰੀਐ ਏਵਡੁ ਦਾਤਾ ਜਿ ਅਗਨਿ ਮਹਿ ਆਹਾਰੁ ਪਹੁਚਾਵਏ ॥[196]
Mata k udar meh pratipal kare so keu visariye.
Manho keu visariye evad data je agan maih ahar pahuchawe.

But it does not mean that it demeans the process of birth. Saint Kabir, also depicts the body as a cage of bones, filled with dirt (‘*mal-mut’*) that one may adorn with sandalwood and good clothes, but only the foolish take pride in it:

ਦੇਹੀ ਘੁਮਾਨ ਕਰੇ ਨਰ ਮੂਰਖ ਸਾਂਝ ਸਵੇਰ ਨਿਰੋਧ ਪਹਿਚਾਨੀ [197]
Dehi ghuman kare nar murakh sanjh saver nirodh pehchani

In the religious tradition, death is a very significant concept which particularly has connotations in the context of religious philosophy. Kabir describes death[198] and denotes it with *Kal*, both Time and *Yama*, the messenger of death which is visible in the poetry of Gulab Das. He said that no one can escape from death. This is the ultimate truth in the world. In a series of verses, Gulab Das wrote that after death the body of a human is cremated with fire. Without any distinction or discrimination, the dust is the final destination of all:

ਸ਼ਾਹ ਕੰਗਾਲ ਫਕੀਰ ਰਾਜੇ, ਸਭੀ ਕਾਲ ਨੇ ਮੁਖ ਮੇਂ ਪਾਇਓਨੀਂ ।
ਪ੍ਰਿਥੀਪਤ ਜੇਹੇ ਕਾਲ ਖਾਇਲੀ ਤੇ, ਕਾਰੂ ਸਾਰ ਖੇ ਧੂਰਮ ਲਾਇਓਨੀਂ ।
ਤੇ ਭੀ ਗਰਕ ਕਰੇ ਕਾਲ ਮਾਰ ਕੇ ਵੋਇ, ਜਿਨੋਂ ਸਿੰਧ ਮੇ ਸੇਤ ਬਨਾਇਓਨੀਂ ।
ਜੀਵਨ ਮੁਕਤ ਹੈ ਜਵਨ ਗੁਲਾਬ ਦਾਸਾ, ਨਹੀ ਕਾਲ ਦਾ ਕੁਝ ਧਰਾਇਓਨੀਂ ।[199]
Shah kangal fakir raje, sabhi kal ne much mou paeoni.
Pirthipat jehe kal khayeli te, karu sark he dhuram laeoni.
Te bhi garak kare kaal maar ke voi, jino sindh mo set bnaeoni.
Jiwan mnukt hai jawn Gulab Dasa, nahi kal da kujh dhareoni.

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196 *Guru Granth Sahib*, pp. 920-21.

197 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman*, Pad, 5. On Kabir, see Charlotte Vaudeville, *A Weaver Named Kabir*: *Selected Verses with a Detailed Biographical and Historical Introduction*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005 (First Published1993), p. 107.

198 Charlotte Vaudeville, *A Weaver Named Kabir*, pp. 106-07.

199 Gulab Das and Piro, *Sanjhi Siharfi*, 13.

The equality achieved by death, for king and beggar alike, is spoken of:

ਜੋ ਰਾਮ ਰਸੂਲ ਕਹਾਏ ਹੈ
ਜਗ ਤੇ ਭੀ ਰਹਿਣ ਨਾ ਪਾਏ ਹੈ ।
ਜਗ ਜੋ ਉਪਜਾ ਸੋ ਮਰਾ ਰੇ
ਤੁਮ ਕਿਸ ਪਰ ਪਾਨਵ ਪਾਸਾਰ ਰੇ ।
Jo Ram Rasul khaye hai
Jag te bhi rehan na paye hai
Jag jo upja so mara re
Tum kis par panv pasar re.[200]

Paradoxically, Kabir distinguished the significance of our body in his verses. He states:

ਭਜੁ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਭੂਲਿ ਮਤ ਜਾਹੁ ॥ ਮਾਨਸ ਜਨਮ ਕਾ ਏਹੀ ਲਾਹੁ ॥
ਇਸ ਦੇਹੀ ਕਉ ਸਿਮਰਹਿ ਦੇਵ ॥ ਦੇਹੀ ਭਜੁ ਹਰਿ ਕੀ ਸੇਵ ॥[201]
Bhajo Gobind bhool mat jaho. Manas janam ka ihi laho.
Is dehi kau simreh dev, dehi bhaj har ki sev.

There is no concept of death in Indian religious tradition. The body plays the only role of a puppet and the primary thing is the soul which never dies. Even in the Guru Granth Sahib, there is a reference to that concept:

ਕਬੀਰ ਪਰਦੇਸੀ ਕੈ ਘਾਘਰੈ ਚਹੁ ਦਿਸਿ ਲਾਗੀ ਆਗਿ ॥
ਖਿੰਥਾ ਜਲਿ ਕੋਇਲਾ ਭਈ ਤਾਗੇ ਆਂਚ ਨ ਲਾਗ ॥[202]
Kabir pardesi kai ghagre chau dis lagi aag.
Khintha jal koila bhayi tage anch na lag.

Significantly, the body acts as the soul (inner consciousness) dictates it. The five senses are the main course in these actions. In the Indic-religious tradition, these senses become five evils when deeply indulged and the excess limit is crossed in a particular sense. The notion that life is momentary and must be optimally used also makes Gulab Das express disdain for falling under the influence of sexual desire, variously referred to as *kam, isaq,* and *bhog* and beautiful women a distraction, alluring in their appeal. He states:

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200 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman, Pad,* 126.

201 *Guru Granth Sahib,* p. 1169.

202 *Guru Granth Sahib Sahib,* p. 1366.

ਕਾਮ ਖ਼ਰਾਬ ਕਰੇ ਬਾ ਮਮਦ ਇਕੁ ਰੂਪ ਸੁਤਾਤਾ ਹੀ ਦੇਖਲੁ ਭਯੋ ।

Kam kharab kare ba mad iku rup sutata hi dekhlu bhayo.[203]

He clearly marked the physical love, biological attractions and sexual act with the example of a saddened Ram looking for Sita and the episode of Lord Vishnu lusting after Lakshmi:

ਰੋਵਤੇ ਰਾਮ ਉਦਾਸ ਫਿਰੇ ਬਨ ਸੁੰਦਰ ਨਾਰੀ ਪਿੱਛੇ ਲਲਚਾਇਓ
ਦਾਸ ਗੁਲਾਬ ਪਿੱਛੇ ਲੱਛਮੀ ਹਰਿ ਕੱਢਕੇ ਲਿੰਗ ਫਿਰੇ ਲਟਕਾਇਓ ।

Rovte Ram udas phire ban sundar nari pichhe lalchayo
Das Gulab pichhe Lachhmi Hari kadke ling phire latkayo.[204]

Furthermore, Gulab Das advocated the path of *bairag* (non-attachment) and *bibek* (discernment) to control these senses. Gulab Das himself gave a brief note on his personal experience of worldly love. He narrates its effect in his poetry:

ਕੁੱਲ ਕਿ ਸਬ ਹੋਰੀ ਤੀ, ਦਾਸ ਗੁਲਾਬ ਨਾ ਝੂਠ ਕਹੁ ਰੀ ਆਪ ਸੁ ਉਪਰ ਬੀਤੀ ।

kul ki sab hori ti, Das Gulab na jhuth kahu ri ap su upar biti [205]

The term *aapbiti* generally denotes autobiography. It could be contextualised with the event and relationship with Piro. But it does not seem to be his regret because he did write *Sanjhi Siharfi,* or joint verses, with her, indicating her as an important disciple.[206] Even though, he pretended that the saints and godly personalities were aloof from these worldly things. Gulabdasis focused much on meditation. Anshu Malhotra argues that like the bhakti saint's emphasis on the repetition of name, *namsimran,* a practice quite close to the Sufis' *dhikr,* Gulabdsis repeated '*soham'* (I am He) both as a chant and a mantra.[207] Sikh theology only focused on meditation (*Naam).* Even in monotheistic religions, meditation is the core element to attain knowledge of Brahm. Gulab Das speaks of both the importance of singing the praise of God (*hari bhajan*) and the repetition of the name, *bina name k phire hi udase* (without name one roams

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203 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman, Pad,* 11.

204 *Ibid,* p. *Pad,* 11.

205 *Ibid, Pad,* 13.

206 Inder Singh Sewak notes that Gulabdas's poetry makes no mention of the coming of Piro to the Dera: Inder Singh Sewak, *Gulabdasi Sampardaye,* p.93.

207 Ashu Malhotra, "Panth and Piety in the Nineteenth Century: The Gulabdasis of Punjab" in Ashu Malhotra and Farina Mir(eds.), *Punjab Reconsidered,* pp. 189-220.

morose).[208] But, it was the repetition of '*soham'* that elevates one to the level of Brahm, the identification with the God within one-self: *pachhano soi soham Brahm kahe ki hoi* (he who recognizes *Soham*, understands Brahm).[209] The closing verses of *Gulab Chaman* are an exposition on the significance of Brahm, the recognition of its salience, making the person free from all attachment and happy in all circumstances: *sarbeapupachhankarrahedivana hoi* (seeing self in all one stays carefree).[210] He gave the mantra of Soham to his followers. In *Sanjhi Siharfi,* Gulab Das and Piro discussed the mantra and its importance. Gulab Das replicated the significance of Soham and said:

ਸੋਹੰ ਪੁਕਾਰਸੀ ਨਾਮ ਸਦਾ, ਰੋਮ ਰੋਮ ਹੀਏ ਹਰ ਗਾਵਸੇ ਤੂੰ ।
ਕਹੇ ਦਾਸ ਗੁਲਾਬ ਪਿਆਰ ਕਰਸੇ, ਤਬੀ ਨਾਮ ਪਿਆਲੜਾ ਪਾਵਸੇ ਤੂੰ ॥ [211]
Sohang pukarsi naam sada, rom rom hiye har gawse tu.
Kahe Das Gulab pyar karse, tabhi naam pialda pawse tu.

His foremost disciple Piro got this mantra from his Guru. She wrote in her poetry:

ਸਫਲ ਹੂਆ ਅਬ ਜਨਮ ਮੇਰਾ, ਗੁਰਾਂ ਭੁੱਲੜੀ ਰਾਹ ਬਤਾਇਓਨੇਂ।
ਕੂੰਜ ਵਾਂਗ ਮੈਂ ਪਈ ਕੁਰਲਾਂਵਦੀ ਸਾਂ, ਤਾਂਹ ਨਾਮ ਹਯਾਤ ਪਲਾਇਓ ਨੇਂ। [212]
Safal hua ab janm mera, guran bhulri raah btaeo ne.
Koonj wang main pai kurlawndisan, tah naam hyat plaeo ne.

Elsewhere, Gulab Das explicates the significance of '*Soham'*, the one who understands it stays intoxicated- *harhal main mast bhayohai.*[213] Even Piro also describes the impact of the *mantra* on her.

ਪੀਰੋ ਮਿਹਰ ਪਿਆਰਿਆਂ ਸਤਗੁਰਾਂ ਦੀ, ਪਾਇ ਸੋਹੰ ਸਰਬ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਿਆ ਸੀ ।[214]
Piro mehar piarian satguran di, paye sohang sarb parkashia si.

Further, Gulab Das talks about the path of *faqiri* (mendicancy). This is also the stage being *mast* or *divana* of those who are intoxicated with the name of God and detached.

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208 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman*, Pad, 280.

209 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman*, Pad, 399.

210 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman*, Pad, 404.

211 Gulab Das and Piro, *SanjhiSiharffi*, 3.

212 *Sanjhi Siharfi*, 4.

213 *Gulab Sagar* cited in Navratan Kapoor, *Sadhu Gulabdas,* p.32.

214 Gulab Das, Piro, *Sanjhi Siharfi,* 10.

This stage is much more difficult. In his verse, Gulab Das describes the difficult path of *faqiri*:

ਫ਼ਕੀਰੀ ਫ਼ਕਰਾਂ ਹੋਈ ਫ਼ਕੀਰੀ ਔਖੀ ਕਰਨੀ ਪਈ ਸਬੂਰੀ ਰੇ,
ਜੈਸੇ ਤਰ ਉਚਤੇ ਤੇ ਉੱਚੀ ਸਰਬ ਬਿਰਖ ਤੇ ਦੂਰੀ ਰੇ ।
Faqiri faqran hoi faqiri aukhi karni pai saburi re;
Jaise tar uchte te uchi sarab birakh te duri re.[215]

This is the path of religion where *faqiri* is the offshoot of it. Guru Granth sheds light on this path as well.

ਖੰਨਿਓ ਤਿੱਖੀ ਵਾਲਹੁ ਨਿਕੀ, ਏਤ ਮਾਰਗ ਜਾਣਾ ।
Khanio tikhi walon nikki, et marag jana.[216]

However, with the attainment of this path of *faqiri*, all sectarian garb (*bhekh*) or worldly temptation minimizes itself. Gulab Das strictly criticized those who torture the body to achieve asceticism. He said that with these efforts we can not anything:

ਭੇਖ ਅਨੇਕ ਕਰ ਕਰ ਹਰੇ ।
Bhekh anek kar kar hare. [217]

Anshu Malhotra raises a question over this thought of action by Gulab Das. She argues that this was a clue to the unusual path that he chose, an extraordinary sect that he started, based on breaking acceptable rules, the normative paths that the ordinary and the less accomplished plied.[218] But the said breaking of acceptable rules was constructed by the class of clergy and reformists. In the Sikh tradition, Guru Granth upholds to deny sectarian garb and identities. The compilation of Guru Granth is the primary example of this argument. Gulab Das and his disciple Piro describe the very interesting concept of ten directions in her writing. In *Raag Sagar,* Piro says:

ਆਜ ਸਖੀ ਹਰ ਹੋਰੀ ਮਚਾਈ ਦਸੋ ਦਿਸਾ ਤੇ ਖ਼ਲਕ ਝੁਕਾਈ ।
Aaj sakhi harhori mchai, daso disa te khalk jhukai.[219]

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215 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman, Pad*, 284.

216 *Guru Granth Sahib Sahib,* p. 918.

217 Gulab Das, *Gulab Chaman, Pad*, 287.

218 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis,* p. 46.

219 Gulabdas and Piro, *Raag Sagar,* p.

Basically, there are four directions i.e North, South, East, and West. If we mix these directions then we have eight numbers of directions like North-West, North-East, South-East, and South-West. In the religious tradition, there are two more directions which are Heaven and Hell as well. Here, the last direction also exists in the religious tradition. When Piro says that her wanderings came to an end then basically she is talking about the path of salvation. Salvation is the goal**.** Piro mentions this in her *Sanjhi Siharfi* with Gulab Das.

> ਚਿੱਤ ਭਟਕਦਾ ਸੀ ਦਸੋ ਔਰ ਮੇਰਾ, ਚਿੱਤ ਦੌੜਨੇ ਤਹਾ ਹਟਾਇਓ ਨੇ।
> *Chit bhatkda si daso aur mera, chit daurno taha htaeo ne.*[220]

Most of the scholars place Gulab Das in the category of Bhakti tradition. Anshu Malhotra has done a deep analysis of the public aspect of Gulabdasi theology and like-minded communities with the reference of Novetzke who has authority over the Bhakti movement in pre-modern India. With the reference to the fourteenth-century Maharashtrian saint Namdev, Novetzke focused on the public aspects of bhakti and memory in pre-modern India. He notes that bhakti's performative predilection addresses a community, imagining it into existence through practices of sharing, singing and memory-making.[221] Other scholars of early modern religious histories too have drawn our attention to the complex relation between orality, performance and the written word, emphasizing how networks of circulation and exchange were set afoot, wherein oral performers and scribal communities and their interaction played a significant role.[222] In the context of religion, scripture is the primary source of ideology for religious communities. These concepts like orality, performance and the written word revolve and are interconnected with the community, the public and the scripture. The community is the primary respondent to scripture. William A. Grahm argues that "From the historians' perspective, the sacrality or holiness of a book is not an a priori attribute of a text but one that is realized historically in the file of communities who respond to it as something sacred or holy. A text becomes 'scripture' in an active,

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220 Piro and Gulab Das, *Sanjh Siharfi, Pad,* 4.

221 Christian Lee Novetzke, *Bhakti and Public Memory: Namdev in Religious and Secular Tradition*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2008, pp.1-31.

222 Jaroslav Strand, "Searching for the Source or Mapping of the Stream: Some Text-Critical Issues in the Study of Medieval Bhakti" in J.S. Hawley, Anshu Malhotra, and Tyler Williams, (eds.), *Text and Tradition in Early Modern North India,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2018, p**.?**

subjective relationship to persons, and as part of a cumulative communal tradition. No text, written or oral or both is sacred or authoritative in isolation from a community".[223] In the context of the meaning of scripture, he further traces the role of a particular community in it. He argues that one does not have to be a proponent of contemporary fads in literary criticism to recognize that there is no absolute 'meaning' in a scriptural text apart from the interpreting community that finds it meaningful.[224]

The second concept in the scripture is orality. The sacred texts of the major religious traditions were first transmitted orally and written down later. The Bhakti tradition is not an exception. There is an oral function in the context of ritual, recitation, reading, devotions and songs of all religious texts, written as well as unwritten. For example, as argued by William A. Grahm, in the case of Islam, unlike that of traditional India, the oral, recited Quran has retained its primacy despite being written down as well as the oral dimension of the scripture has been much stronger than is usually recognized.[225] For all these reasons, a descriptive distinction between oral and written scriptures, or oral and written uses of the same scripture, is on occasions necessary, even though etymologically 'oral scripture' is an oxymoron and 'written scripture' a redundancy.[226] However, the scripture has been significantly vocal as well as a visual fact. The public sphere of a community gives strength to scripture. Instead of descriptiveness the orality and its perceivedness are more important components. How individuals and groups have understood and dealt with their sacred scripture not only as holy books to be calligraphed and illuminated, preserved and revered read aloud, recited, retold and woven into the texture of their language**;** though as auditory facts.[227] The above notion of orality produced the notion of vernacularity.

However, some historians have contestations over orality, scribal community and cosmopolitan hierarchy. That such oral and local into literary and cosmopolitan, accruing more prestige as scribal communities and higher castes became involved,

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223 William, A. Grahm, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scriptures in the History of Religion*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, p.5.

224 *Ibid.*, p.5.

225 *Ibid*, p.5.

226 *Ibid*, pp. 4-5.

227 *Ibid*, p. 7.

shows the continually expanding scope of such exchanges.[228] In orality, performative and inscriptive is a locater of cultural exchange and its connections in early modern North India. In this context, it is important to remember that while society, as Christopher Bayly noted, was not a highly literate one, it valued literacy highly; Sheldon Pollock commented on the significance of 'literalization' and the written word in a society that is seen to hyper-value the oral.[229] In this regard, William A. Grahm comments that it may be argued, for example, that non-literate communities- the so-called 'little' or 'extra-civilizational' societies, in so far as these cultures use traditional recitations in cultic practice or hold certain myths or other oral texts sufficiently sacred to be worthy of transmission over generations.[230] In the same manner, the Bhakti saints' words were transmitted through singing, reciting and later on collected gradually. Gradually, these words were written down and converted into scripture for the community.

The sacred text exists for a long time even without being written and every scripture has traditionally functioned in large measure as vocal, not silent discourse.[231] Print capitalism usually allies with communal forces and plays a role to silence the voices of diversity. Much focus on orthographic text obscures the vocal presence of the holy in individual and collective piety.[232] The scripture and a text are not only an object of faith but are historical documents too, to study contemporary society. William A. Grahm argues that the study of a text as scripture, on the other hand, focuses upon its contextual meaning, interpretation and use that is, the ongoing role the text has played in a tradition not only in formal exegesis, but in every sector of life, to put it succinctly (briefly, clearly expressed) 'scripture' is not a literary genre but a religious-historical

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228 Tyler William, '*From Local to Trans-Regional Poets: Translating Texts and Traditions in the Niranjani Sampradaya,* in J.S. Hawley, Anshu Malhotra, and Tyler Williams, (eds.), *Text and Tradition in Early Modern North India,* pp. 99-101.

229 C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India (1780-1870),* Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2007, p.13; Sheldon Pollock, The *Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Premodern India,* Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2007, p.4.

230 William A.Grahm, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scriptures in the History of Religion,* p. 4.

231 *Ibid*, p. ix.

232 *Ibid*, p. x.

one, and it must be understood a much.[233] In the context of the text of Gulab Das, he talks about every aspect of life and plays a significant role in the existing religious tradition. He produced alike-minded community by transmitting the text through oral, performance and written words. This community responded to Gulab Das as his followers and makes the text sacred particularly.

The poetry of Gulabdas did not remain limited only to oral narration but his theological and philosophical ideas were transmitted and elaborated through his writing and performances in the public domain. In the period of colonial modernity, this public participated in the circulation of certain ideas, within which intellectually stimulating, to a large extent Advaita polemics gained popularity.[234]

Walter J. Ong argues that after the post-enlightenment period the whole trend of education in the West, especially in the twentieth century, has been away from memorization (in essence on oral activity), reading aloud (together with reciting by heart and declamation) and classical rhetoric (formless, the core disciple of literate education and culture).[235] With the age of Reason, rhetoric lost more and more of its character as public oral art and became increasingly a technique for written composition. For a century and more now, the term rhetoric itself has denoted training in the skills of written composition or, in a pejorative sense, affection and flowery insincerity in speech.[236] In the Indian context, it is not the inability to write that has resulted in the supremacy of the oral form of religious texts, but the conscious choice of oral transmission as the only appropriate vehicle for holy utterance.[237] Kennedy suggests, that first the dominance of writing, then that of printing, diminished the importance of the spoken word increasingly down to the modern-day.[238] Significantly, still, Gulab Das was doing dialogue with the public or community with the older mode

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233 *Ibid*, p.6.

234 Christopher Minkowski, *Advaita Vedanta in Early Modern History'* in Rosalind O' Hanlon and David Washbrook(eds.),*Religious Cultures in Early Modern India: New Perspectives*, Routledge, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 105-42.

235 William A. Grahm, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspectsof Scriptures in the History of Religion*, Cambridge University Press, Canada, 1987, p.23.

236 *Ibid*, p.25.

237 *Ibid*, p.68.

238 Kennedy, George A., *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1980, p. 111.

of communication. The new public sphere was still not fully penetrated and affected by print capitalism.

During the period of Gulab Das, colonial modernity in Punjab came into being. Gradually, the modes of communication were going to be changed. The print medium enforced and influenced politics and the 'public sphere'. The first printing press was set up in Punjab in 1836 by the American Presbyterian Mission in Ludhiana, the rest of Punjab began to be affected by the new technology only after all of Punjab came under the British Raj in 1849.[239] Even though, this print capitalism and growing colonial modernity made regressive elements strong. Sanjay Joshi uses the term 'public sphere' which is much relevant to draw attention to colonial modernity with its growth of print capitalism, associational and reformist politics and elitist middle-class self-identity of its overwhelmingly male participants.[240] Female voices like Piro's were gauged and shrank on the cusp of colonial modernity and print capitalism. The memorization, rhetorics and orality were going to seem as pejorative and forms of knowledge changed and started adopting the western models. But in the initial stage, the Gulabdsis both the guru and his foremost disciples remained unapproachable from this print world.

During the time of Gulab Das, the lithographed print of *Gulab Chaman* was not published. Even there is no reference regarding the dera of the guru at Chathianwala to be affected by the changes taking place with print culture. By 1870, the young disciples of Gulab Das were indulged and affected by print culture. Though it would soon be, as the likes of Kishan Singh Arif and Ditta Ram would enter the 'Punjabi literary formation', that is the shared practices of producing and taking pleasure in Punjabi literature through the print medium.[241] The Gulabdasis were a learned community and they were active participants in such a changing modern socio-textual community. They had diverse choices in their philosophical thoughts which comprised Advaita, Bhakti and Sufi ideas. These were the core ideas which were diversely deep-rooted in the north Indian religious tradition. The texts of Gulab Das are potentially valuable for envisaging Gulab Das's social context.

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239 Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language*, pp. 32-33.

240 Sanjay Joshi, *Fractured Modernity*: *Making a Middle Class in Colonial North India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, p.24.

241 Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language*, pp.17-18, 97-103.

In the South, the text of Eknath argues that whatever truths became conveyed through Sanskrit can be obtained through Prakrit as well. In this context, Eknath sarcastically comments, 'Sanskrit language was created by the gods, so Prakrit came from what, thieves?[242] In this genre, Gulab Das was clear about several patterns in their broader literary milieu. There is a clear preference of Gulab Das for composing in the local language. The logic or *tarak* as described through Advaita was very dear to Gulab Das. He is described by Shamsher Singh Ashok as a Vedanti who was *tarakvadi, dharmic Brahm mubisian vich pravin* (skilled at logic and disputing on Brahm, invoking a public platform for debate).[243]

In his literary milieu, Gulab Das strictly spoke against the pride of the body and *bhekh* (dress), or haughtiness a sectarian garb bestowed. In practice, he refused to adopt any sectarian garb and gave freedom to his disciples to dress as they pleased. He remained well dressed up and adorned with weapons, riding a horse and sitting royally. He wrote against the drag of desire and warned not to fall under the spell of sexual need. But he openly lived with a woman who was earlier a prostitute, despite the contentiousness this relationship brought into his life. Ganesha Singh mentions their intimate relationship as combining *yog* and *bhog*. Ganesha Singh, however, questions unsavoury characters and, mudding his name under the garb of morality. He took notice of Gulab Das's thought that remaining nonchalant and non-attached in all circumstances, but he had an attachment and relationship with Piro. Sikh historians, Giani Gian Singh and Ganesha Singh accused Gulab Das to break o the norms of *shara* (*tajishara sab keri*). Giani Gian Singh criticized Gulab Das and said that he projected himself above such norms (*hornan nu sharamazab de bajhehoyekahe, apnunshara ton par das keuchajanave*).[244] Usually, the term *shara* defines the quranic or Islamic law. Historians of South Asia have debated the ambiguity that may arise among a Muslim populace when authority might be claimed from customs or laws other than that of the Shari 'at.[245] However, few scholars have ambiguity about the word in the context of the

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242 Rosalind O'Hanlon, Christopher Minkowski, Anand Venkatkrishnan, *Scholar Intellectuals in Early Modern India: Discipline, Sect, Lineage and Community,* p. 84.

243 Cited in Inder Singh Sewak, '*Gulabdasi Sampradaye'*, p. 126.

244 Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, p. 1293; Ganesha Singh, *Bharat Mat Darpan*, p. 128.

245 Katherine Ewing, (ed.), *Shari 'at and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 1988.

Punjabi language. In its everyday usage, the word '*shara'* seemed to connote a moral law applicable to Hindus and Muslims throughout the Mughal and Sikh rule in Punjab as the historian J.S. Grewal has argued.[246] Grewal quotes the British author Neil Baille writing in the mid-nineteenth century that except for matters pertaining to marriage, adoption and inheritance, the *shari*'at applied to Hindus in 'matters of contract and ordinary dealings of men with each other'.[247] In general usage, the term '*shara'* has acquired the applicability of the meaning of ethics. For Giani Gian Singh and Ganesha Singh '*shara'* did not make a sense of legal but also cultural and social ethos. Both have stated that Gulab Das broke the '*shara'* of Hindus and Muslims through his social conduct. *Hindu Turak di shara had jo sou ghol pilave* (the limits of ethics of Hindus and Turks were wiped away) - a usage which while recognizing differences between the two communities is based on the idea that certain behavioural ethics apply to all.[248]

At the same time, when our historians talk about the straightening out of the Gulabdasis, they invoke *shara* again: *shara mana ke chore* (they were made to accept shara).[249] Anshu Malhotra argues that when groups like the Gulabdasis, the followers of Wazir Singh, or some Sufis challenged what they considered untenable social norms—*shara*- they must have a sense of solidarity with a tradition with which they aligned themselves; a public which they invoked, a counter-public on which they relied.[250] Gulabdasis had libertine nature. Shamsher Singh Ashok, the late scholar of Punjabi literature refers to the Gulabdasis as *azad-khiyalie*, or independent-minded.[251] These Sikh scholars used words for Gulab Das as *khulase* and *fukre* (arrogance, instigation), *Behaya* (shamelessness), *hankari* (egoistical), *abhimani* (arrogant), *vitandevadi* (argumentative, cussed), and *phisadi* (discordant) in their writings.[252]

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246 J.S. Grewal, '*The Shari 'at and the Non-Muslims*', in J.S. Grewal, *Miscellaneous Articles*, Guru Nanak Dev University, 1974, Amritsar, pp. 118- 22.

247 J. S. Grewal, The Shari'at and the Non-Muslims', *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 48 , Issue 4 , July 2014, pp. 108–109.

248 Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, p.1294; Ganesha Singh, *Bharat Mat Darpan*, p. 127.

249 Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, p. 1295.

250 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, p. 52.

251 Shamsher Singh Ashok, *Shirin Farhad*, Punjabi Sahit Academy, Ludhiana, n.d. p.5.

252 *Ibid*, p. 5.

Ganesha Singh noted that Gulabdasis were egoistic and individualistic in nature. The logic of solipsism made the Gulabdasis individualistic, as they examined and interrogated the self to locate the divine. Usually, individualism and the idea of self, particularly an inner self is seen as a western development and a trait of modernity in India.[253] South Asian cultures usually give preference to collective identity, whether of caste, community, family or kin group over individual growth. The foremost theory of religion is to focus on the relationship between God and self. In the context of the Gulabdasi sect, they have done the same and this notion pushed them to challenge social norms. They lived their life according to their principles. It seems like an individualistic phenomenon that was not motivated by the liberalism of the West but influenced by non-dualistic philosophy.

However, Gulab Das is called a Bhakti saint-poet with good reason. He composed confidently in a vernacular language rather than another. His compositions display enthusiastic praise for God, heartfelt longing for the elusive divine presence and sheer delight in ecstatic worship. He asserts the irrelevance of caste for proper devotion, and he cites the references that support the argument. Another way of envisioning Gulab Das in a historical context is through depictions of inter-caste disputes in Punjab. The hagiographical episodes portray Gulab Das interacting with untouchables and consequently having his purity put into question. Gulab Das's Punjabi literary production during a period of the colonial state and Ranjit Singh's rule and his challenging engagements with untouchables (in discourse or the face) are two such examples.

It would be misleading to identify Gulab Das definitively as belonging to a particular philosophical school. Themes of dualism and utter devotion to God are encompassing in his writings, but Gulab Das does not explicate these by systematically laying out his position and counter-positions. His compositions display a kind of vernacular Advaita. Therefore, rather than categorizing Gulab Das in the domain of a particular school of thought, it is suggested to envision him as engaging in an Indic counterpart to occasional rather than systematic theology. He dealt with issues as they arose, making no attempt to construct a thoroughgoing system. The aim in nearly all of Gulab Das's writings is more polemic than apologetic. Gulab Das left his spiritual and

253 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabasis*, pp. xv-xvii.

textual lineage. Conventionally, Gulab Das had no clear association with a royal court and no adherence to a particular philosophical school. He produced an enormously diverse range of compositions and was prominent as quite unorthodox and became a liberal in nature. Gulab Das shed light on a part of early modern South Asia and focused as well on the vernacular society and religion outside the royal courts. The piety was not submitted to the state by Gulab Das.

After the death of Gulab Das, his seat was inherited by his adopted son Hargobind. Many deras were established by his prominent disciples, spread across various parts- Ferozepur, Patiala, Ropar, Ambala, Jullunder, Karnal, Amritsar, Kasur, Pothohar, Sialkot, Sultan, Sindh and Balochistan.[254] After the partition of 1947, many centres came to emerge in parts of Haryana and Rajasthan as well.[255] Ganesha Singh mentions Sindh as an important centre of the Gulabdasis.[256] The disciples of Gulab Das either consciously acknowledge and praise their guru or make stray references to others' opinions of him, often vigorously defending this conduct. Like Gulab Das, his disciples were also literary figures and scholars who wrote much spiritual poetry and secular literature. There are some names like Bawa Desraj, Sant Bahadur Singh, Shamdas Arif, Piro, Muhammad Shah, Hira Singh, Kishan Singh Arif, Sant Ditta Ram, Mayyia Das, Seth Vishan Das and later reformist polemicists Giani Ditt Singh, Bhai Jawahar Singh Kapoor, Mayyia Das.

254 Giani Inder Singh Sewak, *GulabdasiSampradaye*, p. 115.

255 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, pp, 279-80.

256 Ganesha Singh, *Bharat Mat Darpan*, p.130.

CHAPTER-IV

TEXT, LINEAGE AND INTELLECTUAL CULTURE OF THE PUNJAB

The sects have remained the centres of learning religious and secular education. The Udasi, Nirmala, and Sewa Pathi sects are the foremost examples of their scholarship. The Gulabdasis have a prolific pen and produced various literary texts. Some disciples were closely associated with the Gulabdasi sect. These devotees, scholars and saints restructure the religion and culture in the sphere of vernacular and sustain a sect's textual lineage. They represent the intellectual tradition/culture of the Punjab. Here, the intellectual word denotes the scholarship and literary wisdom of the Punjab in terms of religion and culture. However, as noted by K.N. Panikar, equally important are the cultural intellectual processes, particularly those that emerged from the cultural intellectual struggles engendered by the desire to create the ideological base of modern society, distinct from the traditional and the colonial.[1]

The relationship between sects and village communities sets the domain of vernacularity. There is a prevalent question in the context of vernacular history whether there was history writing in India before the British colonial intervention. Raziuddin Aquil and Partha Chatterjee argue that the methods of proper historical writing came to India, according to this old answer to the question, in the form of the court chronicles of the Islamic rulers of the country.[2] But there it lost its organic character. It was confined to the military and administrative activities of sultans and their officials and did not strike roots in the indigenous, local and vernacular traditions of retelling the past.[3] Later on, a communal agenda of communal forces bifurcated historiographical trends and categorized vernacular history writing in the frame of insider and outsider. However, the characterization of Indo-Persian historiography as 'foreign' and disconnected from later practices of history writing in the regional

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1 K.N.Pannikar, *Culture, Ideology and Hegemony*, Tulika Publishers, New Delhi, 1998, p. 56.

2 Raziuddin Aquil and Partha Chatterjee, (ed.), *History in the Vernacular,* Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2008, p. 15.

3 *Ibid*, p. 15.

languages of India has been thoroughly criticized and rejected.[4] However, India's Persian histories undoubtedly developed their caucus from Arabic, Persian and Turkish histories, and thus brought into India many historiographical practices hitherto unknown in the country. But while writing their Indian histories, Indo-Persian chroniclers developed their own body of practices, giving birth to a tradition of their own.[5]

C.A. Bayly has located the practices of Indo-Muslim history writing in the eighteenth century within what he calls 'an India ecumene', characterized by a distinct information order and an indigenous public sphere.[6] His work has been significant in flattening prejudices against the existence of history in pre-colonial India. However, Bayly argues that notions such as 'ecumene' and 'information order' lack theoretical clarity and analytic power while the attribution of a Habermasian public sphere to the literary world of eighteenth-century northern India is too quick.[7] Other historians like V. Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam who are pursuing the question of the emergence of new literary forms in India in the period of early modernity, have also explored the field of history writing.[8] Rao Shulman-Subrahmanyam hypothesis and questions about pre-colonial historical narrative in the Indian vernaculars cannot be taken as a general presumption: its applicability must be tested for each language region.[9]

The pre-colonial vernacular historical traditions demand an analysis that what happened to them under conditions of modernity and as well as conceptual distinction between the early modern and the colonial modern in South Asia. Raziuddin Aquil and Partha Chatterjee argue that "The early modern is not necessarily a 'period' with specific dates marking its beginning and end. It is preferable to use the term to

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4 *Ibid*, pp. 15-16.

5 *Ibid*, pp. 15-16.

6 C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, (1780-1870)*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p.13.

7 *Ibid*., pp. 13-14.

8 Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India (1600-1800)*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2001.

9 *Ibid*., pp. 18-19.

characterize elements of thought or practice that have been identified as belonging to early modern historical formations in other regions of the world, thus providing, at least potentially, a comparative dimension with other modern histories."[10]

The British form of knowledge and developing economic model is pinpointed to understand colonial modernity. The crucial historical point would be to distinguish such elements of the early modern from the recognizable components of colonial modernity. The latter might be dated from roughly the 1830s, achieving its fully developed form in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was during this period that the Indian economy acquired the form of a characteristically colonial economy. Politically, the British power was established as paramount all over the subcontinent – a violent process of warfare, conquest, suppression of rebellions and unequal treaties- with associated consequences in terms of the symbols and practices of sovereignty and law, which brought about a profound transformation in the character of government and politics.[11] In this shifting paradigm, the vernacular tradition remained the subject of investigation.

Though written in a vernacular is not a vernacular history. The ideological and moving powers of these versions of history would have much greater influence in the field of the vernacular than they would within the professional forums of academic history. In the context of social history in vernacular, Sheldon Pollock states that the practice entered the domain of poetry in the vernaculars too, such that by the mid-nineteenth century, when printed literature in the Indian languages began to flourish, traditional literary scholars such as Narmad in Gujarati, Ishwarchanrda Gupta in Bengali, and Sri Ramamurthy in Telugu were able to publish biographical histories of the great poets in those languages.[12] Kishan Singh Arif, Dharam Das Arif and Ditt Singh were the poets who could be placed in this domain. These castes, sectarian, ethnic and local histories produced them form a large part of the social history literature in the vernaculars of South Asia which distinguish the essence of vernacular literary tradition in the domain of history writing. Vernacular history may seem divergent from

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10 *Ibid*, p. 21.

11 *Ibid*, p. 21.

12 Sheldon Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out", in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History:Reconstructions from South Asia*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003, p.6.

Illustration 4.1 Kishan Singh Arif
Source: Sufinama.org

academic history because it adopts the prose form of the essay or the monograph. However, vernacular histories frequently use different literary genres, such as novel, drama, autobiography, and even poetry. By emphasizing the 'local' or the 'regional', it challenges the national framework of mainstream history. By celebrating the living memory of the community, it questions the state-centred logic of modern historiography.

In the same manner, conventional Punjabi frontier society demands evidence to be justified as the literary and intellectual society in the domain of vernacular literary traditions. The egalitarianism of religious traditions not only broke all divisive lines but set the discourse of literary tradition in Punjabi society. The intellectual and literary tradition emerged from three basic elements like love, devotion and resistance. These currents occupied the domain of religion. The saint poets used this canvas to concretize dissent through devotion. The sect of Guabdasis has some noted saints under the above domain. Three poets are most important to be discussed here who emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century Punjab. These scholars and intellectuals extended the textual and spiritual lineage of the sect in particular and represent the intellectual literary tradition of the Punjab in general. The present chapter explores the interaction and relationship of the disciples of Gulab Das and the transcreated Gulabdasi philosophy and rituals for this sect that was under formation in the Punjab in the first half of the twentieth century. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section problematizes the question of the poet's agency and his historical and religious consciousness in contemporary society while the second section explores the colonial influence on the poet's thought and literary production stemming from his sojourn in the Punjab during the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

Gulabdasi sect contributed substantially to the enrichment of the 'Arif tradition' of the Punjab. This tradition emerged in the Majha region of the Punjab in the nineteenth century and then spread to other parts of the province.[13] The Arif tradition

[13] Pardeep Singh, *Punjabi Arif Kaav: Sidhantik Te Itihasik Sandarbh,* Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 2021, p.7. Literally, Arif means the *Brahm Gyani* or the person who has knowledge of Brahm. According to the Arabic-Parsian dictionary, Arif is the one who has the knowledge of *Maarfat*: *Ibid*., p. 10. According to Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, Arif means who has *Arif-i- Urf, Atam Gyani:* Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, *Gurshabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh,* Language Department, Patiala, 2019(First Published 1930), p. 104.

can be traced back to the Sufis in the Punjab. Sufi of the highest intellectual order was called Arif. Some of the Sufis even used the term for their *Murshid*.[14] In the post-annexation period, Punjab went through a lot of turbulence and the Arif poets came forward with a new tradition known as Arif Samparadaye (tradition).[15] They preached humanism and brotherhood contrary to the British idea of divide and rule.[16] Arif tradition was influenced by Sufism, Gurmat and Vedanta as well. Kishan Singh Arif (1836- 1900) was the foremost disciple of Gulabdasis. The second Gulabdasi poet is Dharam Das Arif (1866-1918) who was a very famous scholar and attained the status of Saint. The last one is the Ditta Ram alias Giani Ditt Singh (1850-1901) who was learned and trained in the sect of Gulabdasi and the disciple of Gulab Das. Later he became a noted poet, polemicist, journalist and primary orator of the Singh Sabha movement.

Kishan Singh Arif was one of the most famous Punjabi poets or vernacular poets of the second half of the nineteenth century. Arif was a publisher and bookshop owner in Amritsar who authored numerous poetic texts but *Qissa Hir te Ranjhe Da* was his most popular one.[17] He finished this *qissa* in *Kalian meter* in 1889.[18] He was proficient in Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Persian. Kishan Singh Arif was born in 1836 in Amritsar.[19] His father, Narayan Singh had a bookshop at Mai Sewan Bazar Amritsar, where Kishan Singh started his learning and reading. After the death of his father, he started printing and selling books in Amritsar. He mentions this in *Krishan Katar*:

> ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ ਵਿਚ ਰਹਿੰਦਾ ਹਾਂ ਮੈਂ ਕੁਤਬ ਫ਼ਰੋਸ਼ੀ ਕਰਦਾ ।
> ਪਾਸ ਅਖਾੜੇ ਚਿੱਟੇ ਦੇ ਹੈ ਆਸ਼ਕ ਰਰ ਦਿਲਬਰ ਦਾ ।[20]
> *Amritsar vich rehnda han main qutub farosh krda.*
> *Paas akhade chite de hai ashaq rar dilabar da.*

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14 *Ibid.* p.20.

15 Shamsher Singh Ashok, "Pal Singh Arif: Jeevan te Rachna", *Khoj Darpan*, January 1978, p.30.

16 Pardeep Singh, *Punjabi Arif Kaav: Sidhantik Te Itihasik Sandarbh,* p.28.

17 Farina Mir, *Social Space of the Language,* p. 12.

18 Mohan Singh, *A History of Punjabi Literature (1100-1932): A Brief Study of Reactions Between Punjabi Life and Letters Passed on Important MSS and Rare and Select Representative Published Works,* Punjabi University, Patiala, 2014, p.207.

19 Bikram Singh Ghuman, *Kishan Singh Arif: Jivan te Rachna,* Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1987, p. 11.

20 Kishan Singh Arif, *Krishan Katar,* Chiragudin Srajudin, Lahore, N.D., p. 14.

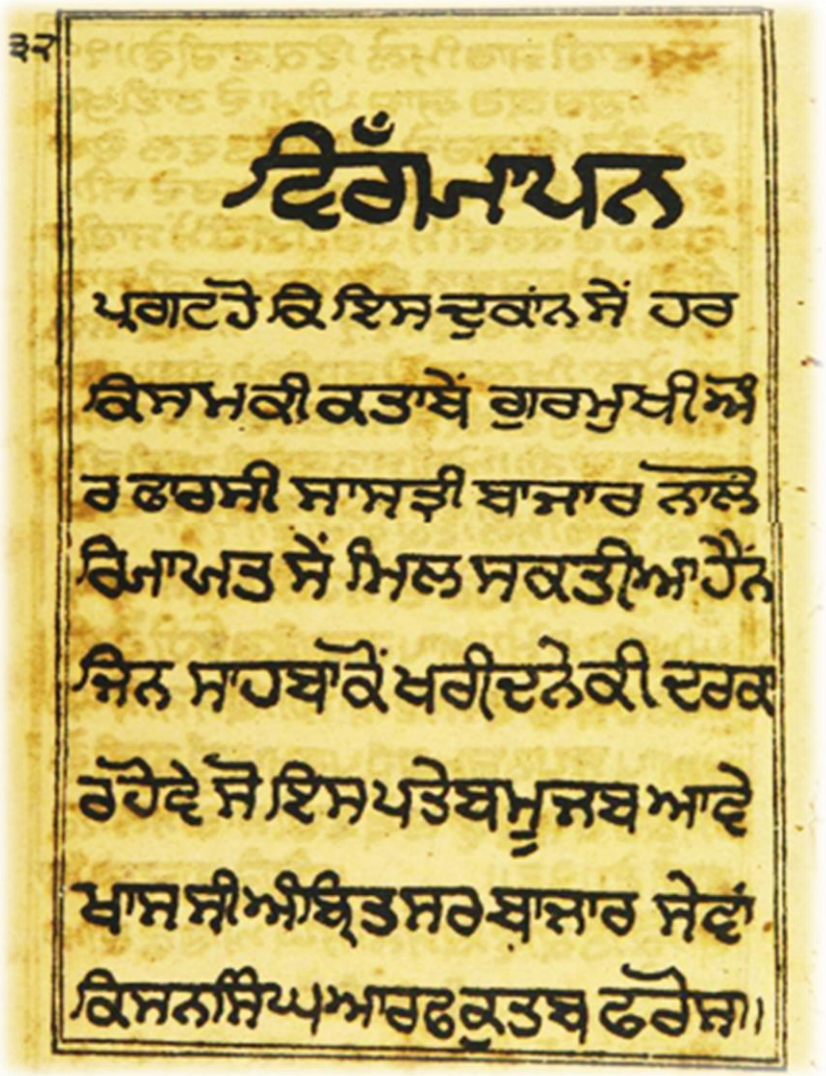

Illustration 4.2 An Advertisement of Kishan Singh Arif's Book Shop
Source: Kishan Singh Arif, Bhujartan,

Illustration 4.3 The Cover Page of the Qissa Dulla Bhatti
Source: Kishan Singh Arif, Qissa Dulla Bhatti

Illustration 4.4 Cover Page of the Qissa Heer Ranjha
Source: Kishan Arif, Qissa Heer Ranjha

Illustration 4.5 Cover Page of the Qissa Raja Rasalu
Source: Kishan Arfi, Qissa Raja Rasalu

He started reading Qissas and produced huge literature including religious and secular. He wrote six Qissas namely Dulla Bhatti, Puran Bhagat, Raja Rasalu, Raja Bharthari, Shiri Farhad, Hir Ranjha.[21] Other works of Kishan Arif include Kafis, Kishan Katar, Rajniti, Granth Rajnitka, Vichar Mala, Rumani Mangal, Kotde Khatpate, Bibek Ban, Kaside Arif (2), Gyan Charkha, Jiv Siapa, Pothi Sudharmi (Vartak), Siharfi Sanjhi (Chet Kaur and Kishan Singh Arif), Kundliye Arif, Kar Sarovar, Baramah (3), Satwara, Painti Akhri, Holian, Sati Shingar, Hari Astotar, Bujhartan.[22] Usually, saints used to keep moving and remained in the company of sadhus at a certain time of age but Kishan Singh claimed that the public sphere of Amritsar and the Golden temple greatly affected his life. He praised the city of Amritsar a lot in his Qissa Hir Ranjha and talks about its milieu:

> ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ ਇਕ ਸ਼ਹਿਰ ਹੈ ਵਿਚ ਦੇਸ਼ ਪੰਜਾਬ। ਰੋਸ਼ਨ ਅੰਦਰ ਜੱਗ ਦੇ, ਜਿਉਂ ਸੂਰਜ ਮਹਿਤਾਬ।
>
> ਸਿਫ਼ਤ ਕਰਾਂ ਕੀ ਸ਼ਹਿਰ ਦੀ, ਨਹੀਂ ਕੁਝ ਹਿਸਾਬ। ਮੰਦਰ ਮਹਲ ਮਕਾਨ ਬਹੁ, ਬਾਗ ਚਮਨ ਤਾਲਾਬ।[23]
>
> *Amritsar ik shehar hai vich desh Punjab. Roshan ander jagg de, jeon suraj mehtab.*
> *Sifat kran ki shehar di, nahi kuj hisaab. Mandar mehal bahu, bag chaman talab.*

However, out of the curiosity to search for truth, he made Gulab Das his mentor. Gulabdas was not only his guru but also the guru of his father Narayan Singh. He was deeply influenced by Sufism and Vedantic philosophy from Gulabdasis. He learned different languages and became proficient in the study of Vedas, and Sufi thoughts, and came to prepare his thoughts on the concepts of Non-Dualism, the unity of God and man. With the aura of his wisdom, the multitudes of followers thronged the young sadhu. Gradually, he became famous as a saint and attracted people with his preaching. Therefore, some poets became his disciples. Kishan Singh Arif, in most of his writings, praised Gulab Das as his Guru:

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21 Surinder Singh Kohli, (ed.), *Punjabi Sahit Kosh* (II), Panjab University, Chandigarh, 1972, p. 183; Kirpal Singh Kasel, Parminder Singh and Gobind Singh Lamba, *Punjabi Sahit Di Utpati te Vikas,* Lahore Book Shop, Ludhiana, 2008(Eight Edition), p.437.

22 *Ibid.,* p. 183.

23 Kishan Singh Arif, *Qissa Hir Rajha,* Bhai Wsawa Singh Juneja, Amritsar, n.d, p.**5**

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਦਾਸ ਗੁਲਾਬ ਸੁਆਮੀ, ਸਾਚੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਹਮਾਰੇ ਹੈਂ।
ਜਿਨ ਕੀ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਸੇਵਾ ਕਰਕੇ, ਜਨਮ ਮਾਰਨ ਭੈ ਟਾਰੇ ਹੈਂ।
ਗਿਆਨ ਧਿਆਨ ਕਾ ਦਾਨ ਕੀਆ ਜਿਨ, ਤਿਨ ਕੇ ਹਮ ਬਲਹਾਰੇ ਹੈਂ।
ਜਿਨ ਕੇ ਦਰਸਨ ਪਰਸਨ ਕਰਕੇ, ਅਨੁਭਵ ਨੈਨ ਉਘਾਰੇ ਹੈਂ। [24]

Satgur Das Gulab Suami, Sahe Guru Hamare Hain.
Jin ki Sangat Sewa Karke, Janam Maran Bhai Taare Hai.
Gian Dhayan ka Daan Kiaa Jin, Tinke Ham Balhare Hain.
Jin Ke Darshan, Parsan Karke, Anubhav Nain Ughare Hain.

He did not spare the slanderers of his Guru and aggressively criticized them in the Kotde Khatpada':

ਜੋ ਜੋ ਤਿਨ ਕੀ ਕਰੇਂ ਨਿੰਦਿਆ, ਸੋ ਹਨ ਨਿੰਦਤ ਸਾਲੇ।
ਕਿਸ਼ਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਗੁਰ ਸੂਰਜ ਮੇਰੇ, ਹੋਏ ਚੱਠਿਆਂ ਵਾਲੇ। [25]

Jo Jo tin ki kare nindia, so Han nindat sale.
Kishan Singh gur suraj mere, hoye Chathian wale.

Gulab Das was a good Vedanti Sadhu. The basic principle of Vedanta, I am the divine, had taken root in him, therefore, refused to believe in any other Braham. In the words of Gulab Das, there is a mystical message that has been given by Indian saints for a long time. Kishan Singh Arif's entire biography developed under the influence of his Guru's ideas. That is why in his works Vedantic philosophy could be seen in his literature. There he used the words like "Jagat Mithya Hai", "Mein Braham Hain", "Hum Sarbangi Hain", etc. The literal meaning of "Arif" is also Braham Gyani. All Gulabdasis considered themselves Braham Gyani because this was the teaching of their Guru. Arif had a very good knowledge of Raag Vidya (knowledge of Ragas) and Hikmat (medicine). Kishan Singh Arif, who had vast life experience, also visited various states and cities of India:

ਰੇ- ਰਾਜ ਡਿੱਠੇ ਕਈਆਂ ਰਾਜਿਆਂ ਦੇ, ਕਈ ਸ਼ਹਿਰ ਅਤੇ ਕਈ ਦੇਸ਼ ਡਿੱਠੇ।
ਕਈ ਪੀਰ ਫ਼ਕੀਰ ਅਮੀਰ ਦੇਖੇ, ਕਈ ਸਾਧ ਧਾਰੀ ਬਡੇ ਭੇਸ ਡਿੱਠੇ।
ਦਵਾਬਾ, ਮਾਲਵਾ ਅਤੇ ਪਹਾੜ ਡਿੱਠਾ, ਹਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਧ ਤੋੜੀ ਪ੍ਰਦੇਸ਼ ਡਿੱਠੇ।
ਕਿਸ਼ਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਗਿਆਨ ਮਕਾਨ ਬਾਝੋਂ, ਪੈਂਡੇ ਨਿੱਤ ਦੇ ਵਿਚ ਕਲੇਸ਼ ਡਿੱਠੇ। [26]

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[24] Kishan Singh Arif, *Kotde Khatpade,* Chiragdin Sirajudin, Lahore, N.D, p. 25.

[25] Kishan Singh Arif, *Kishan Kahani,* Handwritten Manuscript, Sikh Reference Library, Amritsar, 2370, p.12.

Re-Raj dithe kayian rajiyan de, kai shehar ate kyi desh dithe.
Kai pir faqir amir dekhe, kai sadh dhari bade bhes dithe.
Dwaba, Malwa ate pahar ditha, Hind Sindh todi pardesh dithe.
Kishan Singh gyan mkaan bajon, painde nitt de vich klesh dithe.

Ignorance and darkness caused the disturbance in society. Kishan Singh Arif clearly demarcated these upheavals and was a witness to the state disturbance. At the time of the birth of Kishan Singh(1836 AD), the Punjab was ruled by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. But, three years later, after the death of the great king on 27 June 1839, chaos and anarchy spread in the Punjab and the Sikh state could not maintain its dignity. Time, society and writers are closely intertwined. The writer is not only a part of the society; he is also responsible to spread consciousness of the truth in society as well. The writer experiences these situations and conditions with the utmost intensity and expresses the nature of his physical existence according to his personality. In this way, the triangle of time, society and literature takes the form of literary creation. Kishan Singh focused on Ranjit Singh's rule and the establishment of the new colonial state in the Punjab.

Literary creation demands a calm atmosphere, a long experience from the stability of the mind which is not possible in an atmosphere of chaos. That is why the work of literary creation came to a standstill during the turbulent times of Punjab after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Nothing had been written in Punjabi literature in these years. But, Kishan Singh's poetry provides a useful entry point for revisiting the role of poets in the early modern world and unsettled the easy characterization of poets as mere sycophants- persons devoid of a critical awareness of their surroundings and contemporary political and cultural developments.[27] Moreover, Arif was participating in a literary tradition having a clear sense of its own contours and history, and which had a continuity which pointed towards the enduring salience of vernacular literature through a period of immense change.[28]

By the time Kishan Singh Arif gained consciousness, the pain of losing the Punjabi state and the mixed feelings about the arrival of the new government continued to haunt him. With the death of the Maharaja, the Sikh state was deprived of a wise

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26 Kishan Singh Arif and Chet Kaur, *Sanjhi Siharfi*, pp.15-18.

27 Shreekant Kumar Chandan, *Alam: A Poet of Many Worlds*, in Tyler William, Anshu Malhotra, John Stratton Hawley(ed.), *Text and Tradition in Early Modern North India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2018.

28 Farina Mir, *Social Space of the Language,* p. 12.

leader. The Sikh kingdom, built up by forty years of resolute ability, did not long survive its founder. Its rigorous life was summed up in the person of Ranjit Singh; he symbolized its unity; he spoke for it to his neighbours, neither his wisdom nor mastery spirit was in any measure possessed by his successors.[29] Conspiracies at the royal court demoralized the people of the Punjab. The clash of the Dogra and Sandhanvalia chiefs shook the roots of the state of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and a period of anarchy and chaos ensued. Thus, the anarchy and villainess spread in Punjab was working as an invitation for the British [30] who had been sitting across the Sutlej for a long time to control their prey. Even during the lifetime of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the British were curious to grab and tried to colonize Punjab through missionary work. Signs of their desire to annex the Punjab began to be seen long before they started the work of translating the Bible into Punjabi, printing and distributing it for free in 1836 with the help of the Punjabi press.[31]

The Khalsa army was defeated after fierce battles at Mudki (18 December), Pheru Shehar (21 December) and Sabhraon (10 February 1846).[32] Through the Treaties of Lahore and Bhairowal signed after the War, the British not only occupied Lahore but lamed all powers and they could easily occupy Punjab as per their designs and wishes.[33] After the Second Anglo-Sikh War, On March 29, 1849, Sir Henry Elliott convened a large assembly at Lahore Fort and issued a proclamation declaring the kingdom of Maharaja Duleep Singh to be a part of the British Empire in India.[34] To eradicate the Punjabis' sense of sovereignty, Maharaja Duleep Singh, the sole successor of the Sikh state, was given a pension under the patronage of John Login. He inspired the Maharaja to convert to Christianity in 1854 AD and became a pensioner of the British.[35] He was taken to England by sea and Rani Jindanwas given exile. It was only natural that these tragic and pathetic incidents would have touched the heart of every

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29 John Gordon, *The Sikhs*, Language Department,Patiala,1970 (Reprint), p.119.

30 Sir Charles Gough, *The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars,* National Book Shop, Delhi, 1984 (First Published 1897), p. 42.

31 Bikram Singh Ghuman, *Kishan Singh Arif: Jivan te Rachna,* p. 3.

32 J.S.Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab,* pp. 123-24.

33 Khushwant Singh, *The Fall of the Kingdom of Punjab,* Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1985, p. 65.

34 Sita Ram Kohli, *Sunset of The Sikh Empire,* Orient Longman, Bombay, 1967, p.183. See also, Khushwant Singh, How The Sikhs Lost Their Kingdom, UBSPD, New Delhi, 1996, p.179.

35 *Ibid*, p. 127.

Punjabi. The writers of the time have portrayed this pain in their works with great intensity. This heart-wrenching sorrow is described in Shah Mohammad's 'Jang Singhan te Farangia' and also by the poet Matak.[36]

After the complete occupation of Punjab by the British, the administrative structure was changed. The feudal system began to transform into a capitalist system. This marked a turning point in the economic, social and cultural life of the Punjab. The government tried to appease the militant interests of the Punjabis by devising various constructive schemes. The new regime was introduced which transformed the law, education, migration and irrigation resources. The Department of Punjab Education was established in 1856; Oriental College, Lahore was established in 1864 and Panjab University, Lahore in 1882.[37] Many schools and colleges were opened. With this, Punjab began to accept the influence of Western education. The progressive culture of the British greatly influenced the way of life, language, dress and economy of the people.

The British, including the Punjab, wanted to promote India as a raw material market. So, they dug new canals for good farming, laid roads and railways, introduced English for clerks to run the state, and created a white-clad middle class. These gifts were not for the welfare of the Punjabis but a part of imperial policy. Behind this selfishness lay such seeds of public welfare that people began to forget their political background and cultural pride. The common people gladly accepted the blessings of British rule and considered it their good fortune to adopt the British way of life. That is why a century of British rule in the Punjab seems to be more effective than many centuries of Muslim rule and people accepted the unforeseen influence in every sphere of life.

Within the colonial setup, the Punjab was infected with the ideas of Westernization. K.N. Panikar argues that European rationalism and humanist thought, scientific mind, knowledge, economic development and political institutions were conceived by Indian intellectuals as progressive characterization of the West. But the intellectuals remained unaware to distinguish these currents in their public sphere. Therefore, conventional scholarship did not initiate an attempt to test their adaptability in the context of indigenous cultural and intellectual traditions. Further, Panikkar

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36 Ganda Singh, *Punjab dian Varan,* Khalsa College, Amritsar, 1946, p. 277.

37 J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab,* p. 128.

argues that the English-educated middle class, alienated from mass culture and placed almost totally outside the traditional intellectual milieu which formed the social base of this quest made it all the more restricted.[38]

In the colonial situation, there were two mutually complementary facets. The first was directed against 'backward elements' of tradition, culture and ideology and was expressed in terms of the reformation and regeneration of socio-religious institutions. The second was an attempt to contend with colonial culture and ideology.[39] Even in Punjab, the writers could not escape the influence of 'this good' British rule. Some writers wrote poems and songs about the blessings of the English Kingdom. Ishar Das wrote stories on 'Qissa Rail Gaddi',[40] Akbar Ali wrote 'Rail Nama'[41], Abdul Shah wrote stories on 'Bar di Abadi'[42] and poet Dayal Singh also wrote Qissas on 'Bar di Abadi'.[43]

Kishan Singh Arif, in his book 'Pothi Sudharmi', praised the British rule for justice, law, education, roads, railways and hospital management, secularism and advanced rule. His verse contains layers of meanings. To fully appreciate Kishan Singh's poetic ecumene, one needs to situate oneself amid the fast-changing world of the Punjab in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Kishan Singh Arif wrote in Diwan-i- Arif:

> ਦੇਖ ਤੂ ਇਨਸਾਫ ਸੇ ਏ ਯਾਰ ਰਾਜ ਅੰਗ੍ਰੇਜ ਕਾ।ਖੂਬ ਹੈ ਔਰ ਨੇਕ ਦਿਲਦਾਰ ਰਾਜ ਅੰਗ੍ਰੇਜ਼ ਕਾ।
> ਬਹਿਰੋਂ-ਬਰ-ਸ਼ਹਿਰ-ਘਰ ਸਬ ਜਾ-ਬ-ਜਾ ਆਬਾਦ ਹੈਂ, ਦੇਖ ਜਾਰੀ ਕਰ ਰਹਾ ਅਨਹਾਰ ਰਾਜ ਅੰਗ੍ਰੇਜ਼ ਕਾ।
> ਏਕ ਊਪਰ ਦੂਸਰਾ ਜ਼ਾਲਿਮ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਰਤਾ ਹੈ ਜ਼ੁਲਮ, ਹੈ ਦਿਖਾਤਾ ਜਿਸ਼ਤ ਕੋ ਤਲਵਾਰ ਰਾਜ ਅੰਗ੍ਰੇਜ਼ ਕਾ।
> ਰੇਲ ਦੇਖੋ, ਤਾਰ ਦੇਖੋ ਔਰ ਸੜਕੋਂ ਸਾਫ਼ ਸਾਫ਼, ਉਨਕੇ ਉਪਰ ਬੋ ਰਹਾ ਅਸ਼ਜਾਰ ਰਾਜ ਅੰਗ੍ਰੇਜ਼ ਕਾ।
> ਦੇਖ ਮਦਰਸੋਂ ਮੇਂ ਲੜਕੇ ਪੜ੍ਹਕੇ ਆਲਿਮ ਹੋ ਗਏ, ਕਰ ਰਹਾ ਹੈ ਸਭ ਕੋ ਅਬ ਹੁਸ਼ਿਆਰ ਰਾਜ ਅੰਗ੍ਰੇਜ਼ ਕਾ।

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38 K.N. Panikar, *Culture, Ideology and Hegemony*, p. 60.

39 *Ibid*, p. 58.

40 Ishar Das, *Qissa Rail Gaddi, N.D.*

41 Akbar Ali, *Rail Nama, N.D.*

42 Abdul Shah, *Baar Di Abadi,N.D.*

43 Gazetteer of the Chenab Colony 1904, Lahore, 1905, pp. 408-9.

ایک اونکار ست گورپرشاد

ہوالغنی اوم ہوالعزیز

حصّہ اوّل

دیوانِ عارف

تصنیف کشن سنگھ عارف باشندہ امرتسر

ردیف الف

پلا ساقی پیالہ اک مجھے صہبائے وحدت کا
دوئی سب دور ہو دل سے کہ ہے یہ پہلا عبادت کا

رہون مخمور مستی مین بلندی اور پستی مین
برابر نیست و ہستی مین تصوّر نیک عادت کا

مجھے بیہوش و بیخود کر چلا جاؤن صنم کے گھر
بکوئے سیمبر ہرگز نہین ہے کام حکمت کا

شراب ایسی پلا مجھہ کو کہ ہو جاؤن مین دیوانہ
خیال آوے نہ دانش مین کبھی بھی مال و دولت کا

کرون یادِ صنم ہر دم نہو غم دین و دنیا مین
اُسی کا شوق ہو دل مین نہ ہو کچھہ ڈر ملامت کا

بنا درویش کی صورت ملون اُس شاہ خوبان کو
نہون محتاج دنیا مین کہین جاہ و جلالت کا

مین خاکِ راہ دلبر لے کرون سُرمہ دوا آنکھون مین
رکھون سر اُسکے پاؤن پر رہون مائل محبت کا

مجھے ہے آرزو اُسکی نہین ثانی کوئی جسکی
نہ ہے کچھہ خوف دوزخ کا نہ خواہان ہون مین جنت کا

انا الحق دم بدم بولون شرابِ معرفت پیکر
نہو ڈر دار و خنجر سے رہون پابند اُلفت کا

گلاب دمی ملا کے وہ کہ ہے یہہ تیز تر بادہ
ہے گر ہوش ہی باقی اثر ہو کچھہ نصیحت کا

Illustration 4.6 A page of Diwan-i- Arif written by Kishan Singh Arif
Source: Sufinama.org

ਹਸਪਤਾਲੋਂ ਮੇਂ ਬਿਮਾਰੋਂ ਕੋ ਮਿਲਤੀ ਹੈ ਦਵਾ, ਫ਼ੈਜ਼ ਸਭ ਪਰ ਕਰ ਰਹਾ ਹੈ ਯਾਰ ਰਾਜ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ ਕਾ।

ਹਰ ਤਰਫ਼ ਕਾਨੂੰਨ ਹੈ ਔਰ ਹਰ ਤਰਫ਼ ਕਾਮਿਲ ਵਕੀਲ, ਸਬ ਹੀ ਰਾਜੋਂ ਕਾ ਹੈ ਅਬ ਸਰਦਾਰ ਰਾਜ ਅੰਗ੍ਰੇਜ਼ ਕਾ।[44]

Dekh tu insaf se e yaar raj angrez ka, Khoob hai aur nek dildar raj angrez ka.
Behron-bar-shehar-ghar-ghar sb ja-ba-ja abaad hai, Dekh jari kar rha anhar raj angrez ka.
Ek upar dusra zalim nahi krta hai zulam, Hai dikhat ajisht ko talwar raj angrez ka.
Rel dekho, tar dekho aur sadkon saf saf, Un ke upar bo rha ashjar raj angrez ka.
Dekh madrason mein ladke padh ke alim ho gye, Kar rha hai sabh ko ab hushiaar raj angrez ka.
Hasptalon mein bimaron ko milti hai dwa, Faiz sab par kar rha hai yar raj angrez ka.
Har taraf kanoon hai aur hartarf kamil waqil, Sabh hi rajon ka hai ab sardar raj angrez ka.

Kishan Singh Arif was quite curious about the structural changes being carried out by the British Raj. He noticed the urbanization patterns of the Britishers and declared once those to be open-hearted. He praised the railway, education system, medical facilities and the maintenance of law and order in the colonial state.[45]

Kishan Singh retold Qissas of Urdu and Persian in Punjabi vernacular language and retold various themes and motifs, and indigenized the stories. Kishan Singh's retelling of Qissa or other literature represents his interaction with the Urdu and Persian literary trends being practised by Gulab Das himself. As a genre, Punjabi qissas are rooted in Arabic and Persian storytelling traditions of the same name.[46] They have a particular affinity with the Persian romantic *qissa*, a subgenre marked by its use of *masnavi* poetic form, which dates to c. 1000 C.E.[47] Interestingly, Pasha M. Khan gives a different opinion over the *qissa* genre. The *qissa* or Dastan is a genre of verbal art that flourished in India, edifying and entertaining audiences in villages and bazaars

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44 Kishan Singh Arif, *Diwan-i-Arif*, p. 141.

45 Kishan Singh Arif, *Diwan-i-Arif*, p. 141.

46 Farina Mir, "Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives: Rethinking Cultural and Religious Syncretism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 48, Vol. 3, July 2006, pp. 734-46.

47 Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, Dordrecht, Reidel, 1968, p. 91.

patronized by imperial and sub-imperial courts and the salons of wealthy urban elites.[48] Further, he describes the term genre as a "historically instituted grouping of texts whose identity is encoded according to a set of common marks. The code defining the genre is ideologically produced by the text's consumers, who may also include the producers. At any given historical movement, the ideology or worldview of a group of audience members positions the genre within a system of genres against which it is relationally defined and hierarchically valued".[49]

This tradition on the whole was transmitted to South Asia from Central Asia and Persia during the medieval period, very likely crossing regional boundaries with court poets, merchants, traders, Sufis, and mendicants.[50] Indian litterateurs took up the genre by composing *qissa* principally in Persian, the literary language of much of North India during the medieval and early modern periods. Amir Khusro's (1254-1325) poetry provides one of the earliest examples of this adoption. He composed the romances of Laila-Majnun (originally Arabic) and Shirin- Khusraw (originally Persian) in Persian and *masnavi* (the standard form of the Persian romance *qissa*).[51]

The form and narratives of the *qissa* were gradually adopted into Indian vernacular literature. Punjabi poets took up the genre in the early seventeenth century and it has been more than five hundred years since the development of Punjabi literature. The Punjabi *qissa* retained the *masnavi* form and rhyme scheme but used indigenous rather than Persian matters. Another way in which the cosmopolitan Persian *qissa* tradition was localized in Punjab was through the inclusion of indigenous romance narratives. Punjabi poets used stories originally brought from the Arabian Peninsula and Persia, such as Laila-Majnun and Shirin-Khusraw, but they also composed stories that were local in origin, situated in the local landscape and embedded in the local social relations.[52] Among these, some that continue to be popular beyond the geographic locale of the Punjab are Puran- Bhagat, Sohni-Mahival, Sassi-

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48 Pasha, M.Khan, *The Broken Spell: Indian Storytelling and the Romance Genre in Persian and Urdu*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, Michigan, 2019, p. 1.

49 *Ibid*, p.6.

50 Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language, Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2010, p. 7.

51 Sunil Sharma, *Amir Khusraw: The Poet of Sufis and Sultans*, Oxford, One World, 2005.

52 Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language*, p. 7.

Punnu Mirza- Sahiban and, perhaps most popular of all, Hir-Ranjha.[53] One of the most significant shifts in literary culture in nineteenth-century India came with the colonial state's designation of official vernacular languages for provincial administration. In much of pre-colonial India, the official language of administration and judicial purposes at the provincial level until 1837 was Persian when it instituted the change from Persian to Indian vernaculars.[54] It paved the way to enlighten the Punjabi litterateur and poets who produced a vast variety of vernacular literature.

The qissa genre is the most important in this category. The Qissa writings were quite famous in which Kishan Singh Arif produced his literature. The former writers used the folk tales of Heer- Ranjha, Laila- Majnu but in the latter, the theme of romance is the source to construct an allegorical narrative of the Sufi quest of Ishq-i- Haqiqi (divine love)[55]. His Persian, Urdu and Punjabi translation of the narrative of Heer Ranjha, a very popular love tale in the Indic tradition, was another attempt to facilitate intercultural dialogue and explore the Indic literary heritage.[56] He was highly influenced by the Sufi milieu and by the Punjabi, Urdu, and Persian vernacular literary trends provided by the Chishti Sufis and Bhakti saints. The most easily discernible influence was the shift of language from Persian to Urdu and then Punjabi reflected primarily in his recasting of the popular tale of love in Punjabi and some miscellaneous verses. There is an example of a poet Alam who belonged to Deccan in the seventeenth century and recast the popular tales of Krishna-Sudama in Dakhni Urdu from *Bhasha* (Hindi literature).[57] Manpreet Kaur has well contextualized Ranjha as a Yogi who lost the identity of Yogi but for her at once, he is Jogi, Faqir and *Darvesh*.[58] Ranjha had the

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53 *Ibid*, p. 7. Between 1886 and 1921, *Qissa Puran Bhagat* was written by at least twelve writers: Akshay Kumar, "From Spiritual to Subaltern: Shifting Semantics of 'Kissa Pooran Bhagat' in Modern Punjabi Literature, *Indian Literature* , Vol. 47, No. 2 (214), March-April, 2003, (March-April, p.147.

54 Farina Mir, "Imperial Policy, Provincial Practices: Colonial Language Policy in Nineteenth-Century India", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 43, Vol. 4, 2006, pp. 395-427.

55 Aditya Behal, "The Magic Doe: Desire and Narrative in a Hindavi Romance Circa 1503", in Meenakshi Khanna (ed.), *Cultural History of Medieval India*, Social Science Press, New Delhi 2007, 175-7.

56 Muzaffar Alama and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 205-48.

57 Shreekant Kumar Chandan, *Alam: A Poet of Many Worlds*, p. 303.

58 Manpreet Kaur, "*Lover and Yogi in Punjabi Sufi Poetry:The Story of Hir and Ranjha*", in Hawley, John Stratton, Novetzke, Christian Lee, Swapna Sharma (ed.) *Bhakti and Power: Debating India's Religion of the Heart,* University of Washington Press, Washington, 2019, p. 105.

quest to explore something which was likened to Balaknath. But Kishan Singh Arif criticized the act of Ranjha as a Jogi in his Qissa. He wrote:

ਰਖੇ ਰੰਨ ਅਕੀਰ ਹੋਇ, ਉਸਦੀ ਨਾਹੀਂ ਸੱਤ ।
ਪਰ ਪਰ ਨਾਰੀ ਦੇਖਣੀ, ਇਸ ਵਿਚ ਖੜਾ ਕੁਪੱਤ ।
ਨਾ ਇਜ਼ੱਤ ਨਾ ਧਨ ਰਹੇ, ਮੁਖ ਨਾ ਜੱਤ ਸੱਤ ।[59]

Rakhe ran akeer hoye, osdi nahi satt.
Par par naari dekhni, is vich khada kupatt.
Na izzat na dhan rahe, mukh na jat sat.

Kishan Singh's sojourn in colonial Punjab had a great impact on his religious thought as well as on his literary production. His command over vernacular language in which he composed verses before coming to Punjab reveals his deep engagement with popular devotion to the sect of Gulabdasis which was geographically located in the region of Majha. Kishan Singh Arif was intensively influenced by the Sufi idea of *Fana* (annihilation of the self into the divine reality) and the agony of suffering that is experienced during the soul's separation from the beloved (that is God). He said:

ਕਹਾਂ ਲੁਕਮਾਨ, ਅਰਸਤੂ ਔਰ ਅਫ਼ਲਾਤੂਨ ਸਿਕੰਦਰ ਹੈਂ
ਕਹਾਂ ਦਾਰ੍ਹਾ ਓ ਜਮਸ਼ੇਦ ਓ ਕਹਾਂ ਤੈਮੂਰ ਸਫ਼ਦਰ ਹੈਂ ।
ਕਹਾਂ ਜ਼ਾਲ ਓ ਕਹਾਂ ਰੁਸਤਮ ਜਿਨ੍ਹੋਂ ਕੇ ਜ਼ੋਰ ਜ਼ਾਹਿਰ ਹੈਂ
ਚਲੇ ਜਾਏਂਗੇ ਸਬ ਯਹਾਂ ਸੇ ਅਮੀਰ ਔਰ ਕਯਾ ਕਲੰਦਰ ਹੈਂ ।[60]

Kahan Lukman, Arastu aur Aflatoon Sikander hain
Kahan Dara o Jamshed o kahan Taimur Safdar hain.
Kahan Zal o kaha rustam jinho ke zor zahir hain.
Chale jayenge sab yaha se amir aur kya klandar hain.

There are not many details about Kishan Singh Arif in the history of Punjabi literature. This information is also found incomplete in other works. A study of his distorted works proves that he became a famous poet in the second half of the nineteenth century. He witnessed the establishment of British rule in the Punjab after the death of Ranjit Singh, the siege of the Lahore Darbar and the battle between the Sikhs and the British. He saw the end of the 'feudal' state and the establishment of the capitalist state. In this clash of tradition and modernization, he remained a subject of distinction between new public spheres**.** He was influenced by the English system and culture but

59 Kishan Singh Arif, *Qissa Hir Rajha*, Bhai Wsawa Singh Juneja, Amritsar, N.D., p. 51.

60 Kishan Singh Arif, *Musaddas-i-Arif*, p. 8.

remained immersed in Punjabi literature which led him to compose poetry based on traditional ideas. Although his poetry did not impress the people of modern ideology like reformist Giani Ditt Singh, the general public read his poetry with great interest. It is evident from the publication of several editions of his writings. During the period of transformation, Kishan Singh Arif touches and goes through the questions under the domain of religion and spirituality during his period. He roamed around the Indian landscape and dealt with these questions. He mentioned the shrines to refute the pilgrimage. He wrote:

ਕਯਾ ਬਨਾਰਸ ਕਯਾ ਮੱਕੇ ਕਯਾ ਜਵਾਲਾ ਜਾਏ
ਦਿਲ ਮੇਂ ਜਬ ਦਿਲਦਾਰ ਪਾਇਆ ਔਰ ਕਿਸ ਕੋ ਪਾਏ ।
ਕਯਾ ਥਾਨੇਸਰ ਕਯਾ ਗਯਾ ਹੈ ਗੈਂਗ ਮੇਂ ਕਯਾ ਨਹਾਏ ।[61]
Kya Banaras kya Makke kya Jawala jaye
Dil mein jab dilbar paea aur kis ko paye.
Kya thanesar kya Gaya hai Gang mein kya nahaye.

The Sikh religious philosophy denied the pilgrimage as a ritual but socio-politically shrines have their importance. The religious tradition does not shrink the religion into the domain of rituals and pilgrimages. For Kishan Singh Arif, the absolute reality is Brahm which is present everywhere in the world. He feels the Braham is in his internal:

ਘਰ ਮੇਂ ਹੈ ਰੰਗ ਦਿਲਬਰ ਔਰ ਕਿਸ ਕੋ ਗਾਏ।[62]
Ghar mein hai rang dilbar aur kis ko gaye.

The concept of the Brahm is the primary element which unified all religious traditions. Therefore, he consciously followed the path of existing religious tradition as given in Guru Granth Sahib:

ਕਾਹੇ ਰੇ ਬਨ ਖੋਜਨ ਜਾਈ।।
ਸਰਬ ਨਿਵਾਸੀ ਸਦਾ ਅਲੇਪਾ ਤੋਹੀ ਸੰਗਿ ਸਮਾਈ।[63]
Kaye re ban khojan jayee,
Sarb niwasi sda alepa tohi sang samayi.

Kishan Singh Arif also wrote Mussadas[64] which is a genre of Urdu poetry. He wrote a Massad. It is written in the Urdu language and its script is Persian. In this genre, he criticized caste inequality:

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61 *Ibid*, p. 10.

62 *Ibid*, p. 10.

63 *Guru Granth Sahib*, p.437.


مسدس کشن سنگھ
مع
مندری رامداس
حسب فرمایش
حاجی چراغ الدین سراج الدین
تاجران کتب کشمیری بازار لاہور
مطبوعہ اسلامیہ سٹیم پریس واقع لاہور

Illustration 4.7 A page of Mussadas-i- Arif written by Kishan Singh Arif
Source: Personal Collection of Author

ਕੌਨ ਊਂਚਾ ਨੀਚਾ ਸਬ ਖ਼ੁਦਾ ਕੀ ਜ਼ਾਤ ਹੈ ।
ਏਕ ਜਿਸਮ ਕੀ ਜਾਨ ਜੈਸੇ ਪਾਓ ਚਸ਼ਮ ਓ ਹਾਤ ਹੈ ।[65]
Kaun Uncha nicha sab khuda ki zat hai.
Ek jism ki jaan kaise pao chasham o haat hai.

Kishan Singh Arif was intensively influenced by the Sufi idea of *Fana* (annihilation of the self into the Divine Reality) and the agony of suffering that is experienced during the soul's separation from the beloved (that is God).

ਹਾਏ ਹਾ ਕਰਤੇ ਹੈਂ ਹਰ ਦਮ ਰੋਤੇ ਹੈਂ ਦਿਨ ਰਾਤ ਹਮ
ਏਕ ਦਿਨ ਜਾਏਂਗੇ ਯਾਰੋ ਪੇੜ ਸੇ ਜਿਓਂ ਪਾਤ ਹਮ[66]
Haye ha karte hain har dum rote hain din raat hum,
Ek din jayenge yaro perh se jeon paat hum.

He used the verses from Gurbani in Pothi Sudharmi to inspire people to live their lives according to the Gurmat. He wrote and retold the *qissa* genre. He wrote several qissas over the love tales of Saman-Shaha, Sarmad, Bulla Shah, Moosa, Isa Messiah, Shirin-Farhad, Laila-Maznu, Yusaf-Zulekhan, Sohni-Mahinwal, Sassi-Punnu, Mirza-Sahiba, Roda Jalali.[67] The principle of love that he presents in his works cannot be termed original or new. Like Punjabi Sufi poets, he emphasizes the importance of both divine love (*Ishq Majazi*) and worldly love (*Ishq haqiqi*). He condemns those who oppose love:

ਬਿਨਾ ਇਸ਼ਕ ਇਨਸਾਨ ਹੈਵਾਨ ਜੈਸੇ,
ਭਾਵੇਂ ਆਦਮੀ ਲੱਖ ਕਰੋੜ ਦੇ ਜੇ ।[68]
Bina ishq insaan haiwaan jaise,
Bhawen admi lakh karor de je.

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64 Musaddas is a genre of Urdu Poetry in which each unit consists of six lines. It became the form used for the *mars□īyeh* (dirge for the martyrs of Karbala). Because it had come to be associated with lofty feelings and serious thought, *musaddas* later was used for the first reformist modern poems.

65 Kishan Singh Arif, *Musaddass-i- Arif*, p. 9.

66 *Ibid*, p. 1.

67 Kirpal Singh Kasel, (ed.), *Punjabi Sahit da Itihas*, (2nd Ed.), Language Department, Patiala, 1972, pp. 10-26.

68 Kishan Singh Arif, *Qissa Shirin Farhad*, Bhai Chatar Singh Jivan Singh, Amritsar, n.d, p. 156.

In Shirin Farhad, he is not satisfied just by talking about figurative love. He considers real love to be the only means of human welfare. He further distinguishes the divine love (*Ishq Haqiqi*) which makes the welfare of society. In some couplets he wore:

ਜ਼ਾਹਿਰ ਕੀਤੇ ਇਸ਼ਕ ਨੇ, ਪੀਰ ਫ਼ਕੀਰ ਅਮੀਰ ।[69]
Zahir kite ishq ne, pir faqir amir.

For divine love, Mansoor and Shams Tabrez became martyrs. That love raised them on a high pedestal where the difference between man and Braham collapses:

ਦੀਆ ਮਨਸੂਰ ਕੋ ਸੂਲੀ ਕੀਆ ਜਬ ਹਕ਼ ਖ਼ੁਦ ਜ਼ਾਹਿਰ
ਉਤਾਰੀ ਖਾਲ ਸ਼ਮਸ ਕੀ ਕੀਆ ਜਬ ਖ਼ੁਦ ਖ਼ੁਦਾ ਜ਼ਾਹਿਰ ।[70]
Dia Mansoor ko sooli kia jab haq khud zahir
Utari khaal Shamas ki kia jab khud khuda zahir.

He metaphorically states that all are Mansoor who have been killed for the sake of divine love.

ਇਸ਼ਕ ਕੀ ਸੂਲੀ ਚੜੇ ਹੈ ਦਰਦ ਏ ਗ਼ਮ ਸੇ ਚੂਰ ਹੈਂ
ਮੂ ਬੁ ਮੂ ਕਹਿ ਕੇ ਅਨਅਲ ਹਕ਼ ਹੋ ਰਹੇ ਮਨਸੂਰ ਹੈ । [71]
Ishq ki sooli chade hai dard e gam se choor hai,
Mu bu mu keh ke anhal haq ho rahe mansoor hai.

Further, he claimed that he himself was enlightened and attained salvation through this love. He confessed that with the love of God, he became capable of attaining something in his life.

ਕਿਸ਼ਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਸੰਸਾਰ ਸਮੁੰਦ ਵਿਚੋਂ, ਸਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ਼ਕ ਨੇ ਪਾਰ ਉਤਾਰਿਆ ਈ । [72]
Kishan Singh sansar samund vichon, sanu ishq ne paar utaria e.

As he was trained as a Gulabdasi disciple, he gave great importance to '*Ishq Majazi'* which further opened the path of '*Ishq Haqiqi'*. Actually, both currents are overlapping and reciprocate each other. In this occupied domain, he counters the argument against

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69 *Ibid*, p. 156.

70 Kishan Singh Arif, *Musaddas-i-Arif*, p.10.

71 *Ibid*, p. 9.

72 Kishan Singh Arif, *Qissa Shirin Farhad*, p. 160.

his guru and Mata Piro's relationship as well. In the Qissa Raja Rasalu, he contextualized the relation of the female with the male eloquently:

> ਜੱਗ ਜੀਵਨੇ ਦੇ ਏਹੋ ਫਲ ਕਹਿੰਦੇ, ਏਕ ਨਾਮ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੂਜਾ ਭੋਗ ਹੈ ਜੀ ।
> ਵਲੀ ਪੀਰ ਫ਼ਕੀਰ ਪੈਗੰਬਰਾਂ ਦਾ, ਨਾਲ ਨਾਰੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਸੰਜੋਗ ਹੈ ਜੀ ।
> ਕਿਸ਼ਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਮੇਹਰੀ ਮਰਦ ਮਿਲਣ ਜਦੋਂ, ਦੂਰ ਹੋਵੇ ਤਦੋਂ ਸਾਰਾ ਸੋਗ ਹੈ ਜੀ । [73]
>
> *Jagg jivne de eho fall kehnde, ek naam sahib duja bhog hai ji.*
> *Wali pir faqir paigambran da, naal nariyan de sanjog hai ji.*
> *Kishan singh mehri mard Milan jadon, door howe tadon sara sog hai ji.*

Kishan Singh Arif, in his verse, is explicatory of his Guru's behaviour and he justifies his relationship with Piro by elevating Gulab Das to the level of godly avatars whom all had consorts. Arif writes:

> ਸੰਤ ਇਸਤਰੀ ਚਾਹ ਜੋ ਰਾਖੇ ਮਤ ਕੋ ਬੁਰਾ ਚਿਤਾਰੇ ਰੇ
> ਇਹ ਭੀ ਨਹੀ ਅਚਰਜ ਨਯਾ ਕੋ ਰੱਖਦੇ ਆਏ ਸਾਰੇ ।
> ਸ਼ਿਵ ਗੋਰੀ ਅਰ ਕਿਸ਼ਨ ਰਾਧ ਕੇ, ਸੀਤਾ ਰਾਮ ਪਯਾਰੇ ਰੇ,
> ਭਗਤ ਕਬੀਰ ਕੇ ਘਰ ਲੋਈ, ਸਭ ਸੰਤਨ ਰਾਖੀ ਨਾਰੇ ਰੇ. [74]
>
> *Sant istri chah jo rakhe mat ko bura chitare re*
> *Ih bhi nahi acharaj naya ko rakhde aye sare;*
> *Shiv Gori ar Kishan Radh ke, Sita Ram pyare re*
> *Bhagat Kabir ke ghar Loi, sabh santan rakhi nare re*

He produced literature in Urdu, Persian, Hindi and Punjabi languages. For his literary production and themes, Pritma Singh Saini declares Kishan Singh Arif as a great scholar and poet at the level of Hashim Shah, Ahmedyar and Fazal Shah who were poets of Urdu and Persian languages.[75] Kishan Singh Arif did not have any children. In a Sanjhi Siharfi which was written by his wife Chet Kaur in memory of his husband; she wrote that:

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73 Kishan Singh Arif, *Qissa Raja Rasalu*, Rai Sahib Munshi Gulab Singh and Sons, Lahore, 1898, p. 88.

74 Kishan Singh Arif's *Kotre Khatpade* cited in Inder Singh Sewak, *Gulabdasi Sampardaye*, p. 104.

75 Pritam Singh Saini, *Kavi Kishan Singh Arif: Ik Alochnatmak Adhiain*, Unpublished Ph.D thesis, Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 156.

Illustration 4.8 A page of Punjabi Ghazals written by Kishan Singh Arif
Source: Personal Collection of the Author

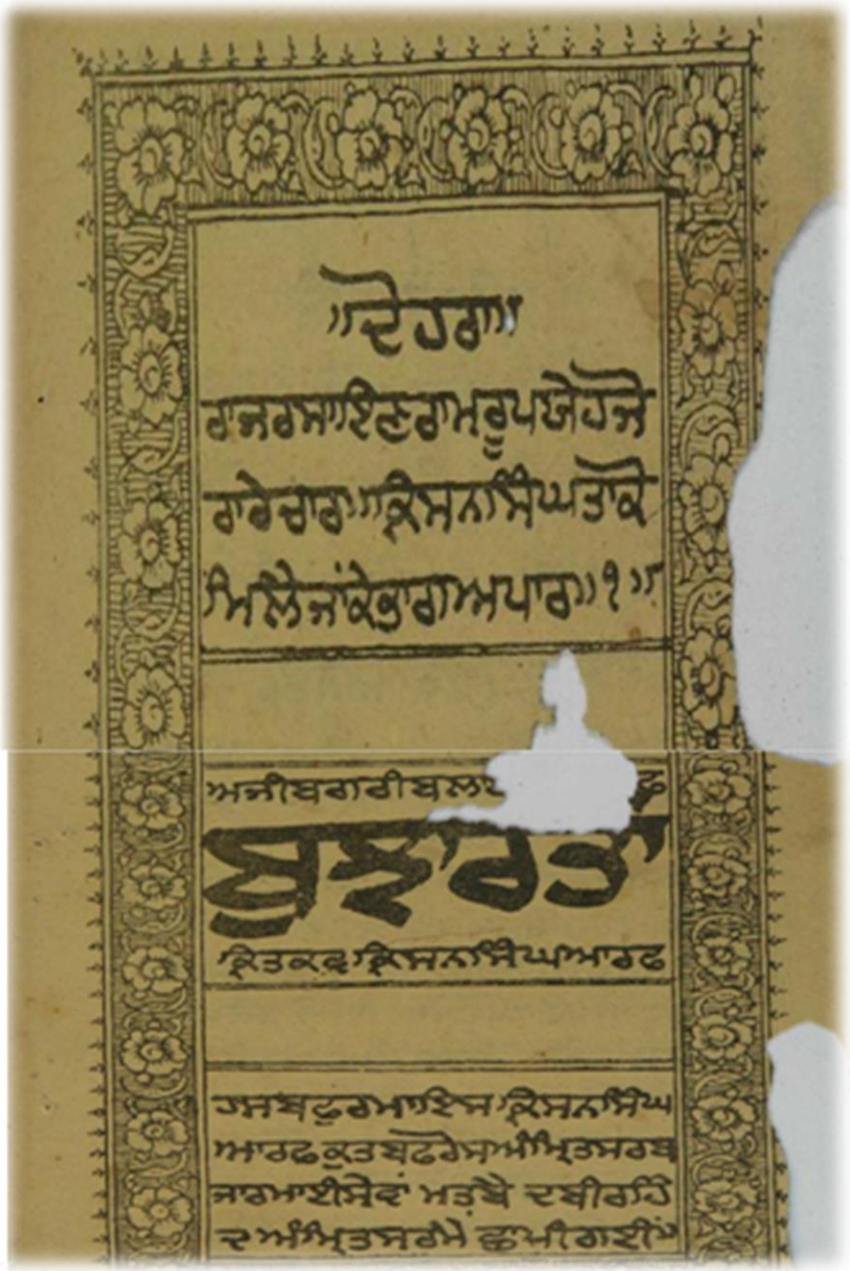

Illustration 4.9 Cover Page of Bhujartan written by Kishan Singh Arif
Source: Panjab Digital Library

ਕਾਫ਼ ਕਰਜ਼ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦਾ ਮੂਲ ਦੇਣਾ, ਧੀ ਪੁੱਤਰ ਨਾ ਕੋਈ ਵਿਹਾਵਣਾ ਹੈ।
ਦਿਨ ਰਾਤ ਬੇਫਿਕਰਿਆਂ ਦੀ ਬੀਤ ਜਾਸੀ, ਆਪੇ ਖਟਣਾ ਤੇ ਆਪੇ ਖਾਵਣਾ ਹੈ।[76]
Kaf karaz nahi kise da mool dena, dhe putar na koi viahwana hai.

Din rat befikriyan di beet jasi, Ape khatna te ape khawana hai .

Kishan Singh Arif died in 1900. However, Pritam Singh Saini and Mohan Singh Diwana do not agree on this date. They considered his death in 1898.[77] Even Bikramjit Singh has not had a valid source to defend his death.[78] Pal Singh Arif was a contemporary of Kishan Singh Arif, he wrote in 'Qissa Sohni Mahiwal' that:

ਕਿਸ਼ਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਆਰਿਫ਼ ਹੈ ਸਨ ਮੀਤ ਸਾਡੇ,
ਸੁਰਗਵਾਸ ਜੋ ਹੂਏ ਸੁਣਾਇਆ ਮੈਂ ।[79]
Kishan Singh Arif haisan meet sade,
Suragwas jo hue sunaea main.

A special feature of his poetry is that it reveals the truth of life through words. The poet tried to fill the lack of emotion with the help of knowledge. Thoughts like the height of divine love, the fascism of life, the selfishness of man, condemnation of woman etc. were common themes in his works. That is why he is one of the most thoughtful traditional poets of the second half of the nineteenth century. He was strongly in the favor of hard work (*kirat*) and honesty:

ਨ ਘਟਤਾ ਹੈ ਔਰ ਨ ਬੜ੍ਹਤਾ ਹੈ ਬੁਲੰਦੀ ਔਰ ਪਸਤੀ ਮੇਂ
ਨ ਡਰ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਓ ਮੋਮਿਨ ਸੇ ਮਗਨ ਰਹਿ ਹਕ਼ ਪ੍ਰਸਤੀ ਮੇਂ ।[80]
Na ghata hai na barhta hai bulandi or pasti mein
Na dar Hindu o Momin se magan reh haq prasti mein.

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76 Her name is not mentioned in the history of Punjabi literature. After Piro, no Punjabi poetess finds place in the history of Punjabi literature between 1849 and 1900. It was in 1936 only that Amrita Pritam fills this gap. As a reference, the writings of Deeko, the disciple of Piro, are still under historical and literary analysis: *Sant Hira Singh Manuscript*, Hansi, p. 28.

77 Mohan Singh Diwana, *A History of Punjabi Literature*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2014; p. 135; Pritam Singh Saini, "Qissakar Kishan Singh Arif", *Punjabi Duniya*, December 1977, p. 58.

78 Bikramjit Singh Ghuman, *Kishan Arif: Jivan te Rachna,* Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 11-12.

79 Pal Singh Arif, *Qissa Sohni Mahinwal*,p. 136.

80 Kishan Singh Arif, *Musaddas-i-Arif*, p.14. He seems to be influenced by the idea of Guru Nanak's thought which echoed in the following of *ਹਕੁ ਪਰਾਇਆ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਉਸੁ ਸੂਅਰ ਉਸੁ ਗਾਇ ॥: Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 141.

Illustration 4.10 Sant Ditta Ram
Source: Anshu Malhotra

Giani Ditt Singh

Giani Ditt Singh alias Ditta Ram was born in a so-called low caste and a bunch of scholars consider him a Dalit hero.[81] During his initial life, the subjectivity of caste was a question for him.[82] The caste played a determining role in his career. Anshu Malhotra sees the impact on his whole journey whether initially in the sect of Gulabdasis or later on within the Arya Samaj and thereafter the Singh Sabha.[83] Ditt Singh was born on the 21st of April whereas the year of his birth is under contestation among scholars and historians. It has been referred to variously as 1850, 1852 and 1853. Shamsher Singh Ashok considers 1850 as his birth year which is mentioned in his *Shirin Farhad*.[84] Narinder Kapoor suggests 1852[85] and Harbans Singh considers 1853 as his birth year which is considered more authentic by other historians later on.[86]

His father Sant Diwan Singh was a resident of the village Jhallian Kalan (Ropar).[87] He was religious-minded and proficient in the philosophies of Nyaya and Vedanta. He could read and write Gurmukhi and was a very popular saint in his area. As per the prevalent tradition of Ravidasias, an educated saint could perform the rituals of birth, death and marriage.[88] He was a follower of the Gulabdasi sect. The radical, intellectually stimulating and uninhibited lifestyle of the Gulabdasis must have

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81 Pritam Singh, *Panth Rattan Bhai Ditt Singh Giani Rachnawali*, Vol. I, Pritam Singh, Mohali, 2005, pp. 1-3; Gurditt Singh, "Giani Ditt Singh: Jivan Ate Rachna", Dharam Parchar Committee, SGPC, Chandigarh, 2013, pp. 4-13.

82 Giani Amar Singh, *Jiwan Charitter Singh Sabha Lehar de Ughe Sanchalak Giani Ditt Singh Ji*, Gulab Singh Malak Firm, Amritsar, 1962, pp.18-22.

83 Anshu Malhotra, "Living and Defining Caste: The Life and Writing of Giani Ditt Singh/ Sant Ditta Ram", *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1&2, 2013, pp. 159-192.

84 Shamsher Singh Ashok, (ed.), Sant Ditta Ram Urf Giani Ditt Singh, *Shirin Farhad*, Punjab Sahit Academy, Ludhiana, 1963, p.15.

85 Narinder Singh Kapoor, *Giani Ditt Singh: Jiwan te Rachna*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1987, p. 14, Karnail Singh Somal, *Bhai Ditt Singh Giani: Jiwan, Rachna te Shakshiat*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 2018, p.15.

86 Harbans Singh, *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1996, Vol. 1, pp. 589-90; Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharam: Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century Punjab*, Manohar Publication, Delhi, 1989, p. 39.

87 As two brothers of Sant Diwan Singh went to Haridwar and got killed over there in a mutual skirmish of Pandas and one shifted to Bassi Pathanan, he felt lonely in the village and moved to Kalaud: Inderjit Singh, *Giani Ditt Singh: Jeevan, Rachna te Vichardhara*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2009, p. 45.

88 *Ibid.* p.45.

appealed to Diwan Singh who came from the upwardly mobile section of the Chamar community, the Ravidasis, who had taken to weaving, a clean profession, giving up the impurity associated with leather.[89] Ditta Ram was influenced and inclined toward religiosity by his father. His father taught him at his home and then at the age of 8-9 years, he was sent to Sant Gurbaksh Singh, a Gulabdasi in village Tiur, in Ambala district. He learned Gurmukhi, prosody, Niti-Shastra and Vedanta over there.[90] Lala Dayanand of Tiur village taught Ditta Ram Urdu and Persian. When he was sixteen or seventeen years old, he went to Chathianwala, near Lahore, at the centre of Gulab Das. Based on the above information, it is believed that he met Gulab Das. In the Qissa of *Shirin Farhad* which was his first literary piece, Ditta Ram acknowledges Gulab Das as his guru and gives him the utmost respect. In Qissa *Shirin Farhad*, he praises Gulab Das as his guru, dedicating a long invocatory verse to his eminence (Pir Murshid Gulab Das ki Upma). He considers his Guru a liberator of Punjab.

> ਅਵੱਲ ਹਮਦ ਜਨਾਬ ਗੁਲਾਬ ਤਾਈਂ, ਜਿਨਾ ਤਰਾਇਆ ਕੁਲ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਆਹਾ
> ਸਾਰੇ ਜਗ ਦੇ ਵਿਚ ਨਸ਼ਰ ਹੋਏ, ਗੋਯਾ ਹੋਰ ਦੂਜਾ ਆਫ਼ਤਾਬ ਆਹਾ ।
> *Awal hamad janab Gulab tain, jina taraiya kul Punjab aha*
> *Sare jag de vich cha nashar hoye, goya hor duja aftab aha.*[91]

According to Shamsher Singh Ashok, Ditta Ram wrote this Qissa in 1872 and it was his first work, which is preserved in the form of a handwritten manuscript. *Abla Nind* was written in 1876, when he may have begun to be more critical of Gulabdas. Giani Ditta Ram himself wrote and attested to the above information about his religious affiliation, and learning in the controversial booklet 'Sadhu Dayanand Naal Mera Samvad'. He wrote that he was born and brought up in the house of a saint who preached from a young age and he too began to settle disputes.[92] The intellectuality, spiritual proficiency and uninhibitedness appealed to Diwan Singh which deeply influenced and transformed Ditta Ram. As it is noted that the sects like Udasi and Nirmalas were centres of learning, anyone could go there without distinction of caste and creed. The Gulabdasis gave this opportunity to the father and his son who belonged to a so-called lower caste

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89 Anshu Malhotra, "Living and Defining Caste", p. 165.

90 *Ibid.,* p.164.

91 Shamsher Singh Ashok, (ed.), Sant Ditta Ram, *Shirin Farhad*, p. 17.

92 Gurditt Singh, *Giani Ditt Singh*, pp. 43-82.

and provided an intellectual environment to Ditta Ram in the formative earlier years of his character. With his eagerness, Ditta Ram became a proficient scholar. He emerged as a poet, polemicist, journalist, teacher, orator and later on an ardent Sikh missionary who left behind more than 50 books to his credit.[93] According to Bhagat Lashman Singh, an erudite Sikh educationist and reformer, Giani Ditt Singh wielded a powerful pen and was a literary giant.[94]

In qissa *Shirin Farhad* he called himself Ditta Ram' Faqir' (mendicant) who sat on the baradari (raised pavilion) of his satguru (Guru/Master) Gulab Das, while around him friends were engrossed in various activities. Ditta Ram illustrated the atmosphere of the sect of Gulabdasis in the verses of *Shrin Farhad*. He wrote that:

ਕੋਈ ਕੋਸ਼ ਤੇ ਕਾਵਿ ਨੂੰ ਪੜ੍ਹੇ ਬੈਠੇ, ਕੋਈ ਬੈਠ ਰਾਮਾਯਣ ਗਾਨ ਬੇਲੀ ।
ਕੋਈ ਟਿਬ ਤੇ ਬਾਬ ਨੂੰ ਦੇਖਦੇ ਜੇ, ਕੋਈ ਗਾਉਣ ਤੇ ਜ਼ੋਰ ਪਾਉਣ ਬੇਲੀ ।
ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਇਕ ਤੌਹੀਦ ਨੂੰ ਸ਼ੌਕ ਬੇਲੀ, ਬੈਠੇ ਉਲਫ਼ਤਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਸੁਣਾਉਣ ਬੇਲੀ ।
ਕੋਈ ਆਸ਼ਕਾਂ ਦੀ ਗੱਲ ਤੋਰ ਦੇਂਦਾ, ਖੋਲ ਕਿੱਸਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਵਰਕਾਂ ਬੇਲੀ ।[95]

Koi kosh te kavi nun parhan baithe, koi baith Ramayan gan beli.
Koi tib te bab nu dekhde je, koi gaon te jor pan beli.
Parhan ik tauhid nu shauq beli, baithe ulfatan nal sunaun beli.
Koi ashqan di gal tor denda, khol qissyan de varqan beli.

Certain scholars were reading Kosh (research over language), classic poetry and analyzing the Ramayana. He saw the discussions over the books like the *Kitab al-Tibb*[96], a book on medicine and the philosophy of Babism. [97] In *Abla Nind*, Ditt Singh

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93 Raj Kumar Hans, "Sant Poet Wazir Singh: A Window for Reimagining Nineteenth Century Punjab", *Journal of Sikh and Punjab Studies*, 20, 1& 2, 2013, p.137.

94 Raj Kumar Hans, " Dalits and Emancipatory Sikh Religion", A Paper Presented at International Conference on *Dalit Challenges to Academic Knowledge: The Great Paradoxes*, December 3-5, 2008, p.3.

95 Pritam Singh, *Panth Rattan Bhai Ditt Singh Giani Rachnavali*, Vol.1, Mohali, 2005, pp. 1-3

96 In Arabic it is called *al-Qānūn fī al-□ibb* and in Persian called *Qanun-e dâr Tâb*. This book was compiled in 1025 AD by the famous Persian physician-philosopher Ibn Sina. He was famous in the West with the name Avicenna. It presents an overview of the contemporary medical knowledge of the Islamic world, which had been influenced by earlier traditions including Greco-Roman medicine, Persian medicine, Chinese medicine and Indian medicine:

97 Babism also known as the Babi faith is the monotheistic religion which professes that there is one incorporeal, unknown and incomprehensible God who manifests his will in an unending series of theophanies, called manifestation of God.

also mentions this environment within the sect of Gulabdasis.[98] Anshu Malhotra mentions that the Tomb where Gulab Das and Peero lie buried is now in a dilapidated condition and during her visit, she was told by an old man about the earlier existence of a beautiful pond (Sarovar) with a bridge across it, which is now destroyed. [99] However, Ditt Singh's personality was imbibed into monist philosophy and trained in revelling in composing poetry, Punjabi popular literary practices, absorbing Bhakti and Sufi ethos and religious discourses. After the death of Gulab Das, many other centres of this sect came into being. Gian Inder Singh Sewak has given information about these centres located in Ferozepur, Patiala, Ropar, Ambala, Jalandhar, Karnal, Amritsar, Kasur, Pothohar, Sialkot, Sindh and Balochistan.[100]

In 1877 Swami Dayanand Saraswati came to the Punjab province and stayed there for fifteen months from April 1877 to July 1878.[101] The young generation was inspired by the ideas of Arya Samajist like modern education, condemnation of idol worship and stance over caste that the talent and the virtues of a person would determine caste, rather than birth.[102] These concepts attracted and influenced Ditt Singh and his friend Jawahir Singh Kapoor who had served Arya Samaj as a secretary for some years. When Aryas started an attack on Sikh Gurus then Ditt Singh took notice and diverged from Aryas. The final breach came on November 25, 1888, when pandit Guru Datt and Lala Murli Dhar spoke disparagingly about the Sikh Gurus.[103] Consequently, Ditt Singh became a Singh Sabhaite and criticized the activities of Arya Samaj in Punjab. Later, Ditt Singh propagated against idol worship, graves, *pirs* and superstitions. Although, when he was a follower of Gulabdas and followed Vedantic monism, worshipped graves and tombs which was the primary ritual of this sect because a tomb was built on the graves of Gulab Das and Peero at Chathianwala.[104]

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98 Pritam Singh, *Panth Rattan Bhai Ditt Singh Giani Rachnavali*, Vol.1, Mohali, 2005, p. 101.

99 Anshu Malhotra, "Living and Defining Caste", p. 187.

100 Gian Inder Singh Sevak, *Gulabdas Sampardaye: Rachna te Vichar*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1984.p. 115.

101 Kenneth Jones, *Arya Dharam: Hindu Consciousness in 19th- Century Punjab*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1976, pp. 36-37.

102 *Ibid*, p.33.

103 Harbans Singh, *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, p.590.

104 Giani Giani Singh, *Sri Guru Panth Parkash*, Bhasha Vibhag, Patiala, 1970 (Reprint), p. 1293.

ਖ਼ਾਲਸਾ ਅਖ਼ਬਾਰ ਲਾਹੌਰ

ਸਪਤਾਹਕ ਪੱਤ੍ਰ

ਖ਼ਬਰਾਂ

Illustration 4.11 Khalsa Akhbar Lahore
Source: Sikh History and Reference Library, Amritsar

Later on, Ditt Singh chose the Khalsa identity during the second half of the 1880s. That was the period when colonial intervention was visible in the public sphere. Anshu Malhotra has rightly pointed out in this context that it was possible till then, even for a man in the colonial public sphere to belong to and appropriate more than one tradition and this was easier for someone like Ditt Singh who received western education institutions somewhat late in life.[105] W.H. Mcleod argues the same in a manner that the Singh Sabhaites essentially thought in western terms.[106] However, Ditt Singh attained intense knowledge of multiple intellectual cultures and religious traditions and became the spokesman of the Lahore Sabha. Until 1901, before his death, he worked for reforming the Khalsa identity. There is a paucity of literature on the caste question in the Sikh community but it is demonstrated through identity and distinction. Giani Ditt Singh contributed a lot to Punjabi society. He started Punjabi journalism and became the editor of the *Khalsa Akhbar*. Ditt Singh was the product of Gulabdasis and even in the sphere of the Singh Sabha movement, he continued the intellectual legacy of the Gulabdasi sect.

Ditt Singh was very proficient in writing verses. He mostly wrote in Punjabi in Gurmukhi script. Navratan Singh Kapoor argues that Ditt Singh used Braj for philosophical issues and Punjabi for his exhortative worth.[107] His literary works like 'Supan Natak', 'Abla Nind', 'Guru Nanak Prabodh' and 'Mansambodhan' show his proficiency in Persian and Urdu.[108] Ditt Singh's choice of language and genres point to his comfort with the literary and pluralistic cultures of pre-colonial Punjab.[109] However, the politics of the language was started by him. The language was glued to religion and the Punjabi social space of language started to change. The agenda of concretization identities was pushed in the name of reform.

Interestingly, a particularly controversial verse of a young disciple of Gulab Das, Sant Ditta Ram (later Ditt Singh as a Singh Sabha ideologue) perhaps uncovers how his disciple's thought was a reason for the critique of Gulab Das and it takes us

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105 Anshu Malhotra, "Living and Defining Caste", p. 171.

106 W.H. Mcleod, *Sikhs of the Khalsa*: *A History of the Khalsa Rahit*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, p. 159.

107 Narinder Singh Kapoor, *Giani Ditt Singh: Jiwan teRachna*, pp. 131-32.

108 Shamsher Singh Ashok, *Shirin Farhad*, p. 9.

109 Anshu Malhotra, Living and Defining Caste, p. 172.

Illustration 4.12 Giani Ditt Singh
Source: Wikipedia

away from the more specific one- Gulab Das's relationship with Piro. In a set of verses published in 1876 called 'Abla Nind' (women's wiles/humiliation), a genre that warns men of being ensnared by women and the disaster that awaits them, Ditta Ram penned a verse that seems to point an accusing finger at Gulab Das for his relationship with a prostitute.[110] In taking disappearing tones Ditta Ram ridicules an ascetic who succumbs to the charms of a prostitute and destroys the accumulated advantages of the practice of celibacy:

ਰੰਡੀ ਔਰ ਫ਼ਕੀਰ ਕਾ ਸਦਾ ਅਨਾਦੀ ਵੈਰ
ਜਬ ਘਰ ਆਏ ਸਾਧ ਕੇ ਕਹਾਂ ਗੁਜਾਰੇ ਖੈਰ ।
ਕਹਾਂ ਗੁਜਾਰੇ ਖੈਰ, ਤੇਜ ਕੋ ਤੁਰਤ ਮਿਟਾਵੇ
ਕਾਹੂੰ ਨਾ ਹੋਵ ਸਤਕਾਰ ਨਿਰਾਦਰ ਜਹੀ ਤਹੀ ਪਾਵੇ ।
ਕਹੇ ਦਿੱਤ ਹਾਰੀ ਜਗਤ ਮੇਂ ਬਾਜੇ ਪਾਖੰਡੀ
ਰਹੇ ਨਾ ਤਿਸ ਦੀ ਤਬ ਸਾਧ ਹੋ ਰਾਖੇ ਰੰਡੀ ।[111]

Randi aur faqir ka sada anaadi vair
Jab ghar aye sadh ke kahan gujare khair;
Kahan gujare khair, tej ko turat mitave
Kahun na hov satkar niradar jahi tahi pave;
Kahe Ditt hari yar jagat mein baje pakhandi
Rahe na tis di tab sadh ho rakhe randi.

It is important to bear in mind that Ditta Ram would not have been probably in direct contact with Gulab Das, or if so, then only for a short time, as he was born in or after 1850, and came to Chathianwala only towards the end of Gulabdas's time when any controversy around his choices in life seems to have settled down. Also, such a verse would not have been out of place in a text purportedly enumerating women's wiles, for sexuality became a cause for the downfall of men. Nevertheless, the content of the verse is too close to home to not have been some kind of a reference to Gulab Das, perhaps a flaw that the disciple saw in the guru. Or more likely, a flaw he perceived after the death of Gulab Das when Ditta Ram was beginning to be attracted to modern associational politics. K.N. Panikar argues that western knowledge and philosophical notions were fundamental to the development of a critical attitude and cognition of

110 Anshu Malhotra, "Print and Bazaari Literature: Jhagrras /Qissas and Gendered Reform in Early Twentieth-Century Punjab", in Charu Gupta (ed.), *Gendering Colonial India: Reforms, Print, Caste and Communalism*, Orient BlackSwan, Hyderabad, 2012, pp. 159-87.

111 Giani Ditt Singh, *Abla Nind*, pp.102-3.

reality. In this supposition, he discusses two broad streams among Indian intellectuals one nurtured on traditional knowledge and the other on a combination of the western and traditional.[112]

However, some of the other writings produced later by Giani Ditt Singh made him an ideologue for the Singh Sabha movement; spreading the idea of purity in Sikhism as a blend of traditional and western influences. Those who were unable to relate to their own tradition failed to rise to the level of intellectuals who could assume social and political leadership; they could only engage themselves only in the elaboration of middle-class values.[113] Panikar brands socio-religious reform movements to be based on and influenced by Rationalism.[114] He gives the example of Rammohan Roy's 'Tuhfat-Ul-Muwahhidin' of 1803 and subjects the entire religious system-except theistic belief and faith in the soul and the other world to an uncompromising rational critique which marked the beginning.[115] David Kopf feels that the Bengal renaissance was a result of the contact of British officials and missionaries on the one hand and the Hindu intelligentsia on the other hand.[116] The Singh Sabha movement also occupied the same domain. The Singh Sabhaites believed that western education would remove the backwardness of their community but they did not regard such learning as their one-time legacy which was suppressed by foreign domination rather, for them, the golden period was when Singh warlords ruled the Punjab.[117] Consequently, weightier works on Sikh history and philosophy began to appear and Giani Ditt Singh was among the men of letters who enriched Sikh learning through their writings.[118] After a serious illness, Giani Ditt Singh died on September 6, 1901.[119]

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112 K.N. Panikar, *Culture, Ideology and Hegemony*, p. 65.

113 *Ibid*, p.67.

114 *Ibid*, p. 26.

115 *Ibid*, p. 26.

116 David Kopf, *British Orientalism and Bengal Renaissance*, Berkely, 1909, p. 59

117 They believed that after the defeat of warrior kings, the community deteriorated under the sloth of decadent temple functionaries and the malign influence of Hinduism: Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making,* Archives Publishers, New Delhi, 1987, p.125.

118 Harbans Singh, *The Heritage of the Sikhs*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1999 (First Published 1983), pp. 232, 33.

119 Harbans Singh, *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism,* Vol. I, p.590.

Dharam Das Arif

Dharam Das Arif was born in 1866 at Garh Maharaj, district Jhang (Pakistan Punjab). But some scholars like Gurdit Singh Premi and others consider the mid-nineteenth century as his birth in tehsil Sherkot district Jhang.[120] In Qissa Raja Bharthari, Dharam Das Arif himself wrote about his birthplace:

> ਕੀਤਾ ਸ਼ੁਰੂ ਸਿਕੰਦਰਾਬਾਦ ਅੰਦਰ ਮਹਾਰਾਜਗੜ੍ਹ ਆਨ ਮੁਕਾਇਆ ਮੈਂ ।
> ਉੱਨੀ ਸੈਂਕੜੇ ਖਟ ਪਚਾਸ ਸੰਮਤ ਫਗਣ ਮਾਂਹ ਦੇ ਵਿਚ ਪੁਜਾਇਆ ਮੈਂ ।[121]
> *Kita shuru Sikandrabad andar maharajgarh aan muaea main.*
> *Uni sainkde khat pachasi sammat faggan mah de vich pujaea main.*

His father was a Chaudhary of a village named Mahiram Punhani and his mother was Deva Bai.[122] A disciple of Gulab Das named Sant Jasram usually came to Anand Bagh at Garhmaharaj. It was situated on the bank of Jhelum where the centre of Gulabdasis was located. Here he first came into contact with the Gulabdasis. The Father of Dharam Das Arif was a trader. He learned his primary education from a school at Garhmaharaj. He learned Urdu and Persian and later on learnt the Shastras from Guru Das Ram. Das Ram headed the sect of Gulabdasis after Sant Jasram. Dharam Das himself wrote about his early experience and he mentions that on the western side of the city, there was a popular garden, Anand Bagh. At this site, he got enlightenment at the age of nineteen.[123] He further mentions that the "poor fellow Dharam Das was able to get salvation by the grace and blessings of selfless Swami Das Ram". [124] Based on certain inferences from Dharam Das Granth Sangreh', Sulakhan Singh also considers Das Ram as a Guru of Dharam Arif.[125] Later, he resided at Chakwal Station near the city of Sikandrabad, located in the tehsil Suzabad district Multan (Western Pakistan). Dharam

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120 Gurdit Singh Premi, *Damodar*, Publication Burea, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1996, p. 10.

121 Dharam Das Arif, *Qissa Raja Bharthari*, Punjabi Pustak Bhandar, Kashmir Printing Press, Bazar Sodhian, Amritsar, 1919, p. 173.

122 Sant Gulab Das, *Gulab Das Granth Sangreh*, Jagjit Bahadur, Tittu Khera, Sirsa, n.d. p. 10.

123 Dharam Das Arif, *Qissa Raja Bharthari*, Punjabi Pustak Bhandar**,** Delhi-6, Printer Kashmira Singh, Kashmir Printing Press, Bazar Sodhian, Amritsar, 1919, p. 175.

124 *Ibid*, p. 92

125 Dharam Das Arfi, *Dharam Das Granth Sangreh*, Punjabi Pustak Bhandar, Dareeban Kalan, Delhi, N.D. p. 97.

Das Arif died in 1918 (Sammat 1975, 8 Poh). Even in 'Gulab Sagar', this date is inscribed on a photograph. A huge fair is held on this tomb on 23rd Chet in the month of March every year. After the partition of 1947, the nephew of Dharam Das Arif named Bhakat Udo Das settled with his elder son in Delhi. His younger son is a businessman in Bahadurgarh, in the Jhajjar district of Haryana.[126] As we know that Nirmala and Udasis also learnt and were proficient in medicine, Dharam Das Arif was himself a noted Vaid. In *Ganzina –i- Marfat* he talks about knowing of some formulas to cure certain diseases

> ਯਾਦ ਥੇ ਅਕਸੀਰ ਨੁਸਖੇ ਜੋ ਤੀਰਿ ਹਦਫ਼ ਮਾਨਿੰਦ ਲੁਕਮਾਨ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵਾ ਧਨੰਤਰ ਵੈਦ ਗਾਨ I [127]
>
> *Yaad the aqseer Nuskhe jo teer hadaf manind lukmaan sahib wa dhanantar vaid gaan.*

Dharam was a prolific writer and had a nuanced understanding of various writings Bhagat Des Raj who was a disciple of Dharam Das Arif devoted so many verses to his guru. He depicted the proficiency of his guru in various languages in his writings. He wrote that:

> ਫਾਜ਼ਿਲ ਆਲਿਮ ਫ਼ਾਰਸੀ ਮੇਂ ਥੇ ਬਤੌਰ ਸਰੂਫ ਨਹਿਵ, ਸ਼ੇਖ ਸਾਅਦੀ ਕੀ ਸਮਝਤੇ ਥੇ ਗੁਲਿਸਤਾਂ ਬੋਸਤਾਂ।
>
> ਮੀਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੋ ਕਿ ਗਾਲਬ ਜੋ ਹੂਏ ਮੁਲਕ ਉਲ ਸੇਅਰਾਂ ਉਨ ਸੇ ਭੀ ਬਰਤਰ ਸਮਝਲੇ ਇਨਕਾ ਉਰਦੂ ਦੀਵਾਂ।
>
> ਚੰਦ ਕਿਤਾਬੇਂ ਸ਼ੇਅਰ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਮੇਂ ਦਿਲਕਸ਼ ਹੈ ਕਹੀਂ, ਜੋ ਹੂਏ ਹੈ ਸ਼ਾਹ ਵਾਰਸ ਫ਼ਜ਼ਲ ਸ਼ਾਹ ਸ਼ਾਇਅਰ ਜਮਾਂ। [128]
>
> *Fazil Alim farsi mein the btaur saroof nehav, shekh saadi ki samjhte the Gulistan Bostan.*
> *Mir sahib jo ke Galib jo huye mulak ul searan un se bhi bartr samjh le inka Urdu Deevan.*
> *Chand kitaben shear Punjabi mein dilkash hai kahin,*
> *Jo huye hai shah Waris fazal shah Shayar Zama.*

Dharma Das produced vast and diverse literature. Kashmir Singh considers his 28 writings related to religious and secular nature. He wrote many Qissas. In the Qissa

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126 Kashmir Singh, *Dharam Das Arif DianRachnawan da DarshnikVishleshan*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2006, p. 35.

127 Dilbag Rai Dilbar (ed.), *Ganzina-i- Marfat,* Sharafat Printing Press, Chah Shiri Rampur, Haldwani (Reprint), 1982, p.9.

128 *Ibid*, p. 9.

genre, he claimed and praised Gulab Das as his Guru and acclaimed him as a true lover of God. He wrote that:

ਗੁਰੂ ਦਾਸ ਗੁਲਾਬ ਯਾਦ ਆਇਆ ਇਕ ਬੋਲ ਮੇਰੇ ਵਿਚ ਖ਼ਯਾਲ ਦੇ ਜੀ ।
ਗੁਰੂ ਬਹੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਰ ਦੇ ਕਹੇ ਉਨਾਂ ਵਾਂਗ ਸ਼ੇਰ ਬਗਯਾੜ ਅਯਾਲ ਦੇ ਜੀ ।[129]
Guru Das Gulab yaad aea ik bol mere vich khyal de ji.
Guru bahur parkar de kheohna wang sherbgyarayal de ji.

Dharma Das remained Brahmachari his whole life. Gulabdasis have focused much on the importance of the Guru. Dharamdas in his literature considered the Guru as the navigator who enlightened the path. In many verses he wrote:

ਮੁਰਸ਼ਿਦ ਨਜ਼ਰ ਇਨਾਇਤ ਕੀਤੀ ਦਿਤੁਸ ਅਜਬ ਪਯਾਲਾ ।
ਪੀਵਨ ਸਾਰ ਗਈ ਉਠ ਦੂਈ ਸਾਫ਼, ਹੋਯਾ ਨੂਰ ਉਜਾਲਾ ।
ਧਰਮਦਾਸ ਸਭ ਗਯੇ ਅੰਦੇਸ਼ੇ ਟੂਟਾ ਕੁਫ਼ਰ ਕਾ ਤਾਲਾ ।
Murshid nazar iniayet keeti ditus azab payala
Piwan saar gaee uth due, saaf hoya nor ujala
Dharma Das sabh gaye andeshe tuta kufr ka taala.

He retold the Qissa genre and indigenized the themes and contexts. He crystallized the Qissa writing as a tough task. Like Kishan Singh Arif he wrote many Qissas. He considered Qissa writing as a very daunting task. In this regard he wrote that: -

ਕਿੱਸਾ ਲਿਖਣਾ ਸੱਚ ਦਾ ਮਾਰਗ ਫੜਨਾ,
ਕਿੱਸਾ ਜੋੜਨਾ ਜਿਗਰ ਦਾ ਲਹੂ ਪੀਣਾ ਗ਼ਮ ਸੋਂਠ ਦਾ ਨਿਤ ਵਿਖਾਦ ਹੈ ਜੀ ।
ਰਹੀਏ ਚੁੱਪ ਨ ਗ਼ਮ ਤਕਰਾਰ ਕੋਈ ਅਤੇ ਬੋਲਯਾਂ ਵਾਦ ਵਿਵਾਦ ਹੈ ਜੀ ।
ਰਹਯਾ ਚੁਪ ਗੁੰਚਾ ਕਿਸੇ ਤੋੜਿਆ ਨਾ ਹੋਯਾ, ਬੋਲ ਕੇ ਤੁਰਤ ਬਰਬਾਦ ਹੈ ਜੀ ।
ਵਿਚ ਚੁੱਪ ਦੇ ਫਾਇਦੇ ਬੋਲਣੇ ਥੀਂ ਚਲੀ, ਆਂਵਦੀ ਆਦ ਜੁਗਾਦ ਹੈ ਜੀ ।[130]
Qissa Likhna Sach da Marag Fadna.
Qissa Jodna Jigar da Lahu Peena, Gam sonth da Nit Vikhaadhai ji.
Rehya Chup na Gam Takraar Koi ate Bolyan Vad Vivaad Hai ji.
Vich Chup de fayade Bolne Theen Chali, Anwdi Ad Jugaad Hai ji.

For him the Qissa genre represents the art of telling a truth which is a daunting and difficult task. For Dharam Das, silence has many facades and contexts. The silence is not a permanent state for him but contextual in his Qissas. He clarifies this in his verse that:

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129 Sant Dharam Das Arif, *Qiisa Raja Bharthari,* p. 84.

130 *Ibid,* p.2.

ਬੁਰਾ ਬੋਲਣਾ ਥੀਂ ਚੁੱਪ ਕਹਿਨ ਦਾਨੇ ਭਲਾ ਬੋਲਿਆਂ ਕੌਣ ਅਪਰਾਧ ਹੈ ਜੀ ।
ਜਿਥੇ ਬੋਲਯਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਨੂੰ ਲਾਭ ਹੋਵੇ ਓਥੇ ਚੁੱਪ ਨੂੰ ਜਾਣੀਯੇ ਵਜਾਪ ਹੈ ਜੀ ।
ਬਹੁਤ ਬੋਲਣਾ ਤੇ ਬਹੁਤ ਚੁਪ ਮਾੜੀ ਭਲਾ ਕਾਮ ਸਭ ਨਾਲ ਮਰਯਾਦ ਹੈ ਜੀ ।
ਧਰਮਦਾਸ ਮੈਂ ਕਹਯਾ ਜੇ ਰਹਯਾ ਜੀਂਦਾ ਪੂਰੀ ਆਪ ਦੀ ਹੋਗੁ ਮੁਰਾਦ ਹੈ ਜੀ ।[131]
Bura bolne thein Chup kehan daane bhala bolian kaun apraadh hai ji.
Jithe boliyan kise nu labh howe othe chup nu janiye vyaap hai ji.
Bhut bolan ate bhut chup maadi bhala kaam sabh naal maryad hai ji.
Dharmdas main kahya je rahya jeenda poori aapdi hog muraad hai ji.

Resistance is the essence of religion. He continued that legacy through the context of silence and speaking the truth. In the Qissa genre, he wrote 'Qissa Raja Bharthari', 'Qissa Jalwa-i-Haqiqat' or 'Dastan-i-Mansoor'. However, the root of pluralistic religious tradition can be seen in his verses. He has given references to the Kabir, Mansoor and other Saints. One of his verses is relevant and has multi-layered meanings:

ਲੱਗਾ ਦੇਖਣੇ ਆਪਣਾ ਨੂਰ ਸਾਰੇ, ਦੂਈ ਗ਼ੈਰਤਾਂ ਦੇ ਖਿਆਲ ਗੁੱਲ ਗਏ।
ਮਸਤ ਹਾਥੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਵਾਂਗ ਮਸਤ ਫਿਰਦਾ, ਸੰਗਲ ਬੰਧਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਕੁੱਲ ਖੁੱਲ੍ ਗਏ।[132]
Lagga dekhane apna noor saae, dui gairtan de khayal gull gaye.
Mast hathian de vangh firda, sangal bandhana de kull khul gaye.

In Qissa Jalwa-i- Haqiqat which is famous for the name of Dastan-i-Mansoor. He composed it in Sikandrabad and completed it in Hanslawal district Gujarat (Pakistan Punjab).

ਕੀਤਾ ਸ਼ੁਰੂ ਸਿਕੰਦਰਾਬਾਦ ਵਿਚੇ ਖਤਮ ਹਾਂਸਲੇਵਾਲੇ ਆਏ ਤਿਆਰ ਹੋਇਆ ।
ਜਿਹੜਾ ਜ਼ਿਲਾ ਗੁਜਰਾਤ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਅੰਦਰ ਇਥੇ ਰਹਿਵਨਾ ਕੋਈ ਦਵਾਰ ਹੋਇਆ ।[133]
Keeta shuru Sikanderabaad viche khatam Hansalwale aye tyar hoea.
Jehda zila Gujarat Punjab ander ithe rehwana koi dwaar hoea.

In this Qissa he focused in self realization which is the primary component of the religion. He wrote that:

131 Dharam Das Arif, *Qissa Raja Bharthari*, p. 3.

132 Dharam Das Arif, *Dastan-i-Mansoor*, Bhagat Udo Das, Mool Chand and Dharam Chand, Punjabi Pustak Bhandar, Dariban Kalan, Delhi,1961, p. 29.

133 *Ibid*, *p.* 160.

ਤੇਰੀ ਜਾਤ ਤੇ ਰੱਬ ਦੀ ਜਾਤ ਏਕੋ, ਦਸਾਂ ਦਾਵਾ ਗੁਰਵਾਰ ਦੀਏ ।
ਜੀਵ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਤੇ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਨੂੰ ਜੀਵ ਸਮਝੋ ਸੁਤ੍ਰੀ ਵੇਦ ਦੀ ਭੀ ਇਹ ਵਿਚਾਰ ਦੀਏ ।
ਧਰਮਦਾਸ ਜਦ ਆਪਨੂੰ ਦੇਖ ਲਈਏ ਰਹੇ ਲੋੜ ਨ ਹੋਰ ਦੀਦਾਰ ਦੀਏ ।[134]
Teri jaat te rab di jaat eko, dasan dawa gurwaar di ae.
Jiv braham te braham nu jiv samjho sutra ved di bhi ih vichar di ae.
Dharam das jad aap nu dekh layiye rahe load nah or didaar di ae.

He minimizes the self and set forth the ideas of Braham. Further, he denied the barrier of *shara* which constructed the wall of identities and differences. One of his verses he wrote that:

ਸਾਡਾ ਆਪਣਾ ਬੁੱਤ ਇਹ ਸੱਚਾ ਮੱਕਾ, ਰਹੀ ਲੋਡ ਨਾ ਕੂਕ ਸੁਣਾਵਨੇ ਦੀ ।
ਰੱਬ ਬਾਝ ਨਾ ਦਿੱਸਦੀ ਤਰਫ ਕੋਈ, ਲੈਂਦੇ ਲੋਡ ਨਾ ਸੀਸ ਨਿਵਾਵਨੇ ਦੀ ।
ਮਤਲਬ ਵੇਦ ਕੁਰਾਨ ਦਾ ਲੱਭ ਲਿਆ, ਮਿਟੀ ਤਾਂਘ ਹੈ ਮਗਜ਼ ਖਪਾਵਨੇ ਦੀ ।[135]
Sada apna butt ih sacha makka, rahi load na kook sunawane di.
Rab bajh na disdi tarf koi, lainde load na sees niwawne di.
Matlb Ved Quran da labh lea, miti tangh hai magz khapawne di.

He considers that the concept of Braham eliminates the differences and integrates the communities from different religions and cultures. He has strongly criticized the idea of glorification of own religion. In a verse he contextualizes that:

ਆਪੋ ਆਪਣਾ ਮਜ਼੍ਹਬ ਸਭ ਕਹਿਣ ਚੰਗਾ, ਪਾਣ ਸ਼ੋਰ ਕੂੜੇ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ਹਿੰਦੂ ।
ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ਕੁਰਆਨ ਨੂੰ ਸ਼ਾਨ ਦਿੰਦੇ, ਭਲਾ ਜਾਣ ਦੇ ਵੇਦ ਪੁਰਾਨ ਹਿੰਦੂ ।
ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ਮੱਕੇ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਜਾਣ ਗੰਗਾ, ਤੁਰਕ ਗੋਰ ਏ ਬੁਤ ਮਨਾਨ ਹਿੰਦੂ ।
ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ਤਸਬੀ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਪਾਣ ਮਾਲਾ, ਰੋਜਾ ਕਹਿਣ ਓ ਬਰਤ ਮਨਾਨ ਹਿੰਦੂ ।
ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ਕਹਿੰਦੇ ਜੱਨਤ ਜਾ ਸਾਡੇ, ਸੁਰਗ ਆਪਨੀ ਜਾਹ ਠਹਿਰਾਨ ਹਿੰਦੂ ।
ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ਨਮਾਜ਼ ਨੇ ਬਾਂਗ ਪੜ੍ਹਦੇ, ਪੂਜਾ ਪਾਠ ਨੂੰ ਊਚਾ ਬਤਾਨ ਹਿੰਦੂ ।
ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ਸੁੰਨਤਾਂ ਸਿਖਾ ਸੂਤ ਹਿੰਦੂ, ਤੁਰਕ ਕਹਿਣ ਰਹੀਮ ਭਗਵਾਨ ਹਿੰਦੂ ।
ਧਰਮਦਾਸ ਆਸ਼ਿਕ ਪਰੇ ਸਭ ਕੋਲੋਂ, ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ਤੇ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਹਾਨ ਹਿੰਦੂ ।[136]
Apo apna mazab sabh kehan change, paan shor kure Musalman Hindu.
Musalman Quran nu shan dinde, bhala jande Ved Puran Hindu.
Musalman Make Hindu jan Ganga, Turak gor e but manan Hindu.
Musalman tasbi Hindu paan mala, roza kehan o bart manan Hindu.
Musalman kehnde jannat ja saade, surag apni jah thehraan Hindu.

134 Ibid, pp. 27-28.

135 *Ibid*, p. 39.

136 *Ibid*, p. 42.

Musalman namaz ne bangh padhde, pooja path nu ucha btaan Hindu.
Musalmans unatan sikhaa soot hindu, Turak kehan Raheem bhagwaan Hindu.
Dharamdas ashiq pre sabh kolo, Musalman te nahi kahan Hindu.

Dharamdas was very conscious about righteous deeds which are symbols and components of the religion. In 'QissaDastan-i-Mansoor' he wrote that: -

ਜਿਚਰ ਮੀਆਂ ਜੀ ਅਮਲ ਨਾ ਨੇਕ ਹੋਵਨ,ਵਜੂ ਬਾਂਗ ਨਮਾਜ਼ ਬੇਕਾਰ ਕਾਜ਼ੀ
ਕਰਨ ਹੱਕ ਉਸਤਾਦ ਦਾ ਚਾਹੇ ਇਹ,ਇਹ ਕੀ ਸ਼ਭਾ ਵਿਚ ਨਹੀਂ ਵਿਚਾਰ ਕਾਜ਼ੀ ।
ਸ਼ਰ੍ਹਾ ਜ਼ੁਲਮ ਦੀ ਤਾਂ ਲਈ ਮੰਨ ਤੁਸਾਂ, ਦਿੱਤਾ ਰਹਿਮ ਦੀ ਸ਼ਭਾ ਵਿਸਾਰ ਕਾਜ਼ੀ ।
ਧਰਮਦਾਸ ਚਤਰਾਈਆਂ ਖ਼ਾਕ ਪਈਆਂ, ਬੇੜੇ ਹੋਣ ਸਫਾਈ ਦੇ ਪਾਰ ਕਾਜ਼ੀ ।[137]

Jichar mian ji amal na nek howan, Wajju bangh namaz bekar Qazi.
Karn haq ustaad da chahe ih, Ih ki shabha vich nahi vichar Qazi.
Shara zulam di ta lae man tusan, Ditta reham di shabha visaar Qazi.
Dharamdas chatraean khak paean, Bede hon safayi de paar Qazi.

The above verses are defining religion in a very simplistic way. Dharamdas said that when righteous deeds, raised voices against oppression and mercy do not remain the main course of action then there is no religion at all. He was resonating the words of Guru Nanak who wrote in the Japuji:

ਧੌਲੁ ਧਰਮ ਦਇਆ ਕਾ ਪੂਤੁ।[138]
Dhaul Dharam Daya ka poot.

The mercy is the mother which shall give birth to a son named religion. Here mercy does not mean pity but it denotes the meaning of love. In Diwan-i- Arif, he discusses true knowledge which he called Braham. It is also called *Gazina-i-Marfat*. It has 163 ghazals. This is the compilation of many Ghazals. In this, Dharamdas touches the sub-themes like the praise of his *murshid and* the morality and character of a man in the domain of religion. He defines the concepts of *Vairag*, spiritual love (*IsqheHaqiqi*) and Advaita. Dharamdas chanted the name *Soham* and its importance in life. He wrote:

ਗਿਆ ਅਬ ਖੈਫ਼ ਮਿਟ ਯਮ ਕਾ, ਰਹਾ ਨਾ ਬੀਚ ਦੁਖ ਗ਼ਮ ਕਾ,
ਲਿਖਾਇਆ ਭੇਦ ਦਮ ਦਮ ਕਾ, ਸਦਾ ਸੋਹੰ ਗਹੀ ਗਾਇਆ ਹੈ। [139]

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137 *Ibid*, pp. 119-20.

138 *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 13.

139 Dharam Das Arif, *Ganzina-i-Marfat,* Sharafat Printing Press, Meetha Kua, Tampur, UP, 1982, p. 30

Gya ab khauf mit yam ka, raha na beech dukh gam ka,
Likhaea bhed dum dum ka, sada sohang ehi gaea hai.

In 'Vigyan Chaman', he used different metres and genres like *Baramah*. He produced 'Prem Baramah', 'Vairag Baramah' and 'Vagyan Baramah'. He retold and adopted different themes and contexts in this literary genre.'Anand Sarovar' is another important work. It comprises the theme of Vedantic tradition. In Anand Sarowar, he minutely discusses the concept of Braham:

ਏਕ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਸਤ ਚਿਤ ਅਨੰਦ ਸਰੂਪ ਅਜਯ ਅਚਲ ਅਖੰਡ ਅਭੇਦ ਸੁੰਨ ਨਿਰਾਧਰ ਹੈ।
ਕਹੀ ਭੂਮ ਆਗ ਨੀਰ ਵਾਯੂ ਨਭ ਸੂਰ ਸਸਿ ਪੁਰਖ ਪ੍ਰਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਨਿਰਾਕਾਰ ਔ ਸਕਾਰ ਹੈ।[140]
Ek Braham sat chit anand saroop ajay achal akhand abhed sunn niradhar hai.
Kahi bhoom aag neer wayu nab soor sas purakh parkrit nirakaar au sakar hai.

The North Indian religious tradition comprises the *sargun* and *nirgun* forms of worship. But Sant Dharam Das Arif as a disciple of Gulabdasis argued that these two currents are parts of Braham. Dharam Das has a couplet which refers that to:

ਥਾਵਰ ਜੰਗਮ ਸੁਕਸ਼ਮ ਥੂਲ,
ਨਿਰਗੁਣ ਸਰਗੁਣ ਏਕੋ ਮੂਲ।[141]
Thawar Jangam Suksham thool,
Nirgun Sargun Eko mool.

Dharam Das remained Brahamchari in his whole life. He narrated the concept of Brahamchariya in his verse, reads:

ਬ੍ਰਹਮਚਾਰੀ ਜੋ ਜਾਣੀਏ ਵਿਦਿਆ ਸੋ ਜਿਸ ਪਿਆਰ ।
ਇਸ ਬਿਨ ਬਰਸ ਪਚੀਸ ਲਗ ਕਰੇ ਨਾ ਆਨ ਵਿਹਾਰ ।
ਧਰਮਦਾਸ ਹੈ ਜਿਸੇ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਕਿ ਚਰਚਾ ਪਿਆਰੀ ।
ਅਮ ਚਰਚਾ ਦੁਖ ਰੂਪ ਲਖੇ ਜੋ ਸੋ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਚਾਰੀ। [142]
Brahamchari jo janiye vidiya so jis pyar.
Is bin bars pachees lg kre na aan vihaar.
Dharmadas hai jise braham ki charcha pyari
Am charcha dukh roop lakhe jo so brahamchari.

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140 Dharam Das Arif, *Anand Sarowar*, Gurbakhsh Press, Lahore, 1919, p. 1.

141 Dharam Das Arif, *Gyan Painteesi*, Bomby Maiseen Press, Lahore, N.D., p. 17.

142 Sant Dharamdas, *Dharamdas Granth Sangreh*, Punjabi Pustak Bhandar, Dareeban Kalan, Delhi, N.D., p. 160.

A man who is keenly interested to attain knowledge of Braham is the true brahmachari. However, in comparison, he distinguishes the nature of a householder. In his verse he wrote:

ਗ੍ਰੇਹੀ ਤਿਸ ਕੋ ਭਾਖੀਏ ਗ੍ਰਹਿ ਮੇਂ ਜਿਸ ਕੀ ਪ੍ਰੀਤ ।
ਭਾਵੇ ਉਪਰ ਭੇਖ ਧਰ ਬਨਿਓ ਫਿਰੇ ਅਤੀਤ ।
ਧਰਮਦਾਸ ਜੋ ਲਖੇ ਆਪ ਕੋ ਹੋ ਯਹ ਦੇਹੀ ।
ਵਰਨ ਜਾਤ ਮੇਂ ਬੰਧ ਜਾਣੀਏ ਸਚਾ ਗ੍ਰੇਹੀ ।[143]

Grehi tis ko bhakhiye greh main jis ki preet.
Bhawe uppar bhekh dhar bnio fire ateet.
Dharamdas jo lakhe aap ko ho yeh dehi.
Varan jaat mein bandh janiye sacha grehi.

Dharmadas argues that an ascetic remains free from the hierarchy of varna and *jati*. The householder performed all these and feel struck by this structure. However, theoretically, Dharamdas wrote in his verse that the path of asceticism is the path of self-realization and true knowledge. On this path ascetics become enlightened. It is reflected in the verse given below:

ਵੈਰ ਨ ਕਾਹੂੰ ਸੇ ਕਰੇਨ ਕਾਹੂੰ ਸੇ ਰਾਗ ।
ਧਰਮਦਾਸ ਸੋ ਲਖੇ ਸਾਖ ਬਨਵਾਸੀ ਮਨ ਮੇਂ ।
ਕਰੇ ਖੋਜ ਜੋ ਸ਼ੇਰ ਆਪਣੇ ਤਨ ਕੇ ਬਨ ਮੇਂ ।[144]

Vair na kahun se kre na kahun se raag.
Dharamdas so lakhe saakh banwasi man mein.
Kre khoj jo sher apne tan ke ban mein.

Dharamdas was strongly against the idol worship. In his couplet, reads:

ਦੇਖਾਂ ਜਗਤ ਲੂਟੇਂਦੇ ਅੰਧੇ ਬੁਤਾਂ ਸੀਸ ਭੁਲਾਵਾਂ ਮੈਂ ।
ਧਰਮਦਾਸ ਕੋਈ ਸੁਣੇ ਨਾ ਭਾਵੇਂ ਅਪਨਾ ਫਰਜ ਬਜਾਵਾਂ ਮੈਂ ।[145]

Dekhan jagat lootende andhe buttan sees bhulawan main.
Dharamdas koi sune na bhawen apna farj bajawan main.

He aggressively criticized and called them fools who are performing idol worship. One of his verses reads:

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143 Sant Dharamdas, *Sant Bilas*, Bombay Massin Press, Lahore, 1928, p. 7.

144 *Ibid*, p. 9.

145 Dharamdas Arif, *Vichar Darpan*, Bombay Maissin Press, Lahore, 1929, p. 11.

ਵੋਹੀ ਮੂਰਖ ਹੈ ਜੜ੍ਹ ਕਾ ਜੜ੍ਹ, ਜੜ੍ਹ ਕੋ ਪੂਜਤ ਜੋਈ ਹੈ ।[146]
Wohi moorakh hai jarh ka jarh, Jarh ko poojat joi hai.

He seems to be avoiding popular culture and popular religious practices. He refused to go to the tomb and criticized ancestral worship (*Jathere*). In 'Anand Sarowar', he mentions it in his verses:

ਮਨਮਤ ਮੂਰਖਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਆਵਤ ਨ ਮਤ ਸੋਚ ਪੱਥਰਾਂ ਤੇ ਕਬਰਾਂ ਦੇ ਨਾਲ ਸੀਸ ਮਾਰਦੇ ।
ਮੋਯਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਪ੍ਰੀਤ ਅਤੇ ਜੀਂਦਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਸੰਗ ਵੈਰ
ਆਵਤ ਨਾ ਹਾਥ ਕਛੁ ਵਯਰਥ ਸੋਧ ਹਾਰਦੇ ।[147]
Manmat moorkhan nu awat na mat soch pathran te kabran de naal sees maarde.
Moyan naal preet ate jeondiyan de sang vair
Awat na haath kachu vayarth sodh harde.

Interestingly, Dharamdasuses the framework of Guru Granth Sahib to distinguish the *manmat*. A person who does not follow the given path by Guru Granth is the *manmat*. In some verses he wrote:

ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕਾ ਹੁਕਮ ਨ ਮਾਨ ਨ ਮਾਥੇ ਕੂੜੁ ਰਗੜਤੇ ਹੈ ।[148]
Granth sahib ka hukam na man na maathe koorh ragarte hai.

Gulabdasis also responded to the conversion being carried on by the Christian missionaries. American Presbyterian Mission was established in Ludhiana[149] in 1835 and extended its activities from Malwa to the Majha region after the annexation which was soon followed by the establishment of various missionary societies vying with each other for the purpose of converts which was further supported by the British officials in the Punjab.[150] Dharamdas Arif was very much aware of the missionary work of the

146 *Ibid*, p.7.

147 Dharamdas Arif, *Anand Sarowar*, p. 110.

148 Dharamdas Arif, *Vichar Darpan*, p. 19.

149 The factors for the choice of this area as the 'best field of labour' were the numerous and hardy population, a better climate than the lower province, ready access to lower ranges of the Himalayas in case of the failure of health and the Sikh population to whom attention was specially directed: Harbans Singh, *The Heritage of the Sikhs*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1999, p.206.

150 Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs, Vol. II,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017 (First Published in 1963), p. 137. The number of Christian converts increased from 3796 in 1881 to 4,14, 788: *Ibid,* p. 137.

Christians. He was not happy with their method to spread Christianity. The missionaries glorified their prophet, and religion and demeaned the other religion and traditions. But Dharamdas raised a question over their preaching and placed 'Truth' above these follies. In the verse below he wrote:

ਹਮ ਤੋਂ ਹੈਂ ਮੋਮਿਨ ਹਮ ਕੀ ਬਖਾਨ ਕਰੇਂ ਭਾਖਤ ਈਸਾਈ
ਹਮ ਗਾਡ ਕੇ ਪਯਾਰੇ ਹੈਂ।
ਔਰ ਸਭ ਕਾ ਫ਼ਿਰ ਹੈਂ ਦੋਜ਼ਖ ਨਾ ਪਾਕ ਮਤ ਜਿਤਨੇਂ
ਬਹਿਸ਼ਤ ਸੋਈ ਵਾਸ ਤੇ ਹਮਾਰੇ ਹੈਂ।
ਦੇਖੋ ਅੰਧ ਧੁੰਧ ਨਿਜ ਮਤ ਕੇ ਵਧਾਨ ਹੇਤ
ਆਪਸ ਮੇਂ ਬੈਠ ਯੇਹ ਬਤਾਕ ਕੂੜ ਮਾਰੇ ਹੈਂ।
ਧਰਮਦਾਸ ਦੋਜ਼ਖ ਬਹਿਸ਼ਤ ਆਗੇ ਕੂੜ ਸਭ
ਸਤ ਕੋ ਵਿਸਾਰ ਕੂੜ ਮਾਹਿੰ ਪਚ ਹਾਰੇ ਹੈਂ।[151]

Hum ton hain momin hum ki bkhaan Karen bhakhat isayi
Hum God ko pyare hain.
Aur sabh kafir hain dozakh napak mt jitney
Baihisht soi waste hamare hai.
Dekho andh dhundh nij mat ke vdhan het
Apas mein baith yeh btaak koorh mare hain.
Dharamdas dozakh baihisht aage koorh sabh
Sat ko visaar koorh mahien pach hare hain.

The Gulabdasis continued the tradition to criticize caste-based discrimination in the society. Dharamdas Arif also strongly refuted the caste hierarchy. In 'Ganzina-i-Marfat' he wrote:

ਜਾਹਲੋਂ ਕੇ ਖਿਆਲ ਮੇਂ ਯੇ ਔਰ ਹੈ ਮੈਂ ਔਰ ਹੂੰ
ਜਾਨਤਾ ਹੈ ਜ਼ਾਤ ਵਾਹਦ ਜੋ ਕਿ ਮਰਦ ਫਹੀਮ ਹੈ।
ਜ਼ਾਤ ਕੀ ਰੂ ਸੇ ਕਿਸੀ ਮੇਂ ਹੈ ਕਮੀ ਬੇਸ਼ੀ ਨਹੀਂ
ਕੌਨ ਊਂਚਾ ਕੌਨ ਨੀਚਾ ਕੌਨ ਸ਼ਾਹ ਯਤੀਮ ਹੈ।[152]

Jahlon ke khayal mein ye aur hai main aur hoon.
Janta hai zat wahad jo ke mard Faheem hai.
Zat ki ru se kisi mein hai kami beshi nahi
Kaun uncha kaun neecha kaun shah yateem hai.

151 Dharamdas Arif, *Anand Sarowar*, pp. 17-18.

152 Dharamdas Arif, *Ganzina-i-Marfat*, p. 177.

He considered priestly class responsible for this inequality. In Qissa Raja Bharthari he wrote:

ਮਾਲਾ ਹੱਥ ਲੈ ਕੇ ਮੱਥੇ ਤਿਲਕ ਲਾਯਾ ਦਿਲੋਂ ਰੱਖਦੇ ਹਾਲ ਕਸਾਈਆਂ ਦਾ ।
ਮਨ ਭਾਂਵਦੇ ਵਰਨ ਬਣਾ ਬੈਠੇ ਬੇਦ ਕਹਿਆ ਸੀ ਵਰਨ ਕਮਾਈਆਂ ਦਾ ।[153]
Mala hath laike mathe tilak laya dilon rakhde haal kasayian da,
Man bhanwde varan bana baithe bed kahiya si varan kamayian da.

Dharamdas Arif was very much aware of the nature of the state, power and rule. He was strongly against the oppression of the state and defended the rights of the people. This was the period of the Britishruler in the Punjab which was marked by colonial oppression. Through the context of Qissa Raja Bharthari he wrote that:

ਪ੍ਰਜਾ ਆਪਣੀ ਨੂੰ ਜਾਣੋ ਜਾਨ ਵਾਂਗੂੰ ਮਤਾਂ ਦੇਵਣਾ ਕਦੀ ਵਿਖਾਦ ਰਾਜਾ ।
ਕਿਸੇ ਮਜ਼ਹਬ ਦੀ ਮੂਲ ਨ ਪਾਸ ਕਰਨੀ ਕਰਨਾ ਸੋਚ ਕੇ ਠੀਕ ਹੀ ਦਾਦ ਰਾਜਾ ।
ਬੂਹਾ ਜੁਲਮ ਦਾ ਰੱਖਣਾ ਬੰਦ ਹਰ ਦਮ ਰਖੋ ਅਦਲ ਦਾ ਦ੍ਵਾਰ ਕੁਸ਼ਾਦ ਰਾਜਾ ।[154]
Parja apni nu jano jaan wango mtan dewna kadi vikhaad raja.
Sukhi log tan such hairajiyan nu na tan kujh nahi such swad raja.
Kise majhab di mool na paas karni karna sochke theek hi daad raja.
Buha zulam da rakhna band hardum rakho adal da dwar kushad raja.

Dharamdas Arif also gave message of the universal brotherhood to live in the society. According to him, a person who always thinks for other is the true follower of religion. In Sant Bilas he mentioned:

ਸਭ ਸੇ ਕੀਜੇ ਦੋਸਤੀ ਵੈਰ ਨ ਕਰੀਏ ਮੀਤ।ਹਰ ਹਰਿ ਕਹੋ ਕਿਨਾ ਕਹੋ ਹਰ ਸੇ ਰਾਖੇ ਪ੍ਰੀਤ ।
ਹਰ ਸੇ ਰਾਖੇ ਪ੍ਰੀਤ ਜਾਨ ਕਰ ਮੂਰਤ ਹਰ ਕੀ।ਪੀੜ ਆਪਣੀ ਜਾਨ ਪੀੜ ਜੋ ਹੋਵੇ ਪਰ ਕੀ ।
ਧਰਮਦਾਸ ਮਤ ਕਰੋ ਕਿਸੀ ਕੀ ਬਦੀ ਸੁਢ ਬਸੇ।ਨਦੀ ਨਾਂਵ ਸੰਜੋਗ ਰਹੋ ਰਲ ਮਿਲ ਕੇ ਸਬ ਸੇ ।[155]
Sab se kije dosti vair na kriye meet. Har hari kaho kena kaho har se rakho preet.
Har se rakho preet jan kar mooat hr ki. Peerh apni jan peerh jo howe par ki.
Dharamdas mat karo kisi ki badi Sudha bse. Nadi naav sanjog raho ral mil ke sab se.

153 Dharamdas Arif, *Qissa Raja Bharthari*, pp. 135-36.

154 *Ibid*, pp. 144-45.

155 Dharam Das Arfi, *Sant Bilas*, pp. 3-4.

Kishan Singh Arif, Giani Ditt Singh and Dharam Das Arif have fascinating similarities even though they lived in different times. Three were the disciples of Gulabdasis. At an early age, they become mendicants and came to be known as sadhus, Sant and Brahmgyani. They attained huge knowledge, and wisdom through meditation and vast readings as also from conversations with others. They transcended the narrow sectarian thoughts beyond the orthodoxy and homogeneity of a particular religion. The Arif poets of the Gulabdasi sect had a deep knowledge of Sanskrit and Persian sources. The Nirmalas Udasis used to give treatises on Vedantic Sanskrit sources but Gulabdasis were well aware of both Sanskrit and Persian literary traditions.[156]

Poetry and contemplation were the common features of these poets which are the synonyms of religious and secular integration. These integrated currents took them to the stage of Brahmgyani. These poets emphasized moral and ethical ideas though Kishan Singh Arif had been more liberal. Their devotion did not shrink till morality. They challenged caste and class-based discrimination in society and dissented against the forces behind this inequality. They retained their status of individual spirituality without becoming part of any of the numerous sects in currency. Their spiritual knowledge and poetic talent integrated their personality with early saints like Kabir or Ravidas.

In the early days, Ditt Singh established a small establishment where his disciples came to seek his blessings and the same was the case with Kishan Singh Arif and Dharam Das Arif. These fine poets and noted saints of the times attained vast popularity through their powerful poetry. The Kishan Singh Arif and Dharam Das Arif both travelled far away and attained practical knowledge of lands and people. Though Dharam Das and Kishan Singh remained unmarried and settled in a different place than their birthplace, Ditt Singh settled down in his native village as a complete family man. The given inspection of their life and poetry shows that they came from the same sect and theological understanding. The north Indian religious tradition was made the basis for their understanding of society and religion. Even after joining as reformists, these three poets were contradictory at one stage and complementary and supplementary to each other. Their roots of religious tradition in which they trained and strengthened their pen against regressive and oppressive forces. Rejected by Sikh Sampardayas and

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156 Sukhdev Singh, *Punjabi Kavita: Drish te Drishti,* p.34.

elite society, the Gulabdasi Arifs acknowledged the creative power of similar marginal groups like Shudras and women.[157]

These poets were strong votaries of humanism. They believed in monotheism, stressed strong faith in god and accepted the sovereignty of the *Brahm* but rejected orthodoxy and ritualism.[158] On the one side, religious exclusivism was becoming the order of the day but on the other side, these poets opposed religious fundamentalism by all force (of course creative power) at their disposal and challenged the narrow sectarian approaches. They opposed British colonialism as well as dealt with the prevalent social evils of contemporary times. They were more vocal in their poetry and boldly rejected the dominant hierarchical social order, caste discrimination and propagated religious pluralism. However, Giani Ditt Singh became a Sikh ideologue later on and became one of the pioneers to concretize the Sikh identity. Though he faced caste discrimination there too within the organizational structure of the Singh Sabha.

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157 Sukhdev Singh, *Punjavi Kavita: Drish te Drishti*, p.34.

158 Pardeep Singh, *Punjabi Arif Kaav: Sidhantik Te Itihasik Sandarbh*, p. 71.

CHAPTER-V

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE SECT AND ITS CHANGING CONTOURS

Institutionalization, as defined by Fanindam Deo, denotes a course of action by which norms and rules are made working and undeviating amongst a set of followers who, in their turn, make the transgression of these norms punishable.[1] The Gulabdasi shrines and the priests who offer ritual services there would not be considered institutions just by virtue of their presence or by the services rendered every day. Institutionalization has to be seen in the meanings and expectations generated in the process of elaborating ritual services and how these get reinforced by those who share, assist, look after and guide these services.[2]

In this context, Joseph T. O'Connell argues that in a different way Institutionalization is not a once-for-all matter (of simply getting from a first charismatic generation to a second institutionalized generation da movement), but an ongoing process, subject to changing historical circumstances that are ever in tension with the received 'value orientation' da movement or community. It is also clear that, in the process of institutionalization, explicitly religious motivation and meaning are inextricably bound up with mundane constraints and interests.[3] The aim of this chapter is to analyse how socio-cultural ideas and values affected the formation of and became embedded in the organizational structures of Gulabadasis.

There are many dimensions in the journey of the Gulabdasi sect; one that had an uncertain beginning in the mid-nineteenth century passed through a phase of institutionalization in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and took new shape in the twentieth century in which ideas and institutions were passed from one generation to another and got transformed in the process. The sect of Gulab Das was initiated by Guru Gulab Das, a charismatic personality, in the mid-nineteenth century. It was

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1 Fanindam Deo, "*Institutionalization of Mahima Samaja*" in Ishita Banerjee Dube, Johannes Beltz (ed.), *Popular Religion and Ascetic Practices New Studies on Mahima Dharam*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 173-74.

2 *Ibid*, p. 174.

3 J.T. O'Connell, *Organisational and Institutional Aspects of Indian Religious Movements*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2003, p. 9.

consolidated by other followers like Piro, Gurmukh Singh, Jawahar Singh, Diita Ram, Dharam Das Arif and Kishan Singh Arif. After the death of Gulab Das, there was a crisis. The leading disciples of the faith were not certain of how to ensure the continuity of the teachings and the popularity of its founder who had not recognized the institution of guru parampara (lineage of masters) and therefore not nominated a successor.

There was also neither an elite core group nor a coherent community of followers of the religion. Hence, it was decided to construct a *samadhi* (memorial) for the founder-a concrete structure that would symbolize his authority-and other dwelling places and places of worship. In other words, in the process of institutionalization, the first step was to identify the sacred topography, and the dwelling places of the founder and the second was to have control over these places.[4] In the next phase, the need was to formulate a mode of worship, rituals and festivals according to the local calendar. This gave rise to the framing of rules for daily.[5] monthly and yearly rituals and the rules concerning the lifestyle of priests and *bhaktas* (devotees). These were crucial modes of institutionalization in the case of Gulabdasis.

Complementary to institutionalization was the composition and compilation of devotional lyrics of prayer like dohas, Ragas and other devotional literature in praise of the Creator. These lyrical compositions have over time come to acquire the place of sacred literature, almost equivalent to the sacred scripture of Gulabdasis. The dissemination of the main tenets of Gulabdasis amongst literate and illiterate *bhaktas* was made possible through these devotional songs. Here it may be recalled that in nineteenth-century Punjab, oral tradition was very strong. Collective singing and recitation of the verses were a powerful mode of emphasizing the values advocated by the new faith upon its followers. In the process, the commitment of the *bhaktas* to the faith was ensured. Thus, it was a useful means that reiterated and perpetrated the crucial duties of the followers and institutionalized them over the course of time.

After the death of Gulab Das, the sect has undergone many changes in terms of its disciples, theological understandings, rituals and structure. The teachings of Gulab Das and the literary production of his devotees have given expression to its

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4 J. T. O'Connell, *Organisational and Institutional Aspects of Indian Religious Movements*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2003, p. 9.

5 *Ibid*, p. 9.

transformation. There were not so many changes in Gulab Das Theology and practice under the regime of Ranjit Singh. Anshu Malhotra does not see any changes even in the later colonial period. However, the disciples like Kishan Arif and Dharam Das Arif's literature have transformed theological concepts. Ditta Ram alias Giani Ditt Singh is the major example who shifted the theological paradigm of the Gulabdasis. However, his divergent character from Gulabdasi saint to the ideologue of Singh Sabha reformists enacted structural changes in the sect.

Later on, the partition of Punjab (1947) further transformed the sect. In this chapter, an attempt is made to explore the changing contours of this sect and also study branches and their location after and before the partition. This chapter also examines the theological changes related to caste, gender and spiritual inheritance during the period. There is an attempt to focus on how the sect is being run in contemporary times. This whole chapter is based on fieldwork, observation and formal and informal conversations with the followers and heads of the various centres of the Gulabdasis sect located in village Rataul district Tarn Taran Punjab and village Rajoke in district Tarn Taran, Hansi, Titu Khera[6] Haryana. I have consistently visited these centres from 2016 to 2021.

The various branches of Gulabdasis had to be shifted from Sindh and West Punjab after the partition in 1947. This caused the loss of the old Gulabdasi establishment in Chathianwala where Gulab Das's foremost disciple Piro has also been buried there. This village was founded by a Jat tribe apparently confined to Gujranwala in which district they hold 81 villages. They claim to be descended from Chatta, a grandson of Prithi Rai, the Chauhan king of Delhi, and brother of the ancestor of the Chima. In the 10th generation from Chatta or, as otherwise stated some 500 years ago, Dahru came from Sambhal in Moradabad, where the bards of the Karnal Chauhans still live, to the banks of the Chenab, and married among the Jat tribes of Gujranwala. They

[6] This is located in Sirsa tehsil of Sirsa district in Haryana. It is situated 10km away from Sirsa. Khera worship is a part of popular religion and connected with the rabi and kharif harvests and likewise the first milk of a cow or buffalo is offered to a deity. The bridegroom before proceeding to the bride's house again after marriage along with his bride; worship Khera and seek blessings for happy married life. When a woman is blessed with a son, she lights lamps in the shrine. Khera is also a surname of Jats in Haryana and Punjab.

Illustration 5.1Tomb of Gulab Das and Mata Piro at Chathinwala Kasur Pakistan Punjab
Source: Haroon Khalid

converted to Islam about 1000 A.D. They rose to considerable political importance under the Sikhs.[7]

It led to socio-cultural and psychological changes in society. In this respect, Anshu Malhotra comments that after partition the country was partly mitigated by spawning new discourses, practices and memories.[8] The partition changed the public memory; transformed myths, and fables about the sacred spaces too. Moreover, the partition transformed the places in a metaphysical sense too as people were uprooted from the places where they had been born and nurtured, the places now existed in memories, came to be embedded in the consciousness of the uprooted people, shaped their subsequent lives and thus, places must merit attention in reappraisals of partition and its aftermath.[9] Anna Bigelow describes the power and importance of these memories. She mentions that mobilization of the memories of the past gave a community its identity allowing old values and truths to metamorphose into shapes that are appropriate in new contexts.[10] Then obviously changing discourse changed the contexts of the memory and perception of society towards a particular community. After the partition, the branches located in Sindh and West Punjab were transferred to North India. These branches are now located in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. One of the important branches is established in Haryana. Sant Vijender Das is the head of this centre. It is a delicate task of propagating the past and a community's sense of itself, in new ways suitable to a changed context, creating new memories that build on older ones in what Vijender sets out to perform.[11] Vijender Das has invented and relocated sites which are related to Gulab Das.

Gulab Das established the centre at Chathianwala, district Kasoor now in Pakistan Punjab as the centre of intellectual and literary activities. There was a

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7 Denzil Ibetson, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province,* Vol. II, Lahore, 1911, p. 154, also see Lepel, H. Griffin, *The Punjab Chiefs Historical and Biographical notices of the Principal Families in the territories under the Panjab Government,* Lahore T.C. Mc Carthy, 1865, p. 402 ff.

8 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 283.

9 Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*, Routledge, London, 2000, p.24.

10 Anna Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred: Practicing Pluralism in Muslim North India*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, pp.36-7.

11 Anshu Malhotra, *The Piro and the Gulabdasis*, p. 289.

Illustration 5.2 The Well where Gulab Das fell in his childhood.
Source: Author

Illustration 5.3 Devotees Gathered on the Birth Anniversary of Gulab Das at Well in the Village Rataul
Source: Author

magnificent building with huge domes and arches. It had a beautiful pond, garden and pavilions. It is the same place where Gulab Das and Piro were buried. A tomb was constructed over there which had the features of Indo-Muslim architecture. The major festival celebrated during the lifetime of Gulab Das was Holi. It is celebrated in the month of Phagun (March) in the main establishment, Dera Chathinawala, district Kasur now in Pakistan (Lehnda Punjab). [12] However, after the partition of 1947, Gulabdasis lost this centre. During the visit to village Rajoke[13], in an informal conversation, I was informed by an aged devotee of Gulab Das about the demolition of the tombs of Gulab Das and Piro. He was inconsolable about this and said that some years ago we could see the *gumbad* (dome) of our *murshid* Gulab Das's tomb from the roof of Gurudwara but now due to the growth of so many trees and the construction of new houses they cannot see the tomb.[14] In contemporary times, the state government of West Punjab has cleared ruins and constructed a Girl's Government School at Chathianwala. The noted Pakistani Punjabi poet Nain Sukh criticised this act and said that their government should at least name this girl's school after the name of the great saint poetess Piro.[15] Piro and Gulab Das have contributed a lot in the domain of literature and society. Thus, their space deserves a memory of them.

The fieldwork was conducted at village Rataul[16] which is the birthplace of Gulab Das. Now, this is the primary centre for the devotees of Gulabdasis. The village Rataul is situated in the district Tarn Taran of East Punjab (*charda* Punjab). In the month of August, every year the birth anniversary of Gulabdasis is celebrated there. This is a place which is considered sacred and several followers come there and get blessings from this sacred place. In the extensive fieldwork, I have collected relevant Punjabi sources and held formal, and informal conversations with the head of the Gulabdasi sect Vijender Das, local devotees and followers. In formal conversation,

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12 Anshu Malhotra, Bhakti and the Gendered Self: A Courtesan and a console in Mid-Nineteenth Century Punjab, Modern Asian Studies, 46, No. 2012: 1506-39.

13 This village is in Patti tehsil of Tarn Taran district Punjab. The village shares a border with Kasur district Pakistan Punjab. Currently it is situated 30km away from sub-district headquarter Patti.

14 Satnam Singh, Main custodian at Rajoke, Interviewed on 19th July, 2020.

15 Nain Sukh, Book Discussion on *Piro and the Gulabdasis: Gender, Sect and Society in Punjab*, 6th September 2020, Layalpur Young Historian Club.

16 This village is in Tarn Taran tehsil of district Tarn Taran in Punjab. A clan of Rataul Jats founded this village.

Vijender Das narrated the story about the birth of Gulab Das. He said, "Mata Desan and Amira Jat, the parents of Gulab Das, were childless for many years. Mata Desan used to pray before the holy Granth Sahib in which she had great faith. With the grace of Guru Granth Sahib, a son was born in their home who was named Gulab Das. The Gulab Das was born smiling and the excited midwife ran off to announce that some saint or Avtar was born. He could also sit since his birth. The child remained inclined towards spirituality. Once Gulab Das, who was seven years old, was walking with his father and a dust storm carried him away and threw him in a well. For a long time, he could not be found. The mother again prayed to Granth Sahib and promised that if he found her son, she would let her son become a saint or let him in the service of the god.

According to oral tradition, Gulab Das was found in deep meditation in the well. Gulab Das asked his mother if he should now become a saint. But his mother could not let him go away from her and disallowed her son to become a saint. Later on, Gulab Das left his home, and family and started the first step toward his sainthood. This is the relatable folk motif in the saga of Puran Bhagat.[17] Here, well is the relative metaphor for the divine personalities. The *qissa* of Puran Bhagat is a popular tale in Punjab which has been retold by many poets. There is a brief story as follows:

The sturdy twelve years old Puran was the son of the legendary king Salvan of Sialkot from his first wife Ishran. He was kept in a deep and dark dungeon for the first twelve years of his life, as advised by an astrologer who predicted his death. After twelve years, Salvan's young (and low-caste) second wife Luna falls in love with him upon seeing him. But Puran resists her act and then she conspired against Puran and on the behest of Luna, Raja Salvan ordered his execution. However, the executioner did not kill him but chopped off his limbs and threw him into a well. It is said that Puran stayed meditating in the well for another twelve years. One day the legendary Jogi Gorakh Nath happened to pass by the well and he took out Puran from the well and restored his limbs by sprinkling water on them. Then Puran became the Jogi and stayed along with the Jogis but not before the beautiful queen Sundran falls in love with him and later kills herself because Puran did not want to be tied down to worldly bonds. In Sialkot, his true identity is revealed and his father begs to stay as a king but Puran

[17] Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, pp. 297-98.

Illustration 5.4 The mentions of Patti Jai Chandiye on a Banner at Ratul Village Source: Author


Illustration 5.5 The Sant Vijender Das and local devotees performed the ritual of Parbhat-pheri Source: Author

refuses his proposal and grants a boon to the childless Luna that she would bear a son, the legendary future Raja Rasalu.[18]

The motifs, semiotics and emotions of these folk tales remain the universal essence in society. The *qissa* of Purna Bhagat and the symbols of well, the emotions of his mother, the love of Luna and the worldly love of Rani Sundran are the motifs which distinguish the divine motive of the Bhagatas in the world. The coming of Gorakhnath is bliss for *bhagats* like Puran which transforms the common man into *bhagat*. The story of Gulab Das is relatable when he fell into a well and her mother expressed her emotions and forgets her promise. In the end, Gulab Das goes with the Jogis and Sufis in the search for the meaning of his life.

Now the family of Jugraj Singh has renovated this well and placed a big picture of Guru Gulab Das. On the birth anniversary of Gulab Das, the devotees gather over here and sing hymns in memory of their Guru, and get lectures on the life and teachings of the Gulab Das. In an informal conversation, Jugraj Singh informed about the ambiguity over the birthplace of Guru Gulab Das. He said that many times we do not have any clarity about the original birthplace of our Guru because three villages exist in Punjab with the same name. One is located in the district of Malerkotla, another one is in the district of Ferozepur and the last one is in the Amritsar district. According to him, the only clue in one of Gulab Das's writings is where he mentioned that his village is Rataul Patti Jaichandiye. The village Rataul is in the Amritsar district where Patti Jaichandiye exists.[19]

On the birth anniversary of Gulab Das, 31st of August every year, devotees celebrate a big fair in this village. They celebrate his birth under the Gurmat tradition. The Sangat of the village places Guru Granth Sahib at the place of Gulab Das and organizes an Akhand Path which ends with Bhog on the 31st of the month of August. Before the Bhog ceremony, they organized a *Prabhat Feri* which literally means early morning round of the village or town. The devotees gather in the early morning much before the sun's rays peep from the sky and take rounds of the village chanting hymns

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[18] R. C. Temple, *The Legends of the Punjab,* Vol.I, Language Department, Patiala, 1962 (First Published 1884), p. 4. For a further fascinating account, see, Surinder Singh, *Medieval Punjab in Transition: Authority, Resistance and Spirituality (c. 1500-c. 1700),* Manohar, New Delhi, pp.155-157.

[19] Interview with Jugraj Singh on October 5, 2020, at village Rataul District Amritsar.

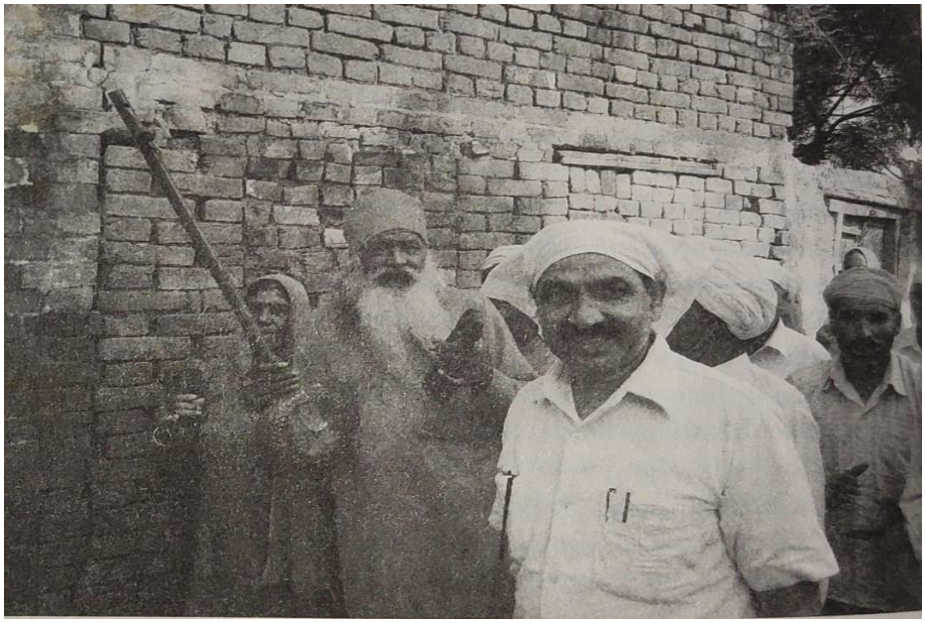

Illustration 5.6 A Local Devotee playing a Ik Tara and Sing a Song with Vijender Das (2013)
Source: Anshu Malhotra

Illustration 5.7 Ik Tara Placed in the sacred space of Gulab Das
Source: Author

with the ethnic folk instrument *dholki*. Vijender Das and the local devotees gather and perform this ritual. They place the *palki with* the photo of Gulab Das and distribute sweets and *parshad*. The whole village gathers there to own and claim the Gulabdasi legacy.

On this day, many devotees from Haryana and Alvar Rajasthan and Yamunagar come along with Sant Vijender Das. They come here two days before the fair on their buses and cars and reside here till the evening of the 31st of August. They come here full of devotion and perform their rituals like singing bhajan, *kirtan*, and distributing food, and sweets. The devotees of village Rataul give warm welcome to Sant Vijender Das and other *sangat* and feel the honour to invite him to their homes. In the earlier years, the Sangat from Haryana would perform *kirtan* with the folk instrument *ik tara* (instrument of one wire). A local devotee used to sing bhajans with *ik tara*. But now the devotee who used to play this instrument has died. However, *ik tara* is placed in the shrine of Gulab Das.

Vijender Das orally narrates the story of the death of Gulab Das. He defined his death as spiritually merging a soul with the divine and called him *jyoti jot* or died. He said that Gulab Das died with his two followers Gurmukh Das and Jawahir Singh. He narrates the following story: "Gulab Das knew that he would die after seven days. At Rajoke, he met his two most loyal disciples Gurmukh Das and Jawahar Singh. These disciples were too honest to serve their Guru. Gurmukh Das was the eldest disciple and in charge of the kitchen in the centre of Chathianwala and that's why Gulab Das called him his *beti* (daughter). Jawahar Singh kept the record of accounts. Before his death, Gulab Das gave a turban/ *mukut* to Gurmukh Das, being eldest (Most Sufis of Sabri and Chishti Silsila wear a turban called *Mukut* or *Taz*).[20] Vijender Das states that further Gurmukh Das placed the turban on the head of Hargobind; an adopted son of Gulab Das and his chosen successor.

Vijender Das is reviving these places associated with the Guru to provide the binding factor that brings them together. Vijender Das wants to popularize the sect and reconsolidate his tradition and legacy by creating a sense of acceptability among the descendants of Hargobind, the successor of Gulab Das in Chathianwala, among the

[20] Yogesh Snehi, Spatializing Popular Sufi Shrines in Punjab: Dreams, Memory and territoriality, Routledge Publication, London, 2020, p. 70.

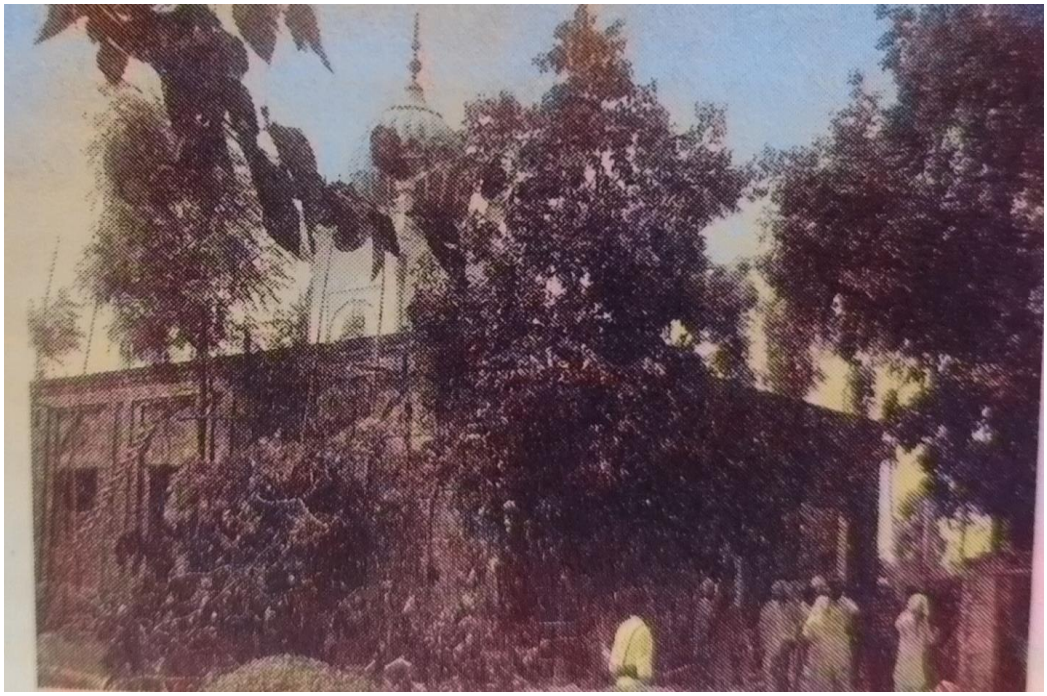

Illustration 5.8 The Tomb of Gurmukh Das and Jawahir Singh under construction
Source: Anshu Malhotra

Illustration 5.9 A Structure of Gurudwara raise over the Samadhis of Gurmukh Das and Jawahar Singh
Source: Author

followers. He claims that Hargobind was installed on the seat by Gulab Das himself.[21] These two disciples desired to die with Gulab Das. Gulab Das told them to go and take Samadhi at village Rajoke and they are buried there. These tombs are still situated at Rajoke.[22]

During my visit in 2019, an old age devotee told me that there is a small bridge in front of the left side of the Gurudwara where Gulab Das stayed in a tent. Later, a landlord of this village gave him a piece of land and requested Gulab Das to stay at that place. Gulab Das made a garden and ordered his two disciples named Gurmukh Das and Jawahar Singh to stay there. Usually, in religious traditions, charismatic narratives are woven around saintly personalities. During the formal conversation with a devotee named Baldev Singh at village Rataul, he told me that after the partition of 1947 Indian army used to parol near this bridge and usually locked the Gurudwara at night. One night, a General of the army heard the voices of kirtan inside the Gurudwara and the sound of horse toes on this bridge.

During my last visit to Rajoke in 2021, I noticed that the devotees of this village have raised a structure of Gurudwara over the samadhis of these two disciples. The dome of their samadhis has been retained in its original form in memory of these saintly disciples of Gulab Das. They have installed Guru Granth on their samadhis. Baldev Singh told me that they are so honoured that every time a *Bani* of Guru Granth recited on their samadhis.

The Gulabdasis established their branches in Titoo Khera village, district Sirsa, Haryana and Vijender claims that this is the original branch of the sect. Looking forward and making this branch popular, Vijender Das himself has taken the charge and in the process established his own credentials and has become an outgoing Guru to lead the sect forward. This might have been done to end the conflict over succession. In this context, Anshu Malhotra gives references to Daniel Gold's work wherein he argues that this type of succession to the spiritual seat of a guru and inheriting his mantle may often lead to conflict and the setting up of new branches which has been discussed by various scholars.[23]

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21 Giani Gian Singh, *Sri Guru Panth Prakash*, Bhasha Vibhag, Patiala, 1970 (First Published 1880), p. 1295.

22 Interviews with Vijender Das during the year 2018 and again in 2021.

23 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, p. 256.

In these particularly defined centres, every year a group of devotees come there and pay their obeisance. Besides that, Vijender Das visits every year with a group of his followers and there he performs rituals, sings bhajans and songs and distributes food (Prasad), shares food with devotees at this centre. This has become every year a primary ritual for this centre. This makes an institutionalized structure for the sect of Gulab Das.

Later, they established a centre of this sect in the village of Titoo Khera, Sirsa district, Haryana and probably claim its original branch of this sect. Vijender Das has created and promoted the sacred spaces attached to Gulab Das. He actively performs rituals and organizes activities with his followers from Haryana. Every year he comes to Punjab and introduces the followers to the sect of Gulab Das and its legacy. He has the pain of losing a shrine of his *Murshid* in Chathiawala, Kasoor. He has reinvented his legacy in the villages of Rataul and Rajoke which are close to the border of Pakistan.

Vijender Das is the saint of Gulabdasis and the nucleus of the followers. He is the source of energy for all the branches in India. He is the contemporary vibrant and active Guru. Vijender Das was born in the Bawana district of Haryana in a weaver caste. His father Ramkala was a freedom fighter. A family which was in the line of Gulabdasis adopted Vijender Das named Nirbhay Singh. Nirbhay Singh was the son of Bishan Singh 'Arif' a noted saint of Gulabdasis who was the son of Sardar Ram Singh Gill of Jagrawan village; Rumi village in Ludhiana district Punjab. He was a disciple of Sewa Singh. Nirbhay Singh took over his gaddi in Hansi along with his wife Krishna Rani who adopted Vijender Das. The Hansi seat is very significant for a space of women. The Yamuna Devi, the wife of Bishan Singh, formed an Istri Sabha at Hansi. She is also the spiritual guru for the followers of Gulabdasis. Till now, the elder women followers of Yamuna Devi used to come to the annual congregation (religious function) at Hansi.

Then Sant Nirbhay Singh adopted a son and Vijender Das took over the seat of Hansi. Vijender Ji told himself that he has been initiated into the sect to perform a ritual of *namdan* (initiation of a name) at the early age of six or seven from Maharaj Brahm Das of Rohtak, Haryana who had a dera in Saharanpur. In this sense, he became the guru and inherited the seat of Hansi's legacy in 1989. The followers of this sect also

have no distinction based on marriages popular in the Nirmala sect.[24] They do not have any restrictions on marriage in this sect. Sant Vijender Das also is living a middle-class life as a householder with his wife Saroj and two children in Sonipat, Haryana. He was in a government job in the state of Haryana. He started his career with the job of Home Guards and came to be known as Vijender Kumar and served as district commandant in Sonepat. He had an additional charge of Panipat and was twice awarded the president's medal for his excellencies.[25]

A son of Vijender Das who is working as SDM has recently got married. On my last visit to Rataul on the birth anniversary of Gulab Das, I met Sant Vijender Das who came with his wife and the whole family to seek the blessings of Gulab Das. Saroj ji also has a very charming nature. She has a huge love for the devotees of Gulab Das and Piro. Now she has full enthusiasm towards the sect. Vijender Das told that he will make a mini archive of the writings of Gulab Das, Piro and other disciples and they have established it in the centre of Hansi. They have collected the manuscripts called *Danda Bir* or Sangli *Bir* (a manuscript written without space) of Gulab Das and Piro. The researchers who have worked on the Gulabdasi sect have donated their research work to this library. The first time when I met Vijenderji, I remember that he became emotional in his love for his guru. He used the verses of Gulab Das and Piro to explain their teachings. He told me that every researcher must write about a good thing that enlightened society and that was the mission of his guru. Vijender Das has also published a book about Piro in the Devnagri script. He has toiled hard to collect the manuscript of Gulabdasis. There is a family in the Tarn Taran district who possesses a manuscript of Gulab Das. But they are demanding a huge amount of money for it. During my visit to Rataul, I also promised to make effort to take this manuscript and submit it to Vijender Das. But still, the custodian does not want to give this manuscript.

In the Gulab Das centres located in Punjab, the devotees are not aware of Piro. There are certain reasons behind that. First, the background of Piro as a prostitute has remained the subject of embarrassment. But Vijender Das acknowledges her past as prostitution boldly. He said in one of his interviews that the feudal people exploited

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[24] Surmit Kaur, *Sikh Rehat Maryada: Nirmal Sampardaye de Parsang Vich,* Unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 2019, p. 22.

[25] This information has been conveyed to me by Sukhdev Singh Ratol and Vijender Das Ji himself.

Piro and she became a prostitute out of her helplessness. He said that she had inherent spiritual tendencies which were later appreciated by her *Murshid*, Gulab Das. While talking with a devotee from Haryana, he told me about the Titoo Khera branch which is associated with Gulab Das in the line of adopted son Hargobind. People have disowned and remained silent about Piro because of her profession and her low caste. But Vijender Das strongly criticises the act of disrespect. He respects Piro as his mother. Another reason is the displacement of the central shrines of this sect from Chathianwala. In an informal conversation with an old devotee from Rajoke, I put a question about the ambiguity of Piro. He told me that she was there at the centre at Chathianwala but he was not happy to refer to the *Muzra* which was performed at the Chathianwala centre of this sect.[26]

As it is said that Gulab Das first gave his turban/crown to Gurmukh Das and he further transferred it to Hargobind. It shows that the Gurmukh Das was the eldest disciple of the Gulab Das who had the first claim over the seat (gaddi). In this context, Anshu Malhotra says that we can also read this as Gurmukh Das being the first successor to Gulab Das and Hargobind as the second.[27] However, in the formal conversation with Baldev Singh's house, he tells another narrative about the succession of the seat of Gulabdasi. He said that as Gulab Das was aware of his death then some of the followers conveyed this news. Shiv Dayal was also one of the followers of Gulab Das. He considered himself capable of being a successor. When Gulab Das denied him successorship then he established his own sect named Radha Soami at Agra. Baldev Singh strongly says that the founder of the Radha Swami sect was a follower of Gulab Das.[28] Interestingly, the family of Shiv Dayal shifted from Lahore to Agra and Shiv Dayal was the contemporary of Gulab Das.[29] The chosen successor Gurmukh Das constructed the narrative of his selfless service and public performance for his guru and this sect. It does not question Hargobind's credentials and accountability as the successor of Gulab Das. Vijender Das never denied the claim of the Titookhera branch as an authentic successor of Chathianwala. The narrative of Gurmukh Das enhances the

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[26] I visited there during the lockdown period where I had a conversation with the aged devotee.

[27] Anshu Malhotra, *The Piro and the Gulabdasis*, p. 304.

[28] Interview with Baldev Singh, 20 July, 2020.

[29] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Radhasoami Reality: The Logic of a Modern Faith*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1991, pp. 3-15.

Illustration 5.10 A place where was the Gulab Das stable
Source: Author

Illustration 5.11 The Old Well
Source: Author

legitimacy of the place of Rajoke. One thing that is also very important is that the legacy of Rajoke is recognized and celebrated only by Vijender Das who established a relationship between the two. The people of the Titookhera branch, Haryana still are not enthusiastic and convinced with the performance of Vijender Das. They criticise him for taking away their livelihood and business. However, for Vijender Das, it is love and passion which minimizes the worldly things they lament for. In the government service, Vijender Das wanted to be free from his job and devoted his whole time to the service of Gulabdasis. He retired from service last year and devoted his time to the service of his guru.

Vijender Das told that he first visited in 2000, to join and participate in the ceremony of Gulabdasis. In his formal conversation, he said that the villagers of the Rajoke consider these samadhis as gurudwara. In 2000, they had to lift their holy Granth to locate the two thambus, cleared them, washed them with milk (*kachi lassi*), the tumuli had turned red, affirming the momentousness of the occasion and the sacredness of the space. Since then, every year they perform this ritual. Satnam Singh, custodian of this centre showed him the area of Gulabdas's stable, where the Guru had kept his favourite mares, Lakhi and Lado. He also showed the old well.[30]

There are other centres located in different parts of Punjab. These are located at Dhamdhan Tohana, Hissar, Riond Kalan Mansa and Gulabdasi Dera Karnal. There are some centres worth mentioning. One of these centres is in the village Lakhna which is located 4.5 kilometres away from the village Rajoke. There is a *mazar* of Muhammad Shah, a Muslim disciple of Gulab Das. Vijender Das often goes there to pay homage as a Gulabdasis saint. During my visit to this shrine, I observed that it was a very popular religious place among the local population. People of all religions and castes come to this *Mazar*.[31]

In the centre of the room which is square, there is a grave of Mohammad Shah which has a decorated roof. His grave is covered with green sheets which is a famous ritual among the Sufi Sheikhs and Pirs. There is a small grave in the corner of this room. As per the popular tradition, the disciples of a Sufi *pir* are buried with the side of their *murshid*. Similarly, this small grave is of Mir Shah who was the devotee and

[30] I visited there on 20 July 2020.

[31] I visited there on 20 December 2021.

Illustration 5.12 The Mazar of Muhammad Shah
Source: Author

Illustration 5.13 Dhuna (Fire Pit)
Source: Author

Illustration 5.14 Figures of the Shiva and Parvati
Source: Author

Illustration 5.15 Figures of Pirs and Guru Nanak on the Entrance Doors
Source: Author

disciple of Mohammad Shah. This shrine is also an example of religious pluralism which can be seen in the surroundings visuals. Its two doors have different figures of both Hindu God-Goddesses and Muslim Pirs. One of the doors has the painted figures of Shiva and Parvati. The image of Mohmmad Shah is inscribed on the panel of a door. The Sufi attires and scriptures are also installed in this *mazar*. Devotees have installed a copy of the Quran and pairs of *Khadawan* (wooden slippers) of Pir. There can be a memory of his *murshid* in the form of a picture of Gulab Das in it. With this picture, they feel the presence of their guru. Every Thursday, local devotees lit a lamp and offered Prasad there. Interestingly, the custodian of this shrine is a Sikh. He dresses in Sufi black clothes with a green turban. On Thursday, he distributes a prasad of yellow rice (*niaz* or *jarda*) to devotees. Moreover, there is a total Sikh population in this village. There is a *dhuna* (fire pit) with iron rods in a small room there. A large *nagara* is also hung on the wall.

This shrine can be seen in a transformed structure after the partition. Anshu Malhotra assumes that the villagers may have converted a Sufi shrine of "Pir Baba" Muhammad Shah since independence to its present eclectic state with its assortment of gods, goddesses, and gurus.[32] But local devotees say that the teachings of the Pir Mohammad Shah include respect and love for all the gods and goddesses. That is why the people come here without the distinction of caste and religion. Gradually, the figures of these gods and goddesses have been inscribed in the precinct of this shrine. The devotees come here, and offer and distribute the food. Although, this place can be equated to the independent establishment of Ditta Ram who also was famous as a Gulabdasi saint. Another reason for the popularity of this centre is being in an adjacent village to the famous Gulabdasi centre.

Anshu Malhotra sees this shrine well fit in the Gulabdasis tradition. She says that Muhammad Shah's grave/shrine fits in rather well with the Gulabdasi tradition of making tombs on the grave sites or cremation platforms of their gurus and favoured disciples as is the case of the tomb of Gulab Das and Piro at Chathianwala, and Gurmukh Das and Jawahir Singh at Rajoke.[33] Till the partition, there remained a tradition among the Gulabdasis to bury rather than cremate which relates them to the

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32 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, p. 300.

33 *Ibid*, p. 301.

Sufi practices of Punjab. It can also be seen as syncretic practices of this shrine; it is the essence of the Gulabdasis legacy and religious tradition of the Punjab which is performed there.

There is another centre of the Gulabdasis located in the village Kandola Kalan, near Nurmahal in the Jalandhar district of Punjab. The centre is famous for the name *takia* (seat) of Pir Milkhi Shah or Milkhi Das. Baldev Singh from the village Rataul said that he was born in 1884, after the death of Gulab Das. He is said to have died in 1989, at the age of 105. Vijender Das says that he wrote 'Hidayat Nämä,' meaning advice stories that retold the religiosity of the Gulabdasis. Vijender Das feels so proud of the religious diversity and plurality of the Gulabdasis. It has great relevance in a society where some people spread hate against a particular religion and community. Vijender Da has the daunting task to propagate the ideology of Gulabdasis. In contemporary times, the Gulabdasi sect has followers from the mainstream religions like Hinduism and Sikhism. The ideological basis of this sect interlocks the peoples of different faiths in different regions and cultural backgrounds. The Khalsa identity is also visible in these centres in Punjab. Vijender Das says that Guru Gobind Singh strongly criticised caste and religion-based discrimination and Gulab Das practised the same in his life. The non-Sikh followers of the Gulabdasi sect come from Alwar in Rajasthan and Yamunanagar, Hansi, and Hissar in Haryana. But their love for Gulab Das easily mixes them up with the Sikhs of Ratol, Rajoki, and Patti. The belongingness of the same sect and faith makes the bond between them.

Yogesh Snehi talks about the popular Sufi shrines in the Punjab which had a great experience of three transitions that occurred in the Punjab. First is the partition of Punjab in 1947, another one is the administrative reorganization of Punjab in 1966 and the last one was the period of the Khalistan movement of 1984.[34] These brought some changes in the sphere of popular religion. We have noticed the structural changes after the partition. However, there was no major impact on the sect during the Khalistan movement in Punjab. The area of Tarn Taran and Amritsar was the core area where the Khalistan movement was very strong during the late 1970s and the 1980s and further remained active in the early 1990s. The demand for the Sikh homeland was at its peak

[34] Yogesh Snehi, *Spatializing Popular Sufi Shrines in Punjab,* Routledge, London and New York, 2019, pp. 99-101

in these districts. The geopolitical importance of these areas had increased much at that time. However, Vijender Das and the local old age devotees say that no one was forced to stop the ceremonies and functions at the Gurudwara of Rataul and Rajoke. Rather the Khalsa Singhs attended and came there in huge numbers. For these reasons, Anshu Malhotra comments that this comfort with eclectic religiosity is in a fundamental sense a part of South Asian popular culture.[35]

South Asian religiosity is the representation of the plurality which can be seen in its sacred spaces and the religious vernacular literary traditions. These two currents reciprocate with each other. In the case of Gulabdasis, Vijender Das is a non-Sikh and the Sikh affiliation of Gulab Das and Gulabdasi ceremonials in Punjab do not detract from its legacy and tradition. The works of Dominique-Sila Khan, Farina Mir, Yogesh Snehi and Ishita Banerjee Dubey reflect examples of such faiths, their worship and popular literary representation in the colonial South Asian religious tradition.

The Gulabdasis seem to have constituted their prayers, rituals of worship and symbol but at the same time, they overlapped this distinction with the mainstream religions. In the Gulabdasi centre in Punjab, we can see this intermingle. On the birth anniversary of Gulab Das, the devotees of Guladasis perform the rituals under the Gurmat Rehat Maryada (Sikh Code of Conduct). They install the Guru Granth on this occasion, perform *Bhog* of *Akhand Path and* then distribute *langar* (community kitchen). There is a banner installed with the picture of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh over it. Usually, there is the *parkash* (installation) of Gulab Bani. But in the Gulab Das centres of Punjab, mainstream Sikhism is overcoming the Gulabdasis. The Rataul village is famous for a Sikh martyr named Bhai Maha Singh who was one of the *Chaali Mukte* (The Forty Liberated Ones).[36]

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35 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, p. 328.

36 During the siege of Anandpur in 1704 by hill chiefs and the Mughals, provisions were exhausted and the Sikhs fighting under the command of Guru Gobind Singh faced starvation. Further, the position of the garrison worsened and some Sikhs suggested evacuation. As the Guru refused to leave, some Sikhs wavered in their faith and left the fort after writing a letter of disowning their Guru (Bedawa). Later on, after being chided by their womenfolk in the villages they sought to make reparation for their faithfulness and joined the Guru at Khidrana (Mukatsar) where they died while fighting heroically: Harbans Singh, *The Heritage of The Sikhs*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1999(First Published 1983), pp. 90, 91. The Guru was deeply impressed by their sense of remorse and self-sacrifice. When Guru found Bhai Mahan Singh who was lying seriously injured, he

Illustration 5.16 Main place of worship with banner and pictures of the Sikh Gurus
Source: Author

Illustration 5.17 A Chandoya over the Pothi of Gulab Das
Source: Author

The posters which were published on the occasion of the birth anniversary of the Gulab Das at Rataul village have the name of Gulab Das with the sobriquet Baba. This is an honorific term used for the ancestry of an old wise man. However, the family of Jugraj Singh worship Gulab Das as their Guru but in the visuals, the Sikh Code of Conduct can be seen as dominating the popular form of this sect. In the writings of Gulab Das, he emphasised the name of Sohang. However, there we do not have a symbol of Sohang. Usually, it is used to be depicted on the flag. But in the Gulabdasi centres of Rataul and Rajoke, the symbol of *Ik Onkar is used. It* is inscribed on the *Chandoya* (canopy: a cover that hangs or spreads above something) which hangs over the Gulab Bani.

It is a common feature in shrines. In Punjab, there are many shrines where the Guru Granth is also installed. There is a *mazaar* of Raja Sahib in the city of Phagwara in the district of Jalandhar. He was a saint from the Chishti Silsilah. There is a Gurudwara of Raja Sahib and Guru Granth Sahib is installed in this shrine. Similarly, Dera Ballan, a sect of Ravidasias also has this unique composition. It resembles both a temple and a Gurudwara at the same time. Guru Granth Sahib is placed in the Dera, but unlike a Gurudwara, the idols of Guru Ravidass and the late heads of Dera Ballan are also installed on its premises and are worshipped along with Guru Granth Sahib.[37] The centres of Gulabdasis in Punjab have the same feature but it is not in regular practice.

There are some symbols and practices which are similar to mainstream Sikhism. First is the sacred text which was written by Gulab Das and Piro. It has been given the status by the Gulabdasis as their holy book (carried on their heads when announcing the birth of Gulab Das) which is wrapped in the cloth of silk as is the case of Guru Granth Sahib. Secondly, there's a place of worship where they install their holy book. It is called Darbar Sahib. It is similar to Sikh tradition. However, certain symbols and practices of Gulabdasis are similar to Hinduism and Sufism. On the left side of the

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requested the Guru to restore the snapped relationship (Tutti *Gandhi)*. The Guru tore the note of renunciation (*Bedawa*) and declared them *Muktas:* Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs,* Vol. I, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 2000 (Reprint), p.307. Afterwards, Bhai Mahan Singh died in peace with his head in Guru's lap: Harbans Singh(ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism,* Vol. III, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2002(Second Edition), p.14.

37 Ronki Ram, "Ravidass Deras and Social Protest: Making Sense of Dalit Consciousness in Punjab" (India), *The Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 67, No. 4, 2008, pp. 1341-1364.

Darbar Sahib, they have installed the symbols in the memory of Gulab Das. They have kept the slippers of Gulab Das. The ritual to install slippers is famous among the Sufis. In the Hindu tradition, an image of feet and a pair of slippers is associated with the God or guru, or may also be iconic. On the right side, they have constructed a special space for Gulab Das where they perform the rituals of *Sukh Asan* of the Pothi of Gulab Das at night. They have also installed a sword in memory of their guru who adopted the attire of a warrior. There is another symbol which speaks about the influence of Sikhism on the sect of Gulab Das. On the poster of langar (community kitchen), the symbol of *Khanda* (double-edged sword), a symbol of Khalsa is also inscribed

The followers from the Alwar and Yamunanagar also come and pay their obeisance to Gulab Das at Rajoke and Rataul villages. They perform their *kirtan* in their folk genre in which they use their folk instruments and folk tones. They play with the *matka* (water pot) which has a rubber stretched over its mouth. In Punjab, there is a small folk instrument which is also played with the rubber stretched on the mouth called *Garwa*. Usually, it is used in the Malwai Giddha, a folk dance of Punjab. Along with these instruments, they sing devotional songs with ektara (single-stringed) in memory and love for Gulab Das and Piro. Most of the people of Alvar, Rajashtan sing the *dohas* of Kabir with these folk forms. In the

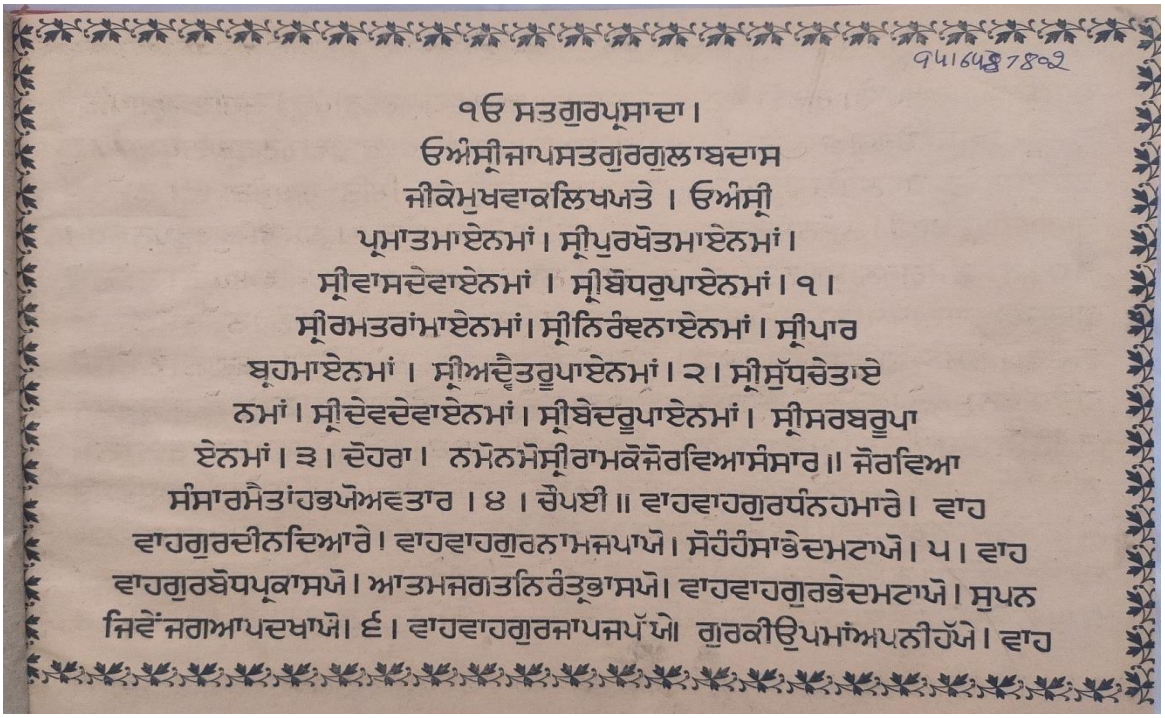
ਮੇਰਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਆਇਆ ਪਾਵਣਾ, ਪ੍ਰਮੇਸ਼ਵਰ ਆਇਆ ਪਾਵਣਾ
ਆ ਗਯਾ ਆਨੰਦ ਭਇਓ ਮੇਰਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਆਇਆ ਪਾਵਣਾ ।
ਮੇਰਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਆਇਆ ਆਂਗਨਾ, ਮੈਂ ਵਾਰੀ ਜਾਵੂ ਰੇ। [38]
Mera satguru aya pawna, parmeswar aea pawna
Agaya anand bhaeo mera satguru ayapavana.
Mera satguru aea angna, main wari jawu re.

There is a song which Anshu Malhotra recorded during her visit.

ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਕੇ ਦੇਸ ਬਸੋ ਨਿਰਮੋਹਤ, ਯਹਾਂ ਬਸੇ ਸੁਖ ਹੋਤ ।
ਆਜ ਮਹਾਰੇ ਰੰਗ ਬਰਸੇ, ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂਜੀ ਆਏ ਮਹਾਰੇ ਪਾਵਣਾ ।[39]
Satguru ke des baso nirmoht, Yahan base sukh hot
Aj mhare rang barse, Satguruji aye mhare pavana

[38] I have recorded the songs during my visit on 20 July 2020.

[39] Anshu Malhotra, Piro and the Gulabdasis, p. 316.



ੴ ਸਤਗੁਰਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਾ।
ਓਅੰਸ੍ਰੀਜਾਪਸਤਗੁਰਗੁਲਾਬਦਾਸ
ਜੀਕੇਮੁਖਵਾਕਲਿਖਯਤੇ । ਓਅੰਸ੍ਰੀ
ਪ੍ਰਮਾਤਮਾਏਨਮਾਂ। ਸ੍ਰੀਪੁਰਖੋਤਮਾਏਨਮਾਂ।
ਸ੍ਰੀਵਾਸਦੇਵਾਏਨਮਾਂ । ਸ੍ਰੀਬੋਧਰੁਪਾਏਨਮਾਂ। ੧।
ਸ੍ਰੀਰਮਤਰਾਂਮਾਏਨਮਾਂ। ਸ੍ਰੀਨਿਰੰਵਨਾਏਨਮਾਂ। ਸ੍ਰੀਪਾਰ
ਬ੍ਰਹਮਾਏਨਮਾਂ । ਸ੍ਰੀਅਦ੍ਵੈਤਰੂਪਾਏਨਮਾਂ। ੨। ਸ੍ਰੀਸੁੱਧਚੇਤਾਏ
ਨਮਾਂ। ਸ੍ਰੀਦੇਵਦੇਵਾਏਨਮਾਂ। ਸ੍ਰੀਬੇਦਰੂਪਾਏਨਮਾਂ। ਸ੍ਰੀਸਰਬਰੂਪਾ
ਏਨਮਾਂ। ੩। ਦੋਹਰਾ। ਨਮੋਨਮੋਸ੍ਰੀਰਾਮਕੋਜੋਰਵਿਆਸੰਸਾਰ॥ ਜੋਰਵਿਆ
ਸੰਸਾਰਮੈਤਾਂਹਭਯੋਅਵਤਾਰ । ੪ । ਚੌਪਈ॥ ਵਾਹਵਾਹਗੁਰਧੰਨਹਮਾਰੇ। ਵਾਹ
ਵਾਹਗੁਰਦੀਨਦਿਆਰੇ। ਵਾਹਵਾਹਗੁਰਨਾਮਜਪਾਯੋ। ਸੋਹੰਹੰਸਾਭੇਦਮਟਾਯੋ। ੫। ਵਾਹ
ਵਾਹਗੁਰਬੋਧਪ੍ਰਕਾਸਯੋ। ਆਤਮਜਗਤਨਿਰੰਤ੍ਰਭਾਸਯੋ। ਵਾਹਵਾਹਗੁਰਭੇਦਮਟਾਯੋ। ਸੁਪਨ
ਜਿਵੇਂਜਗਆਪਦਖਾਯੋ। ੬। ਵਾਹਵਾਹਗੁਰਜਾਪਜਪੱਯੋ। ਗੁਰਕੀਉਪਮਾਂਅਪਨੀਹੱਯੋ। ਵਾਹ

Illustration 5.18 First page of the Pothi installed in the Darbar Sahib
Source: Author

Illustration 5.19 Slippers installed in the memory of Gulab Das
Source: Author

Illustration 5.20 A view of a special space in the right side of the Darbar Sahib
Source: Author

Illustration 5.21 A poster with the symbol of Khanda
Source: Author

These devotional folk songs are sung by a group of devotees who have occupied the multi-vernacular religious and cultural domain within the sect. In this form, a single man or woman sings a single line and other followers in the group sing other lines to the tune of the *dholak*. They used the *khartals* and *manjire* as well in this performance. Anshu Malhotra relates this devotional form as 'visually psychedelic religiosity', comparable to the proliferating bhajan *mandalis* (devotional song groups) that one encounters everywhere in middle-class Hindu religiosity.[40] But this is the folk form of the Alvar Rajasthan which is performed by the common people. The middle class of Hindu religiosity perform it in their homes but it is the common form in the Sikhs as well. In the *parbhat pheri* on the occasion of the Gur Purab, Sikhs sing these types of devotional songs. It is also called the *kachi* Bani. Many groups sing this *kachi* Bani with the *dholak* and *chimta during* religious functions.

The Gulabdasis perform a ritual of *Aarti* of Mata Piro in the centres of Haryana. In this *Aarti* they worship the Mata Piro:

ਜੈ ਪੀਰੋ ਮਾਤਾ, ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੈ ਪੀਰੋ ਮਾਤਾ ।
ਤੁਮਕੋ ਜੋ ਜਨ ਧਯਾਵੈ, ਇੱਛਤ ਫਲ ਪਾਤਾ ।[41]
Jai Piro máta, satguru jai Piro mata
Tumko jo jan dhyave, ichhit phala pata.

In some sects, the *Aarti* is the special feature which is usually performed in their centres. The sect of Nirmala Performs the *Aarti* written by Guru Nanak with the lit lamps, waving around the Guru Granth. In the Udasis, the Baba Shiri Chand wrote an Arta**.** It was written in the praise of Guru Nanak when he returned from his Udasi to Pakhoke[42]. They also sing this Arta with lit lamps in front of Guru Granth Sahib. However, it does not mean the Hinduization of this sect. For Anshu Malhotra, the *Aarti* is an example of Hinduization which is said to be like the most popular *Aarti in* north India, *Om Jai Jagdish Hare.*[43] Throughout his childhood, Vijender Das was an adherent of Vedantic philosophy. Anshu Malhotra comments that finally, the Gulabdasi world in

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40 *Ibid*, p. 300.

41 Sant Vijender Das, *Sant Kavitri Mata Piro*, p. 240.

42 Gurdev Singh, (ed.), *Udasi Sampardaye and Sikh Panth*, The Advanced Institute of the Religious Studies and Comparative Religions, New Delhi, 2002, p. 23.

43 Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*, p.298.

many ways may be defined as 'Hindu' if we understand Hinduism as what its adherent Vijender Das was initiated at a young age.[44] The concept of the Brahm, according to the Gulabdasis, is self-realization. She further elaborates that the "devotion that Vijender Das displays towards the founder-Guru Gulab Das resembles that which one may have for a godly being. The rituals conducted by Vijender Das at Ratol or Rajoke, the veneration of the pictures of Gulab Das, the burning of incense, the singing of devotional songs or the distribution of consecrated food are very similar to popular Hinduism that one witnesses in temples and homes. I suggest that Vijenderji's ritualistic practices smack of popular Hinduism more than might be present in some other Gulabdasi Deras."[45]

In Sikh Gurudwaras, however, *Aarti* is not performed. Guru Nanak referred to *Aarti* in the *Raag* Dhanasari in Adi Granth. The entire cosmos, said he, is performing the *Aarti* of a single God. So, the ritual of *Aarti* is not related to the Sikh fold. The forms and contents of *Aarti* have been different from mainstream Hinduism too and praise Piro and her sainthood. It is produced under the shadow of great religious traditions. There we have a similar example of the Dera Balla, a sect of Ravidasis in the district of Jalandhar, Punjab. They use the insignia of *Har*, different *ardas*, *aarti*, and salutation (Jai Guru Dev) which can be simply claimed to the Hindu but these are their markers of the separate Dalit identity from mainstream Hinduism and Sikhism.[46] However, the forms of *Aarti*, prayers and songs adopted by the saints and their followers have thus become distinct symbols of the separate identity of the sect of Gulab Das, distinct from the mainstream religions.

To place Gulabdasis in a single context is the act of delimiting and shrinking their legacy. The divergent saint of the reformists has diverse disciples who came from different religious traditions like Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhism. Interestingly, Gulabdasis did not define and concretized their identity which enriched the popular religiosity and vernacular religious tradition in colonial Punjab. The sect of Gulabdasis became the source of religious movement in colonial Punjab. It reconstituted religion and tradition in the domain of vernacular.

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44 *Ibid*, p. 315.

45 *Ibid*, p. 315.

46 Ronki Ram, "Ravidass Deras and Social Protest: Making Sense of Dalit Consciousness in Punjab (India)", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 67, No. 4, 2008, pp. 1341-1364.

CONCLUSION

The Punjab has a diverse geography, culture, and religious tradition. The vast land of Punjab has the tradition of adopting various tribes, cultures, and religious faiths and synthesizing them. The diversity, fluidity and pluralism remained the essence of the Punjab. It is the fertile land which produced the brotherhood, cultural syncretism, and religious pluralism. In this region, devotion comprises the idea of dissent which further occupied the domain of love. Shaivism, Shaktism, Nanakpanthis, Udasis, Nirmalas, and Sewa Panthis minimized the homogeneity of mainstream religions. When the Sufi, Yogi, Nath and other such faiths interacted with mainstream religions, they deconstructed the form of religion, culture and society. They constructed new genres in the domain of vernacular. However, the Saints of the Bhakti movement made the bond strong between the different religious traditions. Guru Nanak defined the religion as one which once again integrated Punjab's religious tradition. The oneness of the religion was the basis of the religious tradition which denied the boundaries of identities. The great religious traditions and their historically evolved common indigenous culture constituted a pluralistic culture. The cultural matrix of Punjab is a 'historically evolved habitat' where syncretism and shared veneration formed the bedrock of Punjabi social life.

The sect is defined as divergent faith from the main conventional movement or the mainstream religious establishment. It is a group of people who have separated from the larger community, who are nonconformists by disposition, and who adhere to somewhat different beliefs and observances (usually labelled as heretical). In Punjab, the 'sects' are also known as sampradayas, panths, or deras, which are the groupings of people sewn together based on specific doctrinal and philosophical inclinations. In the nineteenth century, there were numerous sects operational in the different parts of the Punjab, and Sikhism was rightly seen as a conglomeration of sects. It was during this period that the Gulabdasi sect emerged as a new faith which had the reflection of this religious tradition. The texts of Gulabdasis and their contexts speak itself a shift in Punjabi culture. This was the vernacular shift in the Punjab religious tradition and culture. The process of vernacularization was not an accidental but a serious, purposeful, and conscious effort in the Punjabi literary domain which was deeply

affected by religion. The Gulab Das and his texts were highly absorbed in the devotional religious tradition of the region. The public memory of Gulab Das has flourished at the heart of Punjabi public culture through the *qissas* genre produced by his disciples. They praised their Guru in the starting verses. This literary process and prolific pen of Gulab Das made him a literary Guru in the South Asian religious tradition. He usually used mixed languages mostly the popular Sadhukari or Sadh Bhasha which remained *lingua franca* of the North Indian Saint tradition. It is interlocutor with Braj, Punjabi and Urdu. Sometimes it comprises a greater part of the Sikh inheritance in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries in relation to Sikh scripture. The poetry of Gulabdasis did not remain limited only to oral narration but his theological and philosophical ideas were transmitted and elaborated through the writing and performances in the public domain.

The North- Indian religious tradition shaped and sharpened the poetic personality of Gulab Das and made him a saint or Guru. The south Asian scholarship classifies Gulab Das as a Bhakti poet. However, this classification minimizes his diverse domain of religious tradition. The Gulabdasis rejected external identity and allowed as they wish to retain uncut hair or the shorn, shaven look (*kes* or *mund*), no sectarian garb or clear distinction (*bhekh or abhekh*). They rejected inequality based on caste, gender and religion. The texts of Gulab Das are potentially valuable for envisaging Gulab Das's social context. In his literary milieu, Gulab Das strictly spoke against the pride of the body and *bhekh* (dress), or haughtiness a sectarian garb bestowed. In practice, he refused to adopt any sectarian garb and gave freedom to his disciples to dress as they pleased. He remained well dressed up and adorned with weapons, riding a horse, and sitting royally. He wrote against the drag of desire and warned not to fall under the spell of sexual need. But he openly lived with a woman who was earlier a prostitute, despite the contentiousness this relationship brought into his life.

During the period of Gulab Das, colonial modernity in Punjab came into being. Gradually, the modes of communication were going to be changed. The print medium enforced and influenced politics and the 'public sphere'. During the lifetime of Gulab Das, a lithographed print of Gulab Chaman was not published. Even there is no

reference regarding the Dera of the guru at Chathianwala being affected by the changes taking place with print culture. By 1870, the young disciples of Gulab Das indulged and were affected by print culture. In this transition period, the sects remained the main centres of learning, and writing and spread the idea of religion in society. These sects constructed the ecumene that fed the system of royal patronage, shrink the supremacy of elites, and clergy and enhanced indignity in the sphere of education, the idea of religion and literary production in vernacular language.

Gulab Das is called a bhakti saint poet with good reason. He composed confidently in a vernacular language rather than another. His compositions display enthusiastic praise for God, heartfelt longing for the elusive divine presence and sheer delight in ecstatic worship. He asserts the irrelevance of caste for proper devotion, and he cites the references for his support. Another way of envisioning Gulab Das in a historical context is through depictions of inter-caste disputes in Punjab. The hagiographical episodes portray Gulab Das interacting with untouchables and consequently having his purity called into question. Gulab Das's Punjabi literary production during a period of the colonial state and Ranjit Singh's rule and his challenging engagements with untouchables (in discourse or in the face) are two such examples.

It would be misleading to identify Gulab Das definitively as belonging to a particular philosophical school. Themes of dualism and utter devotion to God are encompassing in his writings, but Gulab Das does not explicate these by systematically laying out his position and counter-positions. His compositions display a kind of vernacular Advaita. Therefore, to categorize Gulab Das in the domain of a particular school of thought, it is suggested that it is preferable to envision him as engaging in an Indic counterpart to occasional rather than systematic theology. He dealt with issues as they arose, making no attempt to construct a thoroughgoing system. The aim in nearly all of Gulab Das's writings is more polemic than apologetic.

Gulab Das left his spiritual and textual lineage. Conventionally, Gulab Das had no clear association with a royal court and no adherence to a particular philosophical school. He produced an enormously diverse range of compositions and was prominent as quite unorthodox and became a liberal in nature. The life of Gulab Das may shed

light on part of early modern South Asia as well as on the vernacular society and religion outside the royal courts. The piety was not submitted before the state by Gulab Das.

The Gulabdasis localized the religious tradition which extended the discourse of vernacularity from literature and language to the domain of religion and culture. The poets, disciples and saints of Gulabdasi sect challenged the elite society, royal courts, and colonialism. They continued the legacy of the religious, literary, and cultural traditions of the Punjab. The sect of Gulabdas remained the centre of learning and education even in the colonial period. The sect of Guabdasis had noted saints in the above domain. The sect continued and strengthened the Arif tradition of Punjab. Three poets are most important to discuss who emerged between the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century Punjab. These scholar intellectuals extended the textual and spiritual lineage of the sect in particular and represented the intellectual literary tradition of the Punjab in general. Kishan Singh Arif (1836- 1900), Dharam Das Arif (1866-1918) and Ditta Ram alias Giani Ditt Singh (1850-1901) learned and trained in the sect of Gulabdasi and the disciples of Gulab Das. Later they become noted poets, polemicists, and journalists and Ditt Singh even became the primary orator of the Singh Sabha movement. Poetry and contemplation were the common feature of these poets which were the synonyms of religious and secular integration. These integrated currents took them to the stage of Brahmgyani. These poets emphasized moral and ethical ideas though Kishan Singh Arif apparently had a more liberal approach. Their devotion did not limit to morality. They questioned caste and class-based discrimination in society and dissented towards the forces behind this inequality. In the due course of time, they attained the status of individual spirituality without becoming part of any of the numerous sects in currency. Their spiritual knowledge and poetic talent had reflections of their personality with early saints like Kabir or Ravidas. In the early days, Ditt Singh established a small establishment where his disciples came to seek his blessings and the same was true with Kishan Singh Arif and Dharam Das Arif. These fine poets and noted saints of the times attained vast popularity through their powerful poetry. The Gulabdasis were a very learned community and they were active participants in such a changing modern socio-

textual community. They had diverse choices in their philosophical thoughts which comprised Advaita, Bhakti and Sufi ideas. These were the core ideas which were diversely deeply rooted in the north Indian religious tradition.

Kishan Singh Arif and Dharam Das Arif Both travelled far away and attained practical knowledge of lands and people; though Dharam Das and Kishan Singh remained unmarried and settled in a different place than their birthplaces, Ditt Singh settled down in his own village as a completely family man. The given inspection of their life and poetry shows that they came from the same sect and theological understanding. The North Indian religious tradition was made the basis for their understanding of society and religion. Even after joining as reformists, these three poets were contradictory at one stage and complimentary and supplementary to each other. Their roots of religious tradition in which they trained and strengthened their pen against regressive and oppressive forces were integrated into them. They were more vocal in their poetry and boldly rejected the dominant hierarchical social order, and caste discrimination and owned religious pluralism. However, Giani Ditt Singh became a Sikh ideologue and at one point of time, he faced loads of caste discrimination. On the whole, they spoke against every sort of hegemony and discrimination. As they themselves were rejected by the mainstream religion, they eventually became the voice of all those who were rejected and suppressed. The Gulabdasi sect and its contribution becomes more important in the context of 19th century Punjab when communalism began to raise its ugly head and the specter of communalism began to haunt Punjabi sensibilities. In such times, the Gulabdasis further pushed the idea of the diffused religious identity based on the great Punjabi tradition of pluralism.

To place Gulabdasis in a single context is the act of delimiting and minimising their legacy. The divergent saint for the reformists had diverse disciples who came from different religious traditions like Muslims, Hindus and Sikhism. Interestingly, Gulabdasis did not define and concretized their identity which enriched the popular religiosity and vernacular religious tradition in colonial Punjab. The sect of Gulabdasis became the source of religious movement in colonial Punjab. It reconstituted religion and tradition in the domain of vernacular. It produced female scholars beyond the barriers of society. After Piro, the sect of Gulabdas had given the space and produced

another female scholar who objected to the regressive ideas of caste, patriarchy and religious fundamentalism. The Gulabdasis revived the great religious tradition of the Punjab through their literary work and contributed to giving Punjabi the status of a literary language. After the partition of the Punjab in 1947, the sect has undergone a number of changes in terms of the followers, organization and spatial expansion. After losing its headquarter Chathianwala in Pakistan, the sect has tried to relocate itself by claiming and establishing certain new centres which again, have diverse practices based on the composition of the following and the location of the center. The fusion of diverse practices and amalgamation of different religious symbols of the mainstream religions can be seen in the tangible heritage of the Gulabdasi Deras.

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GULABDASIS: RELIGION, SECT AND SOCIETY IN COLONIAL PUNJAB

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CONCLUSION

The Punjab has a diverse geography, culture, and religious tradition. The vast land of Punjab has the tradition of adopting various tribes, cultures, and religious faiths and synthesizing them. The diversity, fluidity and pluralism remained the essence of the Punjab. It is the fertile land which produced the brotherhood, cultural syncretism, and religious pluralism. In this region, devotion comprises the idea of dissent which further occupied the domain of love. Shaivism, Shaktism, Nanakpanthis, Udasis, Nirmalas, and Sewa Panthis minimized the homogeneity of mainstream religions. When the Sufi, Yogi, Nath and other such faiths interacted with mainstream religions, they deconstructed the form of religion, culture and society. They constructed new genres in the domain of vernacular. However, the Saints of the Bhakti movement made the bond strong between the different religious traditions. Guru Nanak defined the religion as one which once again integrated Punjab's religious tradition. The oneness of the religion was the basis of the religious tradition which denied the boundaries of identities. The great religious traditions and their historically evolved common indigenous culture constituted a pluralistic culture. The cultural matrix of Punjab is a 'historically evolved habitat' where syncretism and shared veneration formed the bedrock of Punjabi social life.

The sect is defined as divergent faith from the main conventional movement or the mainstream religious establishment. It is a group of people who have separated from the larger community, who are nonconformists by disposition, and who adhere to somewhat different beliefs and observances (usually labelled as heretical). In Punjab, the 'sects' are also known as sampradayas, panths, or deras, which are the groupings of people sewn together based on specific doctrinal and philosophical inclinations. In the nineteenth century, there were numerous sects operational in the different parts of the Punjab, and Sikhism was rightly seen as a conglomeration of sects. It was during this period that the Gulabdasi sect emerged as a new faith which had the reflection of this religious tradition. The texts of Gulabdasis and their contexts speak itself a shift in Punjabi culture. This was the vernacular shift in the Punjab religious tradition and culture. The process of vernacularization was not an accidental but a serious, purposeful, and conscious effort in the Punjabi literary domain which was deeply

affected by religion. The Gulab Das and his texts were highly absorbed in the devotional religious tradition of the region. The public memory of Gulab Das has flourished at the heart of Punjabi public culture through the *qissas* genre produced by his disciples. They praised their Guru in the starting verses. This literary process and prolific pen of Gulab Das made him a literary Guru in the South Asian religious tradition. He usually used mixed languages mostly the popular Sadhukari or Sadh Bhasha which remained *lingua franca* of the North Indian Saint tradition. It is interlocutor with Braj, Punjabi and Urdu. Sometimes it comprises a greater part of the Sikh inheritance in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries in relation to Sikh scripture. The poetry of Gulabdasis did not remain limited only to oral narration but his theological and philosophical ideas were transmitted and elaborated through the writing and performances in the public domain.

The North- Indian religious tradition shaped and sharpened the poetic personality of Gulab Das and made him a saint or Guru. The south Asian scholarship classifies Gulab Das as a Bhakti poet. However, this classification minimizes his diverse domain of religious tradition. The Gulabdasis rejected external identity and allowed as they wish to retain uncut hair or the shorn, shaven look (*kes* or *mund*), no sectarian garb or clear distinction (*bhekh or abhekh*). They rejected inequality based on caste, gender and religion. The texts of Gulab Das are potentially valuable for envisaging Gulab Das's social context. In his literary milieu, Gulab Das strictly spoke against the pride of the body and *bhekh* (dress), or haughtiness a sectarian garb bestowed. In practice, he refused to adopt any sectarian garb and gave freedom to his disciples to dress as they pleased. He remained well dressed up and adorned with weapons, riding a horse, and sitting royally. He wrote against the drag of desire and warned not to fall under the spell of sexual need. But he openly lived with a woman who was earlier a prostitute, despite the contentiousness this relationship brought into his life.

During the period of Gulab Das, colonial modernity in Punjab came into being. Gradually, the modes of communication were going to be changed. The print medium enforced and influenced politics and the 'public sphere'. During the lifetime of Gulab Das, a lithographed print of Gulab Chaman was not published. Even there is no

reference regarding the Dera of the guru at Chathianwala being affected by the changes taking place with print culture. By 1870, the young disciples of Gulab Das indulged and were affected by print culture. In this transition period, the sects remained the main centres of learning, and writing and spread the idea of religion in society. These sects constructed the ecumene that fed the system of royal patronage, shrink the supremacy of elites, and clergy and enhanced indignity in the sphere of education, the idea of religion and literary production in vernacular language.

Gulab Das is called a bhakti saint poet with good reason. He composed confidently in a vernacular language rather than another. His compositions display enthusiastic praise for God, heartfelt longing for the elusive divine presence and sheer delight in ecstatic worship. He asserts the irrelevance of caste for proper devotion, and he cites the references for his support. Another way of envisioning Gulab Das in a historical context is through depictions of inter-caste disputes in Punjab. The hagiographical episodes portray Gulab Das interacting with untouchables and consequently having his purity called into question. Gulab Das's Punjabi literary production during a period of the colonial state and Ranjit Singh's rule and his challenging engagements with untouchables (in discourse or in the face) are two such examples.

It would be misleading to identify Gulab Das definitively as belonging to a particular philosophical school. Themes of dualism and utter devotion to God are encompassing in his writings, but Gulab Das does not explicate these by systematically laying out his position and counter-positions. His compositions display a kind of vernacular Advaita. Therefore, to categorize Gulab Das in the domain of a particular school of thought, it is suggested that it is preferable to envision him as engaging in an Indic counterpart to occasional rather than systematic theology. He dealt with issues as they arose, making no attempt to construct a thoroughgoing system. The aim in nearly all of Gulab Das's writings is more polemic than apologetic.

Gulab Das left his spiritual and textual lineage. Conventionally, Gulab Das had no clear association with a royal court and no adherence to a particular philosophical school. He produced an enormously diverse range of compositions and was prominent as quite unorthodox and became a liberal in nature. The life of Gulab Das may shed

light on part of early modern South Asia as well as on the vernacular society and religion outside the royal courts. The piety was not submitted before the state by Gulab Das.

The Gulabdasis localized the religious tradition which extended the discourse of vernacularity from literature and language to the domain of religion and culture. The poets, disciples and saints of Gulabdasi sect challenged the elite society, royal courts, and colonialism. They continued the legacy of the religious, literary, and cultural traditions of the Punjab. The sect of Gulabdas remained the centre of learning and education even in the colonial period. The sect of Guabdasis had noted saints in the above domain. The sect continued and strengthened the Arif tradition of Punjab. Three poets are most important to discuss who emerged between the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century Punjab. These scholar intellectuals extended the textual and spiritual lineage of the sect in particular and represented the intellectual literary tradition of the Punjab in general. Kishan Singh Arif (1836- 1900), Dharam Das Arif (1866-1918) and Ditta Ram alias Giani Ditt Singh (1850-1901) learned and trained in the sect of Gulabdasi and the disciples of Gulab Das. Later they become noted poets, polemicists, and journalists and Ditt Singh even became the primary orator of the Singh Sabha movement. Poetry and contemplation were the common feature of these poets which were the synonyms of religious and secular integration. These integrated currents took them to the stage of Brahmgyani. These poets emphasized moral and ethical ideas though Kishan Singh Arif apparently had a more liberal approach. Their devotion did not limit to morality. They questioned caste and class-based discrimination in society and dissented towards the forces behind this inequality. In the due course of time, they attained the status of individual spirituality without becoming part of any of the numerous sects in currency. Their spiritual knowledge and poetic talent had reflections of their personality with early saints like Kabir or Ravidas. In the early days, Ditt Singh established a small establishment where his disciples came to seek his blessings and the same was true with Kishan Singh Arif and Dharam Das Arif. These fine poets and noted saints of the times attained vast popularity through their powerful poetry. The Gulabdasis were a very learned community and they were active participants in such a changing modern socio-

textual community. They had diverse choices in their philosophical thoughts which comprised Advaita, Bhakti and Sufi ideas. These were the core ideas which were diversely deeply rooted in the north Indian religious tradition.

Kishan Singh Arif and Dharam Das Arif Both travelled far away and attained practical knowledge of lands and people; though Dharam Das and Kishan Singh remained unmarried and settled in a different place than their birthplaces, Ditt Singh settled down in his own village as a completely family man. The given inspection of their life and poetry shows that they came from the same sect and theological understanding. The North Indian religious tradition was made the basis for their understanding of society and religion. Even after joining as reformists, these three poets were contradictory at one stage and complimentary and supplementary to each other. Their roots of religious tradition in which they trained and strengthened their pen against regressive and oppressive forces were integrated into them. They were more vocal in their poetry and boldly rejected the dominant hierarchical social order, and caste discrimination and owned religious pluralism. However, Giani Ditt Singh became a Sikh ideologue and at one point of time, he faced loads of caste discrimination. On the whole, they spoke against every sort of hegemony and discrimination. As they themselves were rejected by the mainstream religion, they eventually became the voice of all those who were rejected and suppressed. The Gulabdasi sect and its contribution becomes more important in the context of 19th century Punjab when communalism began to raise its ugly head and the specter of communalism began to haunt Punjabi sensibilities. In such times, the Gulabdasis further pushed the idea of the diffused religious identity based on the great Punjabi tradition of pluralism.

To place Gulabdasis in a single context is the act of delimiting and minimising their legacy. The divergent saint for the reformists had diverse disciples who came from different religious traditions like Muslims, Hindus and Sikhism. Interestingly, Gulabdasis did not define and concretized their identity which enriched the popular religiosity and vernacular religious tradition in colonial Punjab. The sect of Gulabdasis became the source of religious movement in colonial Punjab. It reconstituted religion and tradition in the domain of vernacular. It produced female scholars beyond the barriers of society. After Piro, the sect of Gulabdas had given the space and produced

another female scholar who objected to the regressive ideas of caste, patriarchy and religious fundamentalism. The Gulabdasis revived the great religious tradition of the Punjab through their literary work and contributed to giving Punjabi the status of a literary language. After the partition of the Punjab in 1947, the sect has undergone a number of changes in terms of the followers, organization and spatial expansion. After losing its headquarter Chathianwala in Pakistan, the sect has tried to relocate itself by claiming and establishing certain new centres which again, have diverse practices based on the composition of the following and the location of the center. The fusion of diverse practices and amalgamation of different religious symbols of the mainstream religions can be seen in the tangible heritage of the Gulabdasi Deras.