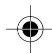

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Situating Popular Veneration

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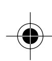

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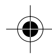


Situating Popular Veneration*

Yogesh Snehi

Medieval Punjab constitutes an important period for any critical analysis of debate on religion. However, the overwhelming perspective on religion in Punjab emerges out of the Tat-Khalsa trope on the region's historiography that seeks to limit the region's history between two seminal dates—from the birth of Guru Nanak in 1469 to the fall of the Ranjit Singh's kingdom in 1839.[1] Explorations in the 'Medieval' are thus significant for a critique of existing historiography that projects backward the modern territorial and ethnic boundaries, which emerged after the reorganisation of the province in 1966, on pre-partition Punjab, hence producing narrow ethnicity-oriented discourses. These two dates are also significant points of contacts between two political milieus, first the rising predominance of Mughal authority and second the strengthening of British presence in Punjab. These two dates thus fit well in the British imperialist imagination of region's history.[2]

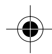
* Revised version of a lecture delivered at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 18 February 2014.

[1] In the aftermath of the demolition of Babri Masjid, Eaton argues how contemporary politics defines the nature of periodization and dramatically brought the late twentieth century Indians face-to-face with their pre-colonial past. He quotes Shahid Amin who later said, 'We all live today in a 1026–1528–1992 to the present, and not in the 1757–1885–1947 of the past. In other words, the critical reference points for thinking about South Asian history were no longer the British colonial period, but a much longer period of time commencing with Mahmud of Ghazna and continuing to, and beyond, the destruction of the Babri Masjid' (2002: 1).

[2] One of the earliest of colonial writings by Cunningham (1853) constructs the history of Sikhs from the time of Guru Nanak (which he calls the 'origin of Sikh nation') till the battle of the Sutlej with Ranjit Singh.

Besides, the production of Sikh nationalist history (juxtaposed with the history of the region) has been mobilized for the political present in the past several decades, and 'shows no indication of losing a privileged discursive position in representations of and by the community' (Murphy 2007: 346). Thus, instead of producing analytical model of discourses, linear narrative on Sikh–Mughal relations as a religious conflict, Singh Sabha and Gurdwara reform unproblematically reproduce colonial historiography, one which the scholars invariably sought to critique. Oberoi remarks that the historiography of the Sikh experience in the nineteenth-century rituals and quotidian practices that constituted the Sikh tradition is based on two principles, one of absence and the other of negation (Oberoi 1992: 363). Like the European, they began a journey in search of 'authentic' texts so that the 'correct' articles of faith could be established. Much like the European scholars or late nineteenth-century Sikh reformers, contemporary scholarship tends to either ignore vast terrains of Sikh life in the nineteenth century or views it as a superfluous addition that has to be ignored (ibid.: 365). Thus, official Sikh historiography completely undermines the role that Nath *panth* and Sufism play in shaping Sikh beliefs and practices, and instead 'establishes that Sikhs were delivered from the bondage of these un-Sikh beliefs by the intervention of the late nineteenth century Singh Sabha movement' (ibid.: 364).

Thus, the Sikh literati who emerged under the shadows of the Raj were powerfully influenced by the European discourse on their religion and in due course began to exhibit a similar intolerance toward many aspects of the Sikh tradition (ibid.: 365). The following discussion will seek to engage with some crucial intellectual debates between Naths, Sufis and Bhaktas (Nanak in particular) to argue that despite the polemics of philosophical abstraction, there exists a vibrant narrative thread between these three traditions which defines the contours of popular veneration in contemporary times. The author also seeks to argue that the evolution of Sufi and Sikh traditions in Punjab cannot be fully appreciated without understanding their dialectics with Naths and vice-versa. Further, it is only through the trope of everyday that



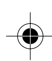
we can appreciate the interplay of interactive traditions of medieval India in the lived trajectories of contemporary popular veneration.

Approaches to Religion in the History

Academic discourses on religion in modern India have predominantly searched for 'essence' of religious tradition by analysing their 'source' and 'original components'. When this 'source' gets recognized, religion is ahistorically established in its 'pure and unchanging essence'. This largely Protestant conception of religion then seeks to explain the 'foreign imports' and 'influences' as derivates from the 'original'. In the broader context of comparative study of religion, Carl Ernst believes that this approach also perpetuates a 'concept of religions as ideologies competing for world domination, and any evidence of dependence on foreign influences is a sure sign of weakness in this game. This model is fine if one is engaging in missionary activity, but for an analytical appreciation of the nature of religion, it is seriously flawed' (Ernst 2005: 15–16).

In the intellectual history since the Enlightenment, the term 'influence' thus assumed a major category of analysis. A historian of ideas was supposed to simplify 'complicated philosophical systems into their basic components, much like a chemist reducing compounds to elements' (ibid.: 16–17). These ideas were further complicated by Orientalist scholarship produced after colonial encounter with ancient civilizations of China and India and under the garb of frames like 'mystic east', produced a highly problematic historiography of Indic civilization.[3] European Christianity was initially exempted from such investigation and

[3] The far-fetched was sought to be explained through self-assured 'Romantic pronouncements about the essential identity of all Oriental (i.e., non-European) religions in their Indian core. The rough edges of particularity, smoothed out by reducing formulations to a doctrinal core, could be safely disregarded as accidental. The real meaning of religious phenomena was to be found in the exercise of theoretical imagination through comparison and detection of sources' (Ernst 2005: 18).



there was an attempt to view non-Christian cultures in terms of their 'difference' from the former. 'This 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 a disingenuous comparison intended to reveal which religion was superior.'[4]

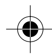
The influence of Oriental scholarship continues to occupy an important place in the study of religious history, particularly in its relation to Hindus and Muslims in pre-independence South Asia. Eaton quotes from Gerald James Larson's *India's Agony over Religion* to show how Indian history continues to be problematically serialized as a 'sequence of distinct cultural 'layers', rather like the sedimentary strata successively deposited on the ocean floor. The earliest and deepest layers, building up from the 'Indus Valley' to the 'Indic (Hindu-Buddhist-Jain)', are seen as indigenous and authentically South Asian, whereas the more recent layers—the 'Indo-Islamic' and 'Indo-Anglian'—as alien and fundamentally unassimilable. Indeed, from the late tenth century, we are told, 'intrusions' by Muslims 'became serious threats to the independence of the subcontinent'.[5]

In a recent introduction to a paper, Larson (2014) once again reinstates his thesis on religious divide in South Asia:

> Whatever else one might want to say about Hindu and Muslim traditions in South Asia since partition in 1947 (and

[4] 'If, however, other religions could be shown to be hybrids composed of various "Oriental" influences, that was a testimony to their dependent and inferior nature. Despite the later progress of historical research into the relation of Christianity to the cultural and religious world into which it was born, the colonial legacy of ambivalence toward "Oriental religions" still lingers. In addition, it is also important to recognise the extent to which Romantic concepts of the "mystic East" were a screen for debates about religion in the European Christian context. Problematic issues coded under the names of mysticism and pantheism could be projected in this way onto a foreign Oriental substratum' (Ernst 2005: 18–19).

[5] Eaton 2002: 2, cited from Larson 1995: 53.

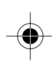


> the later emergence of Bangladesh in 1971), in many ways the most important observation is that partition represents a fundamental paradigm shift in religious sensibility among many Hindus and Muslims in South Asia since independence. ... Partition was not simply an ambivalent political event. It was also a profound and ambivalent religious event in which masses of Hindus and Muslims recognized, many for the first time, that Hindu religious sensibilities could not coexist with Muslim sensibilities in a modern, democratic polity.[6]

Eaton (2014) responds to Larson by raising some fundamental methodological questions. He says that while historians are accustomed to 'empirically' gather evidence and build argument 'from the ground up', Larson seems to have followed 'downwards' reasoning from a 'normative model'. He adds:

> For him (Larson) ... South Asian religions can be understood as if they were recipes in a cookbook authored by some unidentified master chef. Thus the recipe for Islam, as presented in the piece, consists of one God, a master text, a master historical narrative, a master community, a credo ('orthodoxy'), and the sacred space of Mecca. The Hindu religion, by contrast, consists of many or no deities, many texts, many narratives, an absence of a credo, and a plurality of normatively hierarchical mini-communities. Without even getting to the question of whether Larson has his recipes right, the problem for the historian or the anthropologist—

[6] Larson goes on to suggest that there has been a significant change in religious sensibilities of communities in post-partition South Asia and identifies some salient of these new features: (1) the recognition that Hinduism and Islam have now emerged as distinct cultural traditions functioning in modern democratic polities that require practitioners in both nations to take account of all sorts of minority religious traditions in their respective environments; (2) the recognition that the largest majority religious traditions (Hindu in India, Muslim in Pakistan) have had from the beginning up to the present moment great difficulty in accommodating their religious minorities even after the major surgeries of Partition; and, most important, (3) the recognition for the need of new civil ideologies, both political and religious, that will permit the new nation-states to coexist peacefully in the South Asian region (Larson 2014: 7).



> both of them trained to keep their noses to the ground and not in a cookbook—is that people do not always follow normative recipes, often preferring to concoct their own religious traditions. Or, they might disagree over which recipe is 'right'. Indeed, they might not even be aware of the existence of a recipe, or in any event of a single one that applies exclusively to themselves, a condition that fairly describes the greater part of South Asia's population before the eighteenth century. Larson appears to be anachronistically backprojecting onto several millennia of South Asian history his own modernist understanding of religion in general, as well as of specific religious traditions (Eaton 2014: 306).

Eaton thus critiques Larson for reinstating Huntington's (1993) problematic theory of clash-of-civilizations and projecting it backwards to the tenth century, 'construing an alien Islam as intruding on an indigenous Hinduism. Such a move, however, prevents him from considering how religious traditions emerge, disappear, or evolve over time, how they adapt to different cultural environments, freely assimilating some bits and pieces of those environments, but not others' (ibid.: 307).

Religion has similarly remained a problematic category for Indian academia. For a significant period in post-colonial India, religion remained outside the domain of historians' investigation. Thus even while 'religion' defined the complex political contours of the nascent state, it was sought to be critiqued or remained outside the historiography of 'mode of production' or the purview of secular historians. In one of his early writings on culture and consciousness in modern India, Panikkar underlines that in 'contemporary India religion as an ideology has 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, the illusion that masks that reality is to be removed. Developing a critique of religion therefore becomes an immediate political task (1990: 7).

This was despite the fact that religion remained a popular medium in the communal discourse and only strengthened

Oriental assumption on some fundamental problems in Indian historiography; particularly in relation to Islam and 'medieval' in Indian history and particularly in the context of Punjab, issues of invasion, conversion and martyrdom. Neeladri Bhattacharya raises a pertinent issue here. Does secular history have to focus only on the political and underestimate the shaping power of religion? Is it not possible to look at the mutual articulation of religious and political? He goes further to ask whether the narratives of religion and power in pre-modern times can be so easily separated (2008: 65)? While Neeladri raises some crucial question here yet his over-emphasis on relationship between religion and power limits the possibility of religion as a discourse which is autonomous of power structures and critical of the latter as well.

The predominance and centrality of the 'archive' in historian's craft also did not encourage forays into some very significant aspects of caste/dalit consciousness which were in a way also contrary to the nationalist as well as Marxist frames of writing Indian history.[7] While highlighting the problems of writing dalit histories through the present paradigm of historical method, Dipesh Chakrabarty, for instance, poses a paradox between the role of evidence and contextualising myths in academic procedures (2008: 157). He also underlines the possibility of multiple narratives of the same event and the growing uneasiness among many historians over the dangers of relativism in history writing (ibid.: 164–65).[8] However, despite the current debates on identity, one major concern of academic engagement among historians continues to be an interpretation of Hindu-Muslim question—a reflection in the backdrop of continued incidents of riots in contemporary India.[9]

[7] For a critical reading on exclusion of caste from historical narrative, see Menon (2006).

[8] Shahid Amin's (1995) presents an interesting example of complex narrativity of an event.

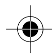
[9] Badri Narayan's (2009) research, for instance, shows how Dalits and their histories have recently been subsumed into the communal narrative in contemporary Uttar Pradesh.

One major question that the historians continue to address is the 'othering' of communities and ethnicities that is being continuously produced and reproduced in the urban and rural landscapes of Indian society. For instance, historians have forayed into the deconstruction of the Hindu identity in ancient India produced by colonial scholarship and sought to disentangle the problematic questions of religious and communal identity.[10] Thus while engaging with the term Hinduism, Romila Thapar underlines it as a modern concept 'resulting from a series of choices made from a range of beliefs, rituals and practices that were collated into creating a label for this religion'[11] (2014: 138). She adds that the reformulation of Hinduism in the colonial times drew more heavily from the daily routine of life, its social sources, than from the philosophical (ibid.: 139). In a further comparison with Semitic religions, Thapar says:

> 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 see themselves as part of the historical process of the unfolding of the single religion even though they may have branched off from the mainstream' (2014: 139–140).

[10] See for instance, Talbot (1995), Pandey (1999) and Thapar (1989).

[11] Thapar adds that 'unlike the Semitic religions (with which the comparison is often made, although the comparison could also be with Buddhism and Jainism closer home), which began with a structure at a point in time and evolved both in relation to and within that structure, and as reactions to historical situations, Hinduism (and I use the word here in its contemporary meanings) because of its fluidity, has taken shape more closely in relation to the latter. This took the form of variations articulated in a range of sects that gave identity belief and practices. This is partly why some prefer to use the phrase "the Hindu religions" (in the plural) rather than Hinduism' (2014: 138).



This problematic 'othering' of Semitic religions, while deconstructing the term Hinduism, invariably orientalises textual assumptions regarding Islam in South Asia and undervalues religious practices.[12] Eaton consistently emphasises that the reductive and theoretical perspectives only reproduce the limited arguments produced by Euro-American theorists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who habitually saw the world as divided into self-contained and mutually exclusive 'civilisations' (2002: 5). Such ahistorical approaches over-emphasise civilisation's 'place of origin'. 'In the case of Islam, then, scholars accordingly focus on seventh-century Arabia to discover Islam's 'essential nature'. Stereotypes associating Islam conceptually with war and geographically with the Arab world persist with remarkable tenacity, as does the quest for civilisational essences and origins (ibid.: 5).[13]

This scenario has long persisted within the historical debates on religion in Punjab which has not just been the earliest centres in the northern hemisphere to receive Islam and its repository of Sufi shrines and practices, but has also provided a fertile ground for the emergence of Sikh religion. Both these traditions had strong critical engagement with existing Nath practices, yet continuously redefined notions of piety. It is this discursive

[12] Thapar, however, clarifies that the yardstick of the Semitic religions that has been the conscious and subconscious challenge in the modern recreation of Hinduism would be inappropriate to an understanding of what existed before (2014: 141).

[13] Similar to Thapar's views (2014), Eaton also underlines that in spite of the variety of the south Asian Muslim communities from which they sprang they shared common elements. 'First, they were all discursive traditions, in the sense that they were rooted in written or oral genres that had sufficient historical depth to lend them the weight of authority. And second, they were Islamic traditions inasmuch as they all related themselves in some way to the Qur'an or the Traditions of the Prophet' (2002: 6). But at the same time he says that by roughly around 1750, 'Islam had become as Indian as any other religious tradition of the subcontinent. Yet at the same time one sees their connectedness with a worldwide religious community, such that the Indo-Muslim culture that emerged in this period ended up as authentically Islamic as anything to be found in the Middle East' (ibid.: 19).

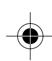
dialectic of religious practices in Punjab which makes the region a fascinating subject of investigation.This thread of argument is discussed later in the paper. However, historical scholarship on the region has predominantly retained oriental discourses on religion, identity and practices. In the context of Sikh religion, Pashaura Singh says:

> The current academic discourse is, however, still theoretically limited as the majority of scholarly works follow with little deviation what we may call the meta-narrative of the Khalsa (that Sikh identity most recognizable as Sikh, one complete with the five corporate symbols known as the Five Ks) and note other ways of being a Sikh whether explicitly or not, as deviations from the 'normative' Khalsa trajectory. The privileging of a normative Sikh tradition from which others diverge is in itself a Sikhism refracted through a western Orientalist lens (as is the term Sikh-ism) and speaks nothing of the Sikh tradition's rich, plural, and inclusive past (2013: 27).

But the problem with Singh is his over-emphasis on the doctrinal precepts of Sikh tradition and hence, while critiquing Harjot Oberoi's emphasis on Sanatanis to argue for fluidity of Sikh identity, he quotes Grewal (1997) and accuses the former of precluding the 'possibility of any (Sikhism's) meaningful linkages with the past'. These polemics on the definition of tradition are largely dialects of methodological questions and epistemological interpretations.[14] Thus while historians continue to habitually produce a neat and linear narrative of Punjab history, they invariably undervalue the complex and overlapping cultural narratives of the past produced within the social history of one community.[15] Thus while discussing periods of transition, historiography remains entangled with unproblematic narration

[14] For a detailed reading on these questions see Ballantyne (2002), Oberoi (1995), Singh (2010), and Murphy (2012).

[15] For a discussion on the emergence of popular tradition of Panj Pir veneration in Punjab through complex intersection of religion, territoriality, trade networks, and locality, see Snehi (2009).



of the implication of invasions and martyrdom in the history of medieval Punjab.

Nath, Sufi and Bhakti Milieu

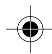
From the eleventh century, the Nath *panth* had started occupying predominant presence in the region and the Nath *yogi*s began to spread throughout northern India, from their centre at Peshawar to all parts of Central Asia and Iran influencing both *qalandar*s and Sufis. All Naths were hostile to brahmanical notion of caste distinctions and ritual purity (Rizvi 2012: 332–33). Followers of a monotheistic belief centred on the veneration of formless Shiva, Naths initiated members of all castes, including those outside the Hindu caste system, such as Chandalas and sweepers into their non-hierarchical order (ibid.: 332). Coincidently, the arrival of Sufis in India took place not long after the Nath or Kanphata yogis became organised in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Naths were free to drop in for meals at Sufi hospices, which in turn were open to any and all visitors. Moreover, in a country where cremation was the preferred funeral method, both groups practiced burial; Sufi tombs, to the untutored eye, must have fit the model of the lingam shrines or *samadhi*s set up over yogis, who were customarily buried in the lotus position. The similarity between yogis and Sufis extended to the point that the heads of Nath yogi establishments became known by the Persian term *pir*, the common designation for a Sufi master (Ernst 2005: 24).

Gorakhnath is said to have founded the ascetic Nath Sampradaya and to have been the first teacher of Haṭha Yoga. Several Sanskrit texts on Haṭha Yoga are attributed to Gorakhnath as well as an extensive corpus of vernacular verses in the tradition of *nirguna bhakti* (Mallinson 2011: 5). Naths live by a *dhuni* or sacred fire. The central object of worship in several monasteries, and for the itinerant *jamat*, was the *patr*, a pot containing items emblematic of the Naths: the *singnadjaneu*, earrings, a *rudraksamala*, and a chillum, the clay pipe used for smoking cannabis (ibid.: 2). The *Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati*, and some

authentic works of Gorakhnath's followers formed the basis of the doctrines of the puritanical Naths and offered a common ground for the exchange of ideas with such Sufis as Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri and Baba Farid. Discussions on the conception of the Ultimate Reality enhanced the mutual respect of the Naths and the Sufis (Rizvi 2012: 333).

There is a long and complex history of Muslim interest in yoga. It back 1,000 years to the famous scholar al-Biruni (d. 1048), who not only wrote a major Arabic treatise on Indian sciences and culture, but also translated a version of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras into Arabic (Ernst 2013: 59). Sufis were particularly engaged with Nath yogic text *Amritkunda (The Pool of Nectar),* one of the most significant treatise on Hatha Yoga dealing with complicated psycho-physical set of techniques of yogic practices. These practices include divination by control of breath through the left and right nostrils, summoning female spirits that can be identified as *yogini*s, and performing meditations on the *chakra* centres accompanied by recitation of Sanskrit mantras (Ernst 2005: 21). Laying emphasis on the human body as the microcosm of the macrocosm, the *Amritakunda* deals at some length with the importance of this belief. The work goes on to prescribe exercises by which one could achieve the Nath-yogic goal of transubstantiation of the body into a state of *samadhi* (Rizvi 2012: 336).

Amritkunda has a wide circulation among Sufi circles and was translated in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and later in Urdu. It is believed that it was translated into Persian and Arabic by Qazi Ruknuddin Samarqandi at Lakhnauti in the thirteenth century who was initiated into Hatha-Yoga principles by a Siddha called Bhojar Brahman. The work was later translated into Persian. A further Arabic version was again prepared by a Brahman from Kamrup, apparently in collaboration with a Muslim scholar. This version was re-translated into Persian by Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus Shattari in the sixteenth century (ibid.: 2012: 335). It was later adapted as a short Persian text *Risala-i-Wujudiyya* (The *Treatise on the Human Body*) on Yoga and



meditation attributed to the founder of Chishti Sufi order, Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti (d. 1236) (Ernst 2012: 168). The figure of Muinuddin is important as a symbol for the encounter between Muslims and Hindus, characterised by deep appreciation of India's spiritual and aesthetic heritage (Kugle 2012: 174).

Amritkunda kept inspiring an entire generation of Chishti Sufi mystics and found a significant expression among a prominent Chishti-Sabiri mystic Abdul Quddus Gangohi (d. 1537) who was probably more familiar with the yoga of the Naths than anyone else in that order. He also composed a treatise called *Rushdnama* or *The Book of Guidance* with considerable yogic content. Rizvi quotes Shaikh Abdul Quddus to identify intriguing similarities between Nath and Sufi ideas and practices. Nath *ultisadhna* was equivalent to Sufi *salat-i-makus and namaz-i-makus*. Similarly Alakh-Nath, *Pranayama and Dwaitadwaita-vilakshana-vada* had parallels with Sufi Alakh Niranjan, *pas-i-anfas* and *Wahdat al-Wujud*. Further, while formless representation of Onkar was the basis of *pranayama* in Nath tradition, Onkar in Sufism was achievable through *zikr* (rememberance) (2012: 336–342). Thus, contrary to Orientalist expectations, Sufi engagement with yoga was not to be found at the historical beginnings of the Sufi tradition, and it was most highly developed, unsurprisingly, in India (Ernst 2005: 21).

The relationship between Islam and yoga gets further complicated by the participation of Muslims in the Nath *yogi* tradition. Out of the thirteen principal Nath sub-orders described by Briggs, one, the Rawal or Nagnath order, located in the Punjab, consisted of Muslims despite being originally derived from Shiva (2009: 66 and 71, quoted in Ernst: 2005: 38).[16] Many of these interactions evolved from a dialectical manoeuvring of borrowing and confrontation, dialogue and triumph, conversation and

[16] A similar contemporary parallel exists in the context of contemporary Nasqbandi tradition. The *silsila* was known for critique of Mughal state's closeness to 'Hindus'. But there now exists Hindu branches of the order (Dahnhardt 2007).

conversion, appreciation and critique. But the most significant component of this process was the way in which Nath practices were assimilated and subsumed in Sufi practices leading to a unique residue in the realm of popular practices. This point will be discussed later, but before that there is a brief discussion on similar debates between Nath Siddha and Guru Nanak.

Among the eleven major Nath yogis of the subcontinent, six lived or settled in Punjab. The popularity of Gorakhnath and Balnath/Balaknath/Jalandharnath (associated with Tilla Jogian near Peshawar was recognised as the headquarters of the Naths until Partition), Chaurangi Nath (son of King Devpal of Bengal, Puran Bhagat's principal shrine in at Sialkot), Carpat Nath (who lived in Chamba),[17] Ratan Nath[18] (thirteenth century, a disciple of Gorakhnath and famous both as a Nath and a Sufi, he lived at Nepal and Bathinda), and Mastnath (eighteenth century, who lived at Asthal Bohar in Rohtak), point to a significant presence of Nath influence in the region. There were many other *dera*s which were spread across the province in medieval times and patronised by the Mughal state.[19]

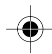
The late-nineteenth and early twentieth century discourses around Sikh history were involved in rhetoric to prove the novelty and sovereignty in the intellectual ascendancy of Guru Nanak from Sant tradition.[20] This came predominantly in response to the subsuming arguments of Arya Samaj and the Sanatan Sabha, and

[17] For a detailed reading on the jogis of Chaparnath see Sharma (2006).

[18] Bouillier and Khan (2009) have produced a complex narrative on the multiple identity of Ratan Nath/Haji Ratan.

[19] Goswamy and Grewal (1967) have worked on one such shrine at Jakhbar (district Pathankot) and explored *madad-i-maash* received by this *dera*.

[20] In a similar context of influence of Islam on Nanak's teaching, Aquil critiques Grewal's (1996: 1–6) denial and remark that the Guru's ideas had 'a sure degree of originality' as they were a product of 'illumination' upon him. A more dispassionate scholarship of Mcleod (1998), he argues, recognised the importance of the religious heritage from which Nanak benefitted, but highlights the transformation of that inheritance by the Guru, leading to the formation of a new Sikh religion (Aquil 2011: 126–27).



led to fierce debates on whether 'Sikhs are Hindus'.[21] Most immediate and rigorous impact of this process was what Oberoi (1994) calls 'the construction of religious boundaries' whereby identities were sought to be sanitised, religious practices redefined and an entire corpus of Sikh literature was reinterpreted and purged of perceived non-Sikh influences. This debate not only gave prominence to text over tradition but also inspired a long-term investigation of Sikh Granth and ideals.[22] A significant repercussion of this shift was the growth of limited theological discourses and the demise of comparative studies on religious traditions in Punjab.[23]

A recent scholarship of Nayar and Sandhu (2007) on *Siddh Gost*, a discourse between the Nath yogis and Guru Nanak is a pleasant yet rare departure from this milieu. *Siddh Gost* forms a

[21] For an interesting debate on these issues, particularly Kahn Singh Nabha's (a prominent Singh Sabhaite) response to these debates, see Jones (1973) and Grewal (1999).

[22] Some of these debates, for instance, the authorship of *Dasam Granth* have now been critically studied by scholars like Rinehart (2011).

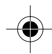
[23] Mandiar notes that 'for Sikh reformists this quest to extricate themselves from the negative stereotype of contemporary Hinduism was inextricably connected … with Ernest Trumpp's thesis that Sikhs, according to the testimony of their own scriptures, were Hindus, and that they shared ideologically, theologically, and ontologically a Hindu time and space. Trumpp's work served to accentuate the crisis for reformist Sikhs leading them to articulate their search for identity with questions like: were Sikhs Hindus? If not, what in fact were they? How could they provide evidence which would demonstrate what they claimed? On what basis could they redraw cultural boundaries that had become blurred?'(2005: 263). Reformers like Bhai Vir Singh's central technique, which is 'unmistakeably modernist' and hinges upon Macauliffe's thesis on *The Sikh Religion*, comprised a 'dual strategy of 'conceptual cleansing'. It worked on the one hand by breaking with prior traditions of interpretation that also shared cultural and intellectual experiences (Nirmala and Udasi traditions of interpretation influenced by Vedantic and Puranic sources) and on the other hand by implementing the peculiarly modern gesture of breaking with the past followed by the act of forgetting that one has made such a break. Specifically in Bhai Vir Singh's commentary, the meaning of the first syllable of the Mul Mantar, *ik onkar*, is defined by disavowing any conceptual association with the Hindu *om*' (ibid.: 270).

significant component of Sikh dialectics with contemporary religious milieu and outlines Guru Nanak's understanding of 'Ture' yoga. Composed by Guru Nanak, it is one of the many hymns (Var Ramkali *salok* 2–7 of *pauri* 12)[24] contained in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. While there remains ambiguity regarding the time and place of its composition, the encounter still remains important. Guru Nanak's encounters with the Nath yogis are further detailed in Bhai Gurdas's *Varan* and the various hagiographies about Guru Nanak's spiritual journey (*udasi*s) to the 'north country', where many followers of the Gorakhnath tradition lived.[25] *Puratan janam-sakhi* describes Guru's fifth journey, during which Guru Nanak is said to have met several Gorakhnathis (Nayar and Sandhu 2007: 48).

Schomer suggests that the Sants were closer to the heterodox religious traditions of India—the Buddhists, the Jains and the esoteric Shaivite tradition of the Nath yogis—than they are to orthodox mainstream of Vaishnava devotional religion. In the case of the Naths, there is a clear continuity of attitudes and themes, and the general scholarly consensus is that the Sants represent a synthesis of Vaishnava Bhakti and elements from the tradition of the Naths. The Sants also have many points of commonality with the Sufis, who were present in India from the twelfth century onwards and contributed to the religious environment in which the Sant tradition evolved (1987: 8). While the argument on the influence of the Sant tradition on the Sikh tradition has, for the

[24] The hymn is also cited in *Miharban janam-sakhi* 117 and can be viewed as a means of legitimising the hagiographical account of Guru Nanak's encounter with the Nath yogis.

[25] In contrast to Guru Nanak's hymns that refer to the Nath yogis (though without providing any historical information about his encounters with them) Bhai Gurdas's *Varan* and the hagiographies do provide descriptions of Guru Nanak's meetings with the Nath yogis. Bhai Gurdas's commentary on the *Guru Granth Sahib* describes Guru Nanak as having definitely met the Nath yogis or Nath *siddh*s (Varan I. 28–31). Guru Nanak is portrayed as having climbed up to Mount Sumera (regarded as the centre of the world according to mythological texts) (Nayar and Sandhu 2007: 50). However, the predominant belief also spelt by W.H. Mcleod contends that the *Siddh Gost* might have taken place at Achal Batala (ibid.: 55).



most part, been accepted, yet several traditional Sikh scholars contend that Guru Nanak was not, in actuality, influenced by the Nath tradition, basing their argument on the fact that Sikhism is founded on the path of the householder that values social involvement, such as selfless service (*seva*) (Nayar and Sandhu 2007: 105).

Nayar and Sandhu, however, exemplify that while Guru Nanak appropriates the Nath terminology of Hatha Yoga, he modifies it for the sake of teaching his own spiritual message. In presenting the spiritual path of self-renunciation while living in the world, Guru Nanak actually transforms the traditional system of yoga. Thus while Guru Nanak does use terms associated with the Nath tradition, he changes them to fit the larger context of his perspective on 'world' and 'liberation'. However, the very incorporation of the concepts from the Nath tradition suggests a certain degree of influence regardless of the modification of the terms by Guru Nanak in the larger context of Sikhism (2007: 106). A mid-seventeenth century account *Dabistan* speaks of Nanak's praise for Muslims, and also the avatars, gods, and goddesses of the Hindus, but he regarded them all as created beings, not the Creator. He denied the (possibility of) Descent of God into human soul or Union between God and man.[26] Nanak's philosophy emerged out of redefinition of the wider complex of religious traditions of his times where borrowing and critique went hand-in-hand.[27]

Thus, while Nanak significantly departs from Nath yogis on questions of renunciation, external symbols and Hatha Yoga, he appropriates and/or redefines the concepts like *sabad*, ultimate

[26] They say, he held the Muslims' rosary in his hand and put the Hindus' sacred thread on his neck. (He recited the formula of faith and offered prayers in the Muslim manner, and recited the *mantras* and *gayatri* and offered *puja* according to the Hindu religion) (Habib 2001: 62).

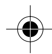
[27] Critiquing Mcleod's ruthless dissection of *janamsakhi* to recover the historical Guru Nanak, Simon Digby underlines that rather than rubbishing the Sikh hagiographic tradition it is significant to locate it within the predominant *tazkira* tradition (1970: 301–13).

reality, *sansar* and *maya* to propose the path of *gurmukh* or self-renunciation while 'living-in-this-world' and reconciling the two polarities of the ascetic and the householder ideals (Nayar and Sandhu 2007: 113–14). Equally significant are hagiographic narratives around Guru Nanak's travels and miracles at Kaba, discourse with deceased Sufi mystics and controversy over his death, which can be located in the prevailing repository of meanings, idioms, and templates also associated with Naths and other Sants, the frameworks of which defined aspects of divinity and devotion in medieval India.[28] It is thus important to note that despite political differences and violence which marked the latter phase of Mughal history, the mystical verses attributed to the thirteenth-century Chishti Sufi shaikh of Punjab, Farid-ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakar and included in the Guru Granth Sahib were not removed.[29]

Aditya Behl critiques the tendency among cultural historians of the period to list events, kings, battles, and literary and religious texts in chronological order, neatly divided into separate compartments such as Hindu and Muslim, and subdivided in each case into art, architecture, languages, and history. This compartmentalised history has made it difficult to account for, or even to discern, larger cultural processes or smaller episodes of interaction and assimilation of the everyday culture of Indian subcontinent (2012: 3). Thus, the literary and popular traditions show a remarkable resilience even in the wake of later hostility between Sikhs and Mughals. Bahuguna adds that 'if one has to look for interactions and encounters between Santism and Sufism, one must move beyond great Sufis and Sants and focus on the concerns, anxieties and aspirations of their followers during the course of sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' (2012: 223). Aquil further highlights that 'implicit in the detailed

[28] Simon Digby narrates several such parallels in the hagiographic accounts of Nath yogis (2006: 219–220).

[29] The Sikh scripture has over a hundred verses ascribed to Shaikh Farid, only slightly less than those credited to Kabir, for instance. In the Sikh and Punjabi traditions, Farid is venerated for his devotional poetry, included in the Guru Granth Sahib (Aquil 2011: 127–28).



treatment of Nanak in eighteenth century Urdu intellectual milieu of Nazir Akbarabadi's poetical works, as also in the hugely popular collection of essays, *Qisas-i-Hind*, and the politically charged compositions of Allama Iqbal, is shared cultural and religious heritage, which was getting ruptured for political and dogmatic reasons (2011: 138).

British Colonialism and the 'Identity' Conundrum

British colonialism induced a complex variant of social formation in Punjab. Agrarian changes, revenue policies and, administrative and juridical reorganisation that led to the commercialisation of agriculture, the narrow codification of customary laws, registration of private property in the name of male head of the family, seething agrarian distress and the invention of martiality to give impetus to young Punjabi recruitment to British Indian Army, had serious implications for the social milieu of Punjab.[30] Historians and anthropologists have further analysed the role that Census played in redefining the contours of religion and identity in India.[31] What historians have perhaps not attempted is to delineate the parallel process of colonialism and identity formation. The following discussion will place together the existing scholarship on colonialism and reform movements and argue that there is a strong correlation between these processes, each complementing the other at several historical junctures. Colonialism here means the structures of

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[30] For a detailed reading on structure and implication of colonialism in Punjab see Ali (1987), Talbot (1988) and Yong (2009). Punjab was also a special place for the British, and within the region the Sikhs were seen as a special. Nowhere else in colonial India was an entire community—numbering some 1,700,000 in 1881—so extensively co-opted by the ruling authorities. Central to this policy of co-option was the controlling connection with the Golden Temple, which, given the tenets and practices of the Sikh faith, had an importance for Sikhs greater than any single religious institution had among India's other religious communities—communities which lacked, in any case, the geographical concentration of the Sikhs (Kerr 1984: 151).

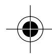
[31] For a fascinating reading on the role of Census in shaping social structures in India see Barrier (1981) and Cohn (1987).

governance both administrative and economic, as well as perspectives which influenced both the European and native writings.

The origins of the 'language' of reform in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth were a direct repercussion of the invention of 'tradition' and 'modernity' in the colonial discourse, thereby juxtaposing the binary division on native and British sensibilities respectively. In both the social and administrative spheres this resulted in vigorous debates on questions of identity, the modernity of which depended invariably on mimicking the missionary sensibilities of relationship between Church, state, and society. Most religious institutions, which until the early nineteenth century were highly localised, struggled to reorganise themselves. Reform inspired both centralising tendencies as well as distancing through redefinition of sacred texts, ritual performance, and reclaimation of shrine spaces.

The practice of Census left diverse strata of Indian society to the mercy of enumerators and colonial ethnographers who sought to map the notion of caste, race, tribe, and religious identities in India, replicated the demographic tools invented in the West.[32]

[32] The question on race, caste, tribe, and religion was included from the very first census 1872 in British India. Anthropologists were appointed as census commissioners of India and population was subjected to be classified into racial categories based on nationality, mixing of nationality, and even religious identities were based the basis of racial classification. The census tried to identify race within a religion and religion within a race. Race or ethnicity and religion were not two separate issues in British India like in US or British census. Religion has never been mixed with race or ethnicity in these two censuses. In census 1872, Indian population was divided in five broad categories—Non-Asiatic, Mixed Races, Exclusives of Natives of India, Asiatic, and Mohammedans. Nationality and religion, along with intermixing of races between Asiatic and Indians with that of Europeans defined as Eurasians, were the fundamental basis of racial classification in India. This broad classification was later abandoned and the purpose of race was mainly to separate the white or European people. After 1872 until the last British census in 1941, race was exclusively used for Christian population (further classified as European and Allied Races, Anglo-Indian and the Natives). The other religious groups were divided into caste and tribes (Bhagat 2003: 687–88).



These categories were unproblematically implemented and gradually presumed standard axioms of colonial enterprise. In the context of Africa, Mamdani points out that little has been done by nationalist and Marxist historians to historicise race and ethnicity as political identities undergirded and reproduced by the political legacy of colonialism (2001: 652).[33] This project was an important part of colonial discourse of homogenisation and systematisation where identities were sought to be refined and fixed within the frames often ascribed with religious identity. For the first time in Indian history problematic categories of majority and minority communities were determined. The introduction of competition for employment and political alignments created artificial ethno-religious solidarities. Reformers co-opted colonial ethnographic discourse and fiercely propagated fixed notion of religious identities. In the early twentieth century these issues led to the emergence of some heated debates among Singh Sabhaites and Arya Samajis on the notion Sikh/Hindu identity.[34]

Established in 1873, the Singh Sabha sought to reaffirm Sikh identity in the face of two threats: the perceived reversion to alleged 'Hindu' practices and the aggressive proselytising efforts of Arya Samaj[35] and Christian missionaries. By the end of the

[33] Races were considered a civilising influence, even if in different degrees, while ethnicities were considered to be in dire need of reform. Besides, while races were governed through civil laws, ethnicities were governed through customary laws. While civil law spoke of language of rights, customary laws spoke the language of tradition, of authenticity (Bhagat 2003: 654). In India this process culminated in the invention of 'caste' (Gautam 2011).

[34] For a detailed discussion on reform movements in Punjab see Jones (1989) and Linden (2008).

[35] Pashaura Singh unproblematically uses the phrase 'Hindu Arya Samaj', without highlighting the association of Sikhs with the movement until the controversy of the *shuddhi* crusade of *samaji*s. (2013: 18). Historians should be extremely cautious in usage of their relative terms in defining a milieu where identities were still fluid. Oberoi raises a significant problem here and says, 'It is all very well for historians to think, speak and write about Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism, but very rarely pause to consider if such clear-cut categories actually found expression in the consciousness, actions and cultural performances of the human actors they describe' (1994: 1).

nineteenth century the Tat ('Pure Essence') Khalsa, the dominant wing of the Singh Sabha, had eradicated the last traces of religious diversity within Sikh *panth* and established clear norms of belief and practices. In effect, they made the Khalsa tradition the standard of orthodoxy for all Sikhs during the colonial period. It was an 'essentialist reconstruction' of a uniform identity suitable for modern times (Singh 2013: 28). The British master discourse came to be mimicked by the native Indians in intimately undercutting the colonist agenda. Further, the new cultural elite among the Sikhs aspired to reach the apex of a 'more homogenous, less 'oral and popular' oriented, textually focused 'syndicated' tradition that roughly corresponded to the typologies of religion furthered by the colonialists' (ibid.).

Oberoi critiques the reformist agenda and emphasises that religious boundaries in nineteenth-century Punjab were highly flexible and the categories 'Sikh', 'Muslim', and 'Hindu' semiotically did not have the same implications as they do today (1994: 366–67). He emphasises the significance of popular centres of devotion like the shrines dedicated to Sakhi Sarwar,[36] Gugga Pir, goddesses among others, as shared sites for the people of pre-partition Punjab. The movement for reform and 'textual revivalism' of dominant religious traditions critiqued these shared popular edifices. However, from the late nineteenth century the arguments in favour of saint veneration gradually started losing ground and were under serious attack of the reformist movement. The late nineteenth and twentieth-century reformist discourse serves as a successful attempt to redefine the boundaries of religious communities, and was directly related to the discourse of nationalism. Saint veneration came under serious strain due to Wahabi rhetoric of reform. Veer provokes investigation of the extent to which saint veneration by both Hindus and Muslims promoted harmony and tolerance, and survived despites rhetoric of revivalism (ibid.: 193–94).

[36] Sakhi Sarwar, also known as Lakhdata or the Giver of Lakhs, Lalanwala Pir, He of the Rubies, or Rohianwala or He of the Hills, was widely spread among the Sikhs.

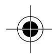
These rhetorics also strengthened the emerging fault lines of communal identities which were now sought to be played out in the selective narrativisation of history. The framework for such an enterprise had already been provided by the European historians (particularly Orientalists) who despite the early nineteenth-century attempts of Rattan Singh Bhangu and Ram Sukh Rao for a defence of Sikh sovereignty, overwhelmingly depended on Mughal sources and Persian texts and produced a narrative of conflict between Sikhs and Muslims (Dhavan 2009: 519–20; Eaton 2002: 5). Taking the debate back to sultanate India, Eaton suggests that contemporary Rajput, Brahman, and other Indian elites saw things differently. From the eighth to the fourteenth centuries, 'contemporary Sanskrit sources referred to invaders or immigrants from the Iranian plateau not by their religion, but by their linguistic identity—most typically, as Turks ('*Turuska*'). This suggests that whatever medieval Indo-Persian chroniclers might have thought, contemporary Indian elites did not regard the religious traditions of the newcomers as sufficiently alien to South Asia, or even as sufficiently remarkable, to warrant identifying those people as Muslims' (2002: 3–4).

Hence, 'if non-Muslim Indians contemporary with the advent of Indo-Turkish rule did not think in terms of an 'Islamic conquest', a 'Muslim era', or even of 'Muslims', how, then, did these categories become so compelling for historians in the colonial and post-colonial eras' (ibid.: 5) and how do these perspectives become a predominant concern of intellectuals and reforms in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century, producing a 'selective amnesia of victimhood' (Snehi 2014c)? Reforms also tried to purge religious practices of folk elements that were absorbed through different forms of proximity within a lived religion and led to a redrawing of boundaries around religion. Veena Das underlines that 'while it is easier to identify and track dramatic events (conquests, martyrdom, Partition), it is harder to follow the slow tectonic shifts through which ongoing negotiations between different religious groups take place within local communities and which might, in time, lead to cataclysmic changes (2013: 80). European scholars, especially Orientalists,

privileged the use of Indo-Persian chronicles over other kinds of pre-modern historical data, which naturally inclined them to view Islam in much the same terms as did the authors of those chronicles—as a 'foreign' intrusion in South Asia (Eaton 2002: 5).

Intriguingly, the colonial military discourse and canal colonisation also produced similar trajectories of identity. Yong's examination of military expansion in the Punjab and its deep connect with the reform movement presents an interesting example of how structures produced by the state get subsumed into elite discourses. Firstly, the invention of the Sikh 'martiality' legitimised the identity of predominantly 'Jats' as a martial race and facilitated their recruitment in the British Indian army. This became particularly significant in the aftermath of the revolt of 1857 when several revolting regiments from other parts India were disbanded. British army manuals produced during this period of time emphasised upon and promoted maintenance of Khalsa Sikh identity (Yong 1995: 659–60). During the peak of Gurdwara reform movement (1920s) the government was alarmed by the ability of Sikhs to organise themselves on military lines through ex-soldiers (demobilised and discharged after World War I) among them who had acquired these skills in the Indian army (ibid.: 678). Despite tensions with the Akali Dal in the 1920s, Sikh sensitivities were assuaged whenever their material and religious demands were carefully managed by the British. But, from the 1930s the Sikhs were no longer content with the special minority status whose interests were maintained by the imperial state, and they began asserting a form of territorial nationalism based on an ethno-religious identity (Yong 2002: 144). Thus, the foundations of aggressive politics based on identity had already been in place before the politics of partition unfolded in the 1940s.

Canal colonisation was another significant tool which facilitated planned agrarian expansion and prompted peasantisation and sedentarisation of predominantly Jat peasantry from the central districts of colonial Punjab to the newly developed canal colonies (Ali 1997). It is not a coincidence that



central districts of Punjab were also a major recruiting ground for the British Indian Army and also the focal point of reform movements. This entire backdrop provided an effective base for mobilisation of the Jat peasantry in the movement for Gurdwara Reform and in a process redefined their hitherto fluid relationship with Sikhism. The enactment of the Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925[37] furthered the process of centralised management of gurdwaras and by 1950 Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee established itself as the central authority on all questions of religious discipline. In that very year it published a manual entitled *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, which came to be regarded as the authoritative guide to orthodox Sikh doctrine and behaviour (Singh 2013: 30–31).

Shrines and Popular Veneration

Punjab had a significant presence of Naths both in the form of practices and repository of shrines associated with them. One of the earliest major Nath centres, which date back at least to the 16th century or earlier, were Jogi Tilla in Punjab and Gorkhatri near Peshawar (both in Pakistan). Until Partition, Tilla Jogian (which has also been known as both Balnath Tilla and Gorakh Tilla) was generally recognised as the headquarters of the Naths. In addition to these, two other previously popular Nath pilgrimage places are also now in Pakistan: Sialkot (the home of Puran Bhagat) and Hing Laj. The latter is situated in a remote part of the Makran coast in Baluchistan and was the most important of the Naths' pilgrimage: it was the duty of every yogi to visit it once (Mallinson 2011: 13–14). So predominant was the metaphor of jogi in the Indus region that the yogi became a popular figure

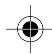
[37] This was in contrast to how Hindu temples were managed, as well as how *waqf* was administered. In the former case, temples were seen to be inherently local in their character, and in this way expressed the highly decentralised and diverse nature of 'Hinduism' as understood by the colonial state; at the same time, this loose definition was upheld as an overarching concept. In the latter case, a homogenised and elite understanding of Islam was followed in the designation of rightful Islamic practice, marginalising local customs (quoted in Murphy 2013: 58).

in poetry written in Punjabi and Sindhi. The writings of the great Sindhi poet and Sufi ‘Abd al-Latif B’hita’i (d. 1752) furnish a very positive evaluation of yogis. He himself had worn the ochre robe and wandered like a Hindu *sannyasin*, visiting the major yogi places of pilgrimage in the Indus region while travelling with yogis for a space of three years. One of his cycles of poetry, the *Sur Ramkali*, is dedicated to the praise of the ideal yogis. Punjabi Sufi poet Bulleh Shah (d. 1758) similarly used folk motifs that portray the archetypal yogi as the mystical beloved[38] (Ernst 2005: 33). Similarly, Ranjha, the hero of the Waris Shah’s eighteenth century Punjabi love poem, gets initiated by Balnath/Balak Nath in the Kanphata jogi order at his Tilla in the Salt Range (now in Pakistan).

Besides the shrines/*deras* of the jogis, in the centuries before the British arrived, networks of shrines loosely linked within the Sufi orders spread through much of the province as the descendants and successors (*khalifas*) of many of the major saints established their own *khanqahs*[39] (hospices), which in turn developed into new Sufi shrines. In addition to these imposing Sufi shrines, there was an emergence of ‘lesser shrines’ dedicated to one or many, major or minor Sufi centres of medieval Punjab (Gilmartin 1989: 41–42). The networks became particularly dense in parts of the Indus Valley; in south-western Punjab, the shrines of the descendants of Syed Jalaluddin Bukhari of Uch dotted the countryside when the British arrived. Though loosely linked, each of these shrines maintained its distinctive identity and apparently played a crucial role in the ‘Islamisation’ of new territory (ibid.: 43–45). However, the term ‘Islamisation’ only partially explains

[38] It has been suggested that he was familiar with the Persian translation of *The Pool of Nectar* through his master Shah ‘Inayat Qadiri (d. 1735), author of the *Dastur al-’amal* or *The Handbook of Practice*, a work that discusses yogic teachings (Ernst 2005: 33).

[39] The construction of Sufi khanqahs (hospices), and later Sufi tombs, produced symbolic cultural outposts of the power of Islam and of the Muslim in a world where local, tribal identities continued to be of vital importance. Imposing Sufi tombs, constructed by Muslim sultans, underscored the importance of Islamic shrines as sites of access to transcendent spiritual authority (Gilmartin 1989: 41–42).



the conversion of native population to Islam and fails to capture the significant process of acculturation that does not necessarily involve conversion.

Hence, even if the medieval state perceived these shrines as the local outposts of Islam, to the population at large, they represented sources of power to all in need of superhuman intervention. They were open to people from all religious persuasions. Liebeskind terms this all-inclusive approach as the local face of Islam (Liebeskind 1998: 2).[40] There was yet another practice of constructing 'memorial shrines', which gradually developed into distinctive centres of cultural practices, often denoting local as well as long-term geographical influences. These memorial shrines existed in the realm of the popular and inspired many folk writers of medieval and modern Punjab, evolving into a distinct form of 'saint veneration'. Literary representation in Punjabi popular narratives, such as Hir-Ranjha, suggests that people participated in saint veneration without recourse to or invoking pre-existing religious identities. The practices involved the reinterpretation of piety and constituted beliefs that stood alongside the formal categories of religious identity, without necessarily being in conflict with them. The repeated depiction of this form of devotional practice in the most ubiquitous Punjabi cultural form suggests the importance of this social formation in Punjab popular imagination, and in Punjab's religious and cultural history (Mir 2006: 755).

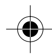
Significantly, these popular shrines emerged as centres of intercommunal dialogue and evolved into a distinct form of cultural practices. One particularly distinct character of this social formation was that while western Punjab (now in Pakistan) became a major centre of emergence and dissemination of Sufism in the medieval period, it was eastern Punjab (India) which was

[40] It is significant to elaborate the term 'local Islam' here. In this essay, this term is used as representing the articulation of belief systems at the popular level. Alternatively, the term syncretism could have been utilised but it assumes that dominant identities are the core determinant of popular identities and thus discounts the academic understanding of the latter.

the recipient of the vast influence of sacred shrines in Sind, Multan, Bahawalpur, and Montgomery districts of colonial India. The frontier districts of eastern Punjab had a direct influence of the major shrines of Shaikh Baha-ud-Din Zakariya (d. 1267) at Multan, Shaikh Farid-ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakar (popularly known as Baba Farid, d. 1265) at Pakpattan, Shaikh Ali Hujwiri (popularly known as Hazrat Data Ganj Bakhsh, d. 1072), and Hazrat Mian Mir (d. 1636) at Lahore. Besides, the shrines associated with Ajmer Sharif and the Chishti *silsila*s (orders) of Delhi (Shaikh Nizam-ud-Din Auliya, d. 1325 and Qutb-ud-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, d. 1235), Kaliyar (Sabir Pak, d. 1291), and Panipat (Bu Ali Qalandar Panipati, d. 1324) continued to influence the popular beliefs of colonial Punjab. But the form in which Sufism came and was disseminated in these regions was different from the major centres. The central and southern districts of Punjab were not known for major centres of Sufi mystics. Rather, minor/ memorial shrines dedicated to either major Sufis or the more popular saints emerged as a source of veneration. Among the most important popular saints were Sultan (Sakhi) Sarwar/Baba Lakhdata, Goga/Gugga/Zahra Pir, Gaus Pak, and Khwaja Khizr. Often, the local Hindu deities, or later, even Sikh gurus, came to be associated with these 'lesser shrines' and led to the emergence of popular ethos.

One significant example of this evolution can be found in the continuous rendition of the *qissa* (story) of Hir-Ranjha from Damodar ('Hindu') in the early seventeenth century to Hafiz Shah Jahan Maqbul and Waris Shah ('Muslims') in the eighteenth century, and Kishan Singh Arif ('Sikh') in the late nineteenth century.[41] While each re-telling critiqued the creed of orthodoxy, their major sources of piety, spiritual strength, and dreams were almost always jogis and pirs. Despite being a story of 'Muslim' lovers and despite the communalization of the contemporary public sphere, the qissa of Hir-Ranjha still finds remarkable resonance in Punjabi identity. These popular narratives exemplify

[41] For a fascinating account on social interaction in Hir-Waris, see Gaur (2009); and for qissa tradition in medieval and modern Punjab, see Mir (2006). For an overview of folk writers of Punjab, see Singh and Gaur (2008, 2009).



the role that shrines and popular mysticism played in the lived lives of Punjabis. Hir Waris continues to be the guiding Sufi text of social critique and constitutes an important social text on the veneration of Sufi saints.[42]

Twentieth-century Punjab was, however, mired by contestations and conflict over the control of sacred shrines of various hues.[43] Propelled by the movement for reform and revivalism, identity was the most important marker of such contestations. Reformers engaged in intense debates to define the 'don'ts' of their perceived religious affiliation. A majority of debates which have looked into the question of gurdwara reform or debate over shrines have overwhelmingly dealt with debates on major shrines. While it is true that gurdwaras were central to this entire debate, but what is left out from such analysis is how reform redefined the notions of piety and sacredness, invariably delineating the periphery of its physical landscape. These events help us in reinstating academic debates on the 'centre' (sanctum standing in the midst of the sacred tank, as also core ritual practices) and the 'periphery' (outer edges of the sacred tank, as well as popular veneration), and the role played by this struggle in redefining the ethical and philosophical foundations of the core (also defined as relating to 'text'), and securing the latter, thereby restricting its access for everyday beliefs and lived practices. These contestations had a profound impact on the dominant perception of popular veneration of pirs and jogis.

As a result of Gurdwara reform movement (1920s) hundreds of ('Sikh') gurdwaras were transferred from their traditional

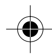
[42] Ajay Bharadwaj's (2005) film *Kitthe Mil Ve Mahi* ('*Where the twain shall meet*'), which focusing on the pre-dominantly Dalit veneration of Sufi shrines in contemporary Punjab, significantly weaves the narrative around the *qissâ* of Hir Waris.

[43] It is interesting to note that this legacy prevails in the latter part of the twentieth as well as the twenty-first century. SGPC has now emerged as an all subsuming body and the recent demand for HSGPC, a similar committee for Haryana, represents inversion against almost absolute hegemony of ruling party Shiromani Akali Dal over the management of Sikh shrines through SGPC (Snehi 2014d).

claimants (udasis) to Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). This struggle was perpetuated during 1921–22, and even after the legislation of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925, legal and political battles over control of sacred shrines continued for the entire period of the twentieth century. Serious efforts were made, for instance, to purge the vicinity of the Golden Temple of perceived 'Hindu' practices which also led to a controversy in the year 1905. In the first week of May 1905, the Manager (*mahant*) of the Golden Temple Arur Singh removed idols from the precincts of Golden Temple and debarred the entry of accompanying Brahmins (Basra 1996: 44–45). This incident led to a long debate among the reformers discussing and detailing both the legitimacy of Manager's action as well as *pujari*s' (priests) right to perform idol worship.

The Tribune maintained that the Golden Temple was held in veneration by both Sikhs and Hindus. However, the *Khlasa Samachar* observed that it was not against idol-worship but the Golden Temple was for the worship of one God and idols could not be allowed there. Ruchi Ram Sahni,[44] a leading Brahmo Samajist similarly justified the removal of idols from the Golden Temple (Basra 1996: 45–48). Harjot Oberoi extends this debate further by bringing in a discussion on *sanatani* Sikhs who believed that just as avatars are born out of Brahma and on finishing their earthly mission are once again united with Brahma, Guru Nanak was one such avatar born to save people from the perils of ignorance and to reveal once again the sanatan faith that had been lost in an age of darkness. Thus, in everyday life the sanatan religious paradigm resulted in paradoxical mixtures and produced a kaleidoscopic Sikh society that is hard to understand by the logic of European enlightenment. The sanatan Sikhs clearly did not support such a unilinear vision of progress. They had received different lessons from their readings of history (Oberoi 1992: 379–380). Modern narratives around religion are therefore completely bereft of social reality and manufacture 'neat' categories of religious traditions which read like impermeable

[44] During the very moment of the reform, Sahni published a detailed tract titled *The Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Sikh Awakening* in 1920.



high walls of institutions complete in their own sense and bereft of influences from other traditions. Significantly, if this metaphor of 'high walls' is applied to religious structures, it produces similar interpretations.

An analysis of the images from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century amply illustrate the ways in which the heatedly debated periphery was secured and redefined. These rare set of paintings/prints not only capture the monumental legacy of the Golden Temple but also define the periphery of the sanctum sanctorum, the *ghat*s along the sacred *sarovar* (man-made water body) and the everyday domains of ritual and veneration.

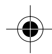
Today the Golden Temple almost looks like a fortress secured from all the four sides with multi-storeyed *serai*s and guarded by Sikhs at all the entrances, instructing devotees to follow the code of conduct for entry to the premises. The expulsion of udasi caretakers from the Golden Temple not only consolidated the rhetoric of reform through which the periphery was secured, guarded and fortified, but also led to invention of competitive zones of ritual and piety, purging it of 'polluting' influences of 'Hindu' practices. Durgiana temple is one such example of a shrine which appeared as soon as the Golden Temple was transferred to the SGPC.

Golden Temple exemplifies how shrines' spaces were claimed and redefined through the rhetoric of reform. Is also indicates towards the larger process in which reform attempted to purge individuals of diversity and heterogeneity. This rhetoric emerged not merely as a response to perceived threat of all subsuming Hinduism, reformers also wrote and published popular tracts against 'Sikh' veneration of 'Muslim' saints. Anshu Malhotra (2014) has analysed how reformers like Giani Ditt Singh wrote popular tracts (*Sadhu Dayanand Nal Mera Sambad*, *Guga Gapora Te Sultan Puara*, etc.) dissuading Sikhs from venerating shrines of popular pirs and mystics. Not only reformers of the Singh Sabha, but also Arya Samaj and Anjumans dissuaded Hindus and

Muslims respectively from venerating *dargah*s as these were rhetorically condemned as promoting forms of 'Muslim' worship and 'Hindu' worship respectively. It is pertinent to note that all the reformers were united in their condemnation of saint veneration. On the other hand, these were centres of popular veneration and attended by Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims. These popular shrines were perceived as threats to the imagined (reformed) ideas of religiosity and identity.

Most scholarship on reform movements present a linear narrative of transformation which reform brought to the respective communities. This perspective is not at much variance from popular tracts on these movements and hence fail to capture the residue as well as existing contours of popular veneration in contemporary Punjab. Post-independence scholarship has presented these shrines as centres of pluralism and syncretism. It will nevertheless be curious to know what happened to these shrines when attempts were made to dissuade Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims from their veneration of popular saints by Singh Sabha, Gurdwara reform, Anjumans, and Arya Samaj movement? For reformers the issue in this debate was not whether saint veneration promotes harmony and tolerance, but whether it is a correct and orthodox practice. A long-standing argument against the veneration of saints is that the imputation of divine powers to the saint and the tomb threatens the monotheistic nature of Islam, an 'innovation' contrary to *sunna*, the example of the Prophet. In the Indian context, saint worship is often condemned as an imitation of Hindu polytheism. The argument is put forward most forcefully by the sixteenth-century Naqsbandi Sufi leader Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, and gains force with the teachings of the eighteenth-century Shah Wali-Allah of Delhi. In the nineteenth century, the Arab reformist movement of the Wahhabis influences a number of the Indian movements that oppose saint worship.[45]

[45] Gaborieau (1989) examines the reformist condemnation of not just the worship of dead and living saints but also the entire plethora of everyday practices associated with shrines and ritual performance during urs.



Situating Popular Veneration

Until recently, the entire range of scholarship on shrines in India, from Gaborieau (1983) and Chambert-Loir and Guillot's (1995) essays on cult of shrines in Islamic history, to more recent works by Currie (1989), Eaton (2000), Hayden (2002), and Troll (2003), has understood them from the dominant perspective of Muslim piety and devotion.[46] Bigelow's work (which is perhaps the only significant exception) on the shrines of Sheikh Haider at Malerkotla (Bigelow 2010) and on Baba Farid's shrine at Faridkot (Bigelow 2012) brings research on the topic closer to an understanding of the contemporary process of non-Muslim veneration. Her work, however, continues to be limited to major shrines and also limits the significance of shrines to providing a site of pluralism. Further, she fails to historicise the semiotics of everyday practices and their relationship with contemporary social processes.

A typical Sufi shrine in Punjab comprises of a *dargah* (a cenotaph built on the grave of a mystic) and in some cases an adjacent mosque and a *langar khana* (community kitchen). While many shrines (depending on the spiritual affiliation) have some restriction on the entry of women inside the sanctum, no such restriction exists in Punjab except for the shrine of the orthodox Nasqbandi Sufi Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi. While every Thursday remains an important day to offer *dua* (blessing) the shrine, longer celebrations are held during *urs* (death anniversary), the duration of which varies from one day to almost a week.[47] Urs is usually

[46] Gaborieau's introduction to Troll (2003: v–xxi) provides an interesting reading on the range of scholarship on Sufi shrines in India.

[47] Gracin de Tassy (1995), a French orientalist who visited India the nineteenth century, unapprovingly remarks that most religious ceremonies of Indian Muslims are local innovations established as a result of unconscious Hindu influences, which conform little to the spirit of the Quran and are sometimes even contrary to its spirit. He further laments Muslims' pilgrimages to the tombs of saints, some of whom are apparently non-Muslim, and their performance of 'semi-pagan ceremonies'. Indian Muslims have also created new ceremonies performed by both Shias and Sunnis. Some of them are

accompanied by *sama* (Sufi practice of gathering to listen to mystical poetry and music) and *qawwali* (a form of Sufi devotional music popular in South Asia) and continuous *langar* (mass feeding). In Punjab, urs is also accompanied by a fete, an occasion for enjoyment and celebration. In rural shrines, such occasions also attract folk musicians and performers who sing the narratives from the life of a patron saint. Wrestling tournaments are organised at several shrines. While the dargah constitutes the core of the shrine practices, the periphery is marked by a diversity of intermediaries and ritual performances like 'possession'.[48] Despite Tassy's orientalist critique of Muslim practices, his list of 'Muslim' festivals includes celebrations at the shrines of Goga (Gugga) pir, Sultan (Sakhi) Sarwar (also remembered as Lalanwala pir), Kabir and Baba Lal (1995: 88–112).

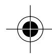
In a limited sense, shrines are looked upon either as agencies of pluralism and syncretism or as sites of competitive conflict and confrontation over control.[49] Most of these works in a way justify the dominant theories of 'Islamisation' and complement modernising theories on exclusive religious identities.[50] One would wonder what happens in such scenarios when conversion

consecrated to the memory of pirs, who are to Muslims what *deota*s are to the Hindus. They visit the tombs of these pirs on Thursdays and sometimes on Fridays (32–33).

[48] Anna Bigelow's (2010) study of the dargah of Haider Shaikh at Malerkotla draws a complex picture of this ritual performance which is ultimately subsumed within the identity of the shrine.

[49] While a majority of works on Sufi shrines in India locate them as centres of pluralism, Hayden (2002) sees them as sites of competition.

[50] Aquil argues that 'Islamisation' and conversion to Islam involved complex negotiations, which further contradicts the older view that only large sections of low-caste Hindus were attracted to the egalitarian and notions of brotherhood in Islam, as embodied by Sufi institutions such as *khanqah*s, *jamatkhana*s and dargahs. Normative Islam does have certain ideals emphasising egalitarianism in society, but as Islam spread to various regions, it got embedded in local social structures; and hierarchies—based in birth, wealth, and power—became an integral part of Muslim communities, as is the case with caste among Muslims in India (2009: 180).



is not the dominant articulation of social processes. Contrarily, it will be interesting to explore how pirs connect to the ordinary lives of non-Muslims. Veena Das argues that the heterogeneity of everyday life invites us to think of networks of encounter and exchange instead of bounded civilisational histories of Hinduism, Islam, or Christianity. The structures of feeling in a neighbourhood define these networks of exchange and encounter as much as by the pressure of authoritative discourses. However, she also underlines that these relations are vulnerable to events at different scales, hence a relatively peaceful social life can be disrupted, and relations between neighbours can morph into violence (2013: 80).

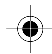
It is also important to trace saint veneration in the genealogy of Muslim debate in India, where one of the main issues have always been 'syncretism', or 'Hindu influence' and 'Hindu participation'. The charge that saint worship resembles Hindu polytheism is, however, strongly rejected by defenders of the practice. They base their defence not on the notion that the practice promotes harmony between Hindus and Muslims, but on the claim that it is an orthodox practice, in continuity with the Islamic past (Fusfeld 1987, cited in Veer 1994: 193). The defenders deny that saint veneration is syncretic. This does not directly imply that saint veneration, as a practice does not have tolerance and harmony among Muslims and Hindus as a (perhaps unintended) consequence. The only thing which is clear from Muslim debate is that syncretism is rejected as a deviation from the Truth (Veer 1994: 193). However, there is ample evidence to prove that saint veneration was and is prevalent as a vibrant practice in the lands from where these practices travelled to India (Wilson 1985 and Khosronejad 2012).

This leads us to a much longer debate, for instance, on the permissibility of music in Islam. Raziuddin Aquil's analysis of the contested legacy of music in Chishti Sufism illustrates how debate on the validity of *sama* in the court of Ghiyasuddin Tughluq led to a half-a-day long argument and counter-arguments and got resolved only after Maulana Ilmuddin (grandson of

Suhrawardi Sufi Bahauddin Zakariya) testified in the *darbar* of the sultan that not only was music listened to in Damascus and Rum but was also accompanied with instruments like *daf* and *Shababa* (*shahnai*) (2014: 287). Jurgen Wasim Frembgem reports how in contemporary Pakistan religious crusades since 2002, the Taliban have burned down cinemas and shops in which cassettes and Bollywood films were sold, forbidden music and dance at weddings, attacked musicians or even killed them, forcing many vocalists from North-West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunwala) to migrate to Punjab. However, even Lahore has not been spared from this reign of terror, with their bombs targeting concerts and other cultural events (2012: 42). It will be curious to know how music survives in popular Sufi shrines in Indian Punjab.

In the twentieth-first century, Punjab has experienced resurgence of the practice of saint veneration through complex processes of dreams, memory, and acculturation.[51] The region has also begun to particularly consolidate the influence of Chishti Sabiri tradition and its expression in the urban and rural landscapes. It is worth examining the urban landscapes that have been marked by the emergence of several cultural forums centred on Sufi thought and music (Snehi 2014a). Hobsbawm poses an important question here regarding the usefulness of the study of the ‘invention of traditions’ for historians. Firstly, he suggests that they are important symptoms and therefore indicators of problems that might not otherwise be recognised, and developments that are otherwise difficult to identify and to date. They are evidence. Secondly, they throw a considerable light on the human relation to the past, and therefore on the historian’s own subject and craft. For all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion (2000: 12). It thus seems significant to understand why the trope of popular shrines has found a renewed visible expression in contemporary religious landscape of Punjab and whether these can be understood through abstractions of the meta-narratives.

[51] For a detailed reading of the role of dreams and memory in the restitution of the practice of saint veneration in contemporary Punjab, see Snehi (2014b).



Tarikare beautifully illustrates this point through a case study of Muharram celebrations that take place in Mudgal in Raichur district of Karnataka:

> The climax of these celebrations is the coming to 'face-to-face' of Hasan and Hussain. Hassan and Hussain are represented by two silver torches. These are decorated with colourful cloth and flowers and made into 'gods'. To see this rendezvous, which lasts for just of second (sic), about a lakh of people of this region stand faithfully at the gates of the Mudgal fort and wait. In terms of caste and creed, these 'people' consist of Bedaru (hunters), *dalits*, *kurubas* (shepherds), Lingayats and some Muslims. On being questioned about this 'encounter' people narrate an interesting story: 'Hassan and Hussain, wandering from Arabia arrived in Mudgal. The younger brother Hussain entered the town admiring its beauty. The elder brother Hassan went outside the town admiring the beauty of the fort. By that time, it was evening and the fort gates were closed. So, the younger brother had to stay inside and the elder brother outside the town. Thus the two brothers were separated and brought together for an encounter once every year' (2009: 102).

Here, historical formulation is easily broken down by the world of faith and the 'epic war of the seventh century, which took place in the fields of Karbala village (on the banks of the river Euphrates in Iraq), got transferred into the hands of the communities of various religions in India and underwent astonishing transformation, Hassan-Hussain had come to Mudgal as the sons of that soil' (Tarikare 2009: 103). Kavita Punjabi similarly critiques the contemporary academic contexts in which cultures are homogenised 'resulting in a rootless, ahistoric universalism, and the concurrent spiralling of fierce identity politics—fundamentalist, communal and ethnic'. It thus becomes imperative to understand the lived histories of cultures, as well as the societies they comprised (Panjabi 2011: 7).

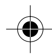
Therefore, it becomes important to first recover the medieval context of Nath-Sufi-Bhakti encounter, explain its location in the

contour of reform and then understand popular veneration in contemporary social contexts. In a fascinating study of Hajji Ratan or Baba Ratan, Bouillier and Khan (2009) recover the multiple narratives around the identity of Baba Ratan whose shrine at Bathinda links him to both the Nath as well as Sufi tradition; having been a disciple of Gorakhnath as well as a companion of Prophet Muhammad. However, in contemporary context the mystic's relationship to three centres (in Nepal, Bathinda, and Delhi) is deeply rooted in their local settings but nevertheless, not separated from its medieval contexts. The inclusive nature of this tradition, its historical developments, and the fact that it has multiple connections and ramifications should warn us against any simplistic classification. Some medieval texts see even the 'jogis' as belonging to a religious category distinct from 'Hindu' and 'Muslim', making the Nath yogi sect a successful medium for expressing the close relationship between Hinduism and Islam (Bouillier and Khan 2009: 593).

Can we thus understand the rise of Sikhism in isolation from its Nath and Sufi contexts? This is an important problematic which has not been a concern for theologically centred enlightenment narratives on history of the region. However, this finds a significant expression in popular Sufi shrines in contemporary Punjab. As Ibbetson wrote:

> On the borderlands where the great faiths meet (…) the various observances and beliefs which distinguished the followers of the several faiths in their purity are so strangely blended and intermingled, that it is often impossible to say that one prevails rather than other, or to decide in which category the people shall be classed (1881: 101).

This raises one fundamental question regarding the evolution of religious traditions, i.e., whether there exists an understanding of religion that remains static and complete to qualify classification as 'great faith/traditions'? Can this category escape the long-term view of religions as evolving traditions that have constantly refashioned them, at times by revisiting older debates in the moment of the contemporary? Is it then possible to sustain



terms like syncretism that have derogatory origins in Protestant Reformation, though still used by the votaries of plurality and secularism? Any treatment of religion as homogeneous or autonomous vastly oversimplifies complex questions of historical change.

> Syncretism, by proposing that religions can be mixed, also assumes that religions exist in a pure unadulterated state. Where shall we find a historically untouched religion? Is there any religious tradition untouched by other religious cultures? Has any religion sprung into existence fully formed, without reference to any previously existing religion? If pure and irreducible religions cannot be found, a logical problem follows; syncretism becomes a meaningless term if everything is syncretistic (Ernst 2005: 17).

Carl Ernst alternatively proposes a 'polythetic analysis of religion',[52] one that avoids essentialism, striking a practical balance between similarity and difference, and makes comparison a problematic enterprise, by abandoning a number of a priori prejudices about religion that are no longer justifiable (2005: 19–20).[53] Eaton similarly proposes 'double movement' between the

[52] The polythetic approach to religion is extremely helpful. No longer is it necessary to attack or defend arguments of influence or authenticity, since it is now possible to acknowledge freely that numerous examples of hybrid and multiplex symbols, practices, and doctrines can be at work in any particular religious *milieu* (Ernst 2005: 20–21).

[53] Ernst gives an interesting example of Nasqbandi *silsia*, which in recent times has transformed itself from its historical baggage as one of the most orthodox of Sufi orders in South Asia. Naqshbandi Sufi leaders in northern India have taken significant steps to spread their teachings among Hindu disciples, including a number of Hindu masters who explain the Naqshbandi cosmology with terms from classical *hatha yoga*. These Naqshbandi branches (centred particularly on Kanpur) constitute what is in effect a new Sufi-based school of yoga, known as *Ananda*-yoga. Particularly important practices of these groups include silent recitation of the name Allah to awaken the *cakra*s. The overall doctrine of the identity of the microcosm and the macrocosm, common to both Islamicate and Indic traditions, permits a wide-ranging series of analogies between Sufi notions of subtle centres with *yogic* cakras. This

local cultures of South Asia and the theological norms of Islam that makes the study of Indian Islamic traditions so fascinating (2002: 10).

Several anthropological debates on understanding, what has been termed as 'everyday religion' between the dialectic of 'ordinary lives' and 'grand schemes' have sought to account for the complex duality of religion as an everyday practice and a normative doctrine (Schielke and Debevec 2012: 1). The concept of 'grand scheme' is again historically problematic since it takes a narrow 'immediate' view of complex historical debates. While it is not desirable to detach popular veneration from 'grand schemes' or 'great traditions', what is being proposed here is to see religious debates as 'processual,' that are 'in the making' and where normative and discursive practices are dialectically embedded in the moment of contemporary. Everyday religion thus permeates both private and public lives, among both privileged and non-privileged people, between state and non-state milieus. It may have to do with mundane routines, but crisis and special events may also punctuate those routines (Ammerman 2007: 5). Thus, the significance of the 'social context' becomes very crucial to understand the form and direction everyday religion takes (ibid.: 6), making today's cultural and religious contact far more complex than either the historiography of 'conquest' produced through textual abstraction or 'revelationary' and 'missionary' perspectives. Recognising both the agency of 'ordinary' individuals and collectivities in negotiating everyday lives becomes crucial in analysing popular forms of piety and devotion (ibid.: 14–15).

What happens to Punjab Studies?

This discussion raises some significant historiographical questions about Punjab studies. Conventional scholarship on religion, both colonial as well as scholarship produced post-

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recent development, which inverts the Orientalist view of the relation between Sufism and yoga, is a striking indication of the way in which the history of religion can defy the expectations of essentialism (2005: 26–27).

reorganisation of Punjab in 1966, has largely focused on the reinterpretation of core 'Sikh' texts. Mention here should be made of the contributions of W.H. Mcleod (1976) and J.S. Grewal (1969) that have inspired scholars during the second half of twentieth century. This scholarship also coincided with the aggressive phase of Green Revolution as well as the turbulent phase of Sikh militancy in Punjab, thus both critiquing some fundamental traditional assumptions and at times feeding the very discourse in the milieu of which it was being produced. This phase also saw an exponential spurt in the emergence of a Punjabi diaspora and the establishment of predominantly endowed chairs for 'Sikh' studies in several universities in the West. The vast scholarship produced through these chairs has produced a textual scholarship that fails to capture the lived realities of the 'imagined' homeland and rather sanitise the production of narratives on religion and identities in pre-colonial Punjab. This narrative dominates the entire spectrum of scholarship produced in the twentieth century and reflects a continued legacy of colonialism in Punjab.

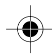
Twenty-first century historiography on Punjab reflects a major paradigm shift in the field, having transitioned from idealised, linear, and descriptive narrative frames, towards more complex and methodologically nuanced narrativisations of historical processes and the unconventional use of both canonical as well as non-canonical texts, material culture, and oral narratives, thus materialising the past and raising challenging questions about the issue of representation.[54] Grewal's critique of Oberoi view of the Singh Sabha 'as a new episteme arising out of praxis' suggesting that it precludes the 'possibility of any meaningful linkages with the past' (1997: 73, quoted in Singh 2013: 29) is geared towards an exclusive narrative of past which is deeply oriented towards a narrow interpretation of religious texts. Even within the corpus of Sikh texts there is a wide range of diversity—from Guru Granth Sahib, Dasam Granth to Janam Sakhis—which draw a picture of

[54] Mention should be made of the works of Singh and Gaur (2008, 2009), Gaur (2009), Murphy (2012), Dhavan (2011), Syan (2014), and Malhotra (2014).

multiplicity of influences (Sufi, Nath, and Bhaktas). Along with the teaching of the Granth, stories from Janam Sakhis (drawing upon both the *puranic* as well as *tazkira* tradition) made several miraculous stories of Guru Nanak popular, including his debate with Nath yogis. Despite being rhetorical and polemical, these stories portrayed an embedded world-view of social reality.

Obsession with neat boundaries has not been a preoccupation of just the reformers but academics too who seek to define, categorise, and delineate the complex social processes. Gaur (2009), for instance, argues against these classifications and seeks to appreciate the 'spontaneous' expression of piety and sacredness which as Snehi (2014a) argues, is an expression of 'organic evolution' of shared practices. It is in the form of veneration of popular saints, ritual practices, and entire paraphernalia of semiotics that embedded meanings of popular veneration are expressed. Also, reducing popular Sufi shrines as exemplars of syncretism, pluralism, harmony, brotherhood, and shared centres of veneration in modern India, denies them a critical agency within the academic debate. A shrine's centrality in popular veneration emerges from its embeddedness with social and political landscape of the region. Reducing shrines to centres of conversion and/or as 'circumscribed domain of healing and magic' (Veer 1995: 195) rips them off their deep engagement with the everyday. Entrenchment of these debates between the dialectics of communalism and secularism posit competitive arguments to justify the binary opposites of political discourse.

Thus, while situating popular veneration today, it is not just the dialectical legacy of the medieval interactive traditions and contours of contestations that remain significant, but also their residue and expression in contemporary social formation. The most fascinating 'residue' from pre-colonial practice of saint veneration emerges from the rituals and symbols at the popular Sufi shrines in contemporary Punjab. One such example is the location of a *dhuna* (hearth) at one such shrine at Makhu where Shia *panjtan pak* is located along with Shaiva *trishul* (trident). A semiotic understanding of these symbols force us to problemtise



the limited frames within which the post-Partition scholarship perceives religion. For the practitioner of religious traditions, being a householder or an ascetic comprises a larger repertoire of choices available to him/her along with diverse spectrum of sacred allegiances to pir, jogis, *baba*s or sadhs and their respective shrines. Thus, any exploration in history of ideas and social change should also explore the ways in which religion is 'received', 'interpreted', and 'practiced' in the lives of 'ordinary'. It is in the diverse spectrum of the 'everyday' that the 'lived' meanings and expression of religious practices can be captured.

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