INTRODUCTION

Religion is experienced as "A system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long lasting moods and motivations in Men...."


"Among the foremost of institutions which conserves society, encoding stabilising world views and values and transmitting these from generation to generation.....Religion has been an instrument of liberation for women. But religion has just as often become an instrument of women's social oppression."

Falk and Gross, Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives in Non Western Cultures, XV, XXI

The above lines are a gist of the complex relationship between the religion and the socio-cultural aspects. Its role is still more significant in the context of its over arching influence on the social values, norms and ethos of the time especially in relation to women.

Joan Wallach Scott's well known paper argues for a shift from "Women's History" to 'History of Gender'. According to her, the category of gender not only illuminates the unequal relations of power between males and females, but helps one understand that the unequal male-female relations are extended via metaphors to varied areas of social life so as to signify unequal relations of power in general. One must admit that the gender is an on-going fluid process which is always evolving and transforming. Joan Wallach Scott further insists that a more radical feminist epistemology is necessary in the study of history. She advocates a post-structuralist approach, one that can address epistemology and the status of knowledge and can link knowledge and power. In her own words "the emphasis on 'how' suggests a study of processes, not of origins, of multiple rather than single causes, of rhetoric rather than ideology or consciousness. It does not abandon attention to
structures and institutions, but it does insist that we need to understand what these organizations mean in order to understand how they work.\(^1\)

Now, it is a well-accepted conceptual assumption that gender relations cannot be studied in isolation. The issue of gender relations has to be looked at in the context of structures and processes in which such relations are embedded. It has been argued that the results of an exclusive focus on women will be disastrous – the male bias of the past will be replaced by a female bias. Can we then really comprehend the social reality? What is really advocated, therefore, is bifocal analysis. Based on the same premise, in the last few decades, women's studies in religion have been undertaken extensively. The scholarship is distinguished from other approaches to the study of religion by its fundamental concern for gender as its critical variable in religion. Taking "Gender" as a primary category of analysis, women studies in religion examine the function of gender in the symbolization of religious traditions- the institutionalization of roles in religious communities and the dynamics of the interaction between religious systems of belief and the personal, social and cultural condition of women with gender as the primary analytical category. Feminist scholars can pursue one of their main purposes, which is the recovery of women's distinctive historical and contemporary experiences on the basis of the recovered experience and perspectives of women. Women's studies offer critics of religion and cultural traditions while at the same time, making the experience and the perspectives of women the starting point for the feminist re-interpretation and reconstruction of both religion and culture.

The close connection between norms is well evinced by our values and the religion and the social behaviour. Institutionalised religion has been at the forefront of conserving and stabilizing societal values and world views and transplanting them from generation to generation. The religious ideology very often plays a crucial role in legitimizing and sustaining the subordination of women. It is in context of this close connection between the religion and the social norm that I decided to study the impact of the Sikh Gurus on the issues concerning women. In sharp contrast to the general social perception and

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ethos of the time Sikhism advocated an egalitarian society. For Guru Nanak, men and women were equal not only before God, but also before one-another. Women are considered as an integral part of society who must not be excluded by a ritual or doctrinal consideration. Thus, I was inclined to study as to what were the ideals of the gender for the Sikh Gurus? How were these ideals constructed? How did these ideals affect the evolution of the Sikh Panth? Was there a difference in perception of women of Guru Nanak and the subsequent nine Sikh Gurus or at a more abstract level was there a difference even at the level of the focuses and emphasis in their teachings. What kind of impact could they make on the social milieu at large? How were these ideals furthered?

The study of the impact of the Sikh Gurus on the dominant patriarchal ideology of the Punjab of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could not be oblivious to the fact that the region of Punjab has been an unusually fluid land, not just geographically but socially and culturally. The boundaries of the present day Indian Punjab for example is just little less than 15% of the total geographical area of the pre-partition colonial Punjab. The boundaries have been redrawn several times over the last few centuries. Socially and culturally too, Punjab has seen many changes in its profile. In course of the study, the myth of a homogenous region i.e. Punjab and the community was clearly demolished. In case of Punjab, the Hindus and the Muslims coexisted and shared a common culture. In the early decades of the sixteenth century, Sikhism in its nascent stage, had not at all evolved as a distinct community and there was no collective urge either on the part of the Sikh Gurus or their followers to evolve a distinct identity of their own. In context of Punjab, multi culturalism is not just a statement of fact, it is also a value. It pictures a society which is characterized not by multiple cultural solitudes or endemic cultural strife but by communities which are not only living together but also sharing a common culture. The society of Punjab, at that point of time, is marked by the fusion of traditions where Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs (if we may use the term) share the aspirations of their lives, the social values and ethos and their social expressions in the form of rituals and rites performed by the society.
When the historians and political analyst look back at the period they need to evaluate the socio-cultural, political and economic significance of events during that period. The cumulative effects of these events cannot be immediately gauged. But there appear to be changes that are both positive and negative. It becomes still more significant as the past has an uneasy relation with the modern Indian woman. Drawing upon the psychoanalyst Erik Erikson's theories "Identity is used in the sense of a persons experience of self-sameness and continuity in time and space which is contingent on its continued recognition and reinforcement by his or her significant social group."¹

In field of gender studies it is difficult to account for women's identities as to how they are formed, if they happen to have an identity and what they signify in such a distant past. It is a very apparent limitation for this study as the period under review is sixteenth and seventeenth centuries where it was beyond, anyone's imagination that women can have an identity of her own. However, it has been well-recognised – the value of understanding the processes by which women become the sites for the construction of group identities. In this context, the social milieu of the period provide rich material for instance the factors behind the social institution of marriage, child-marriage, relationship between marriage and caste, underlying logistic of ritual-purity behind varied forms of widow-remarriage – 'Karewa' and 'Chadar Pauna' or still prevalent, if not predominant, the ideology of domesticity and seclusion.

This work attempts to tap the different and often contentious issues concerning women. The gender negotiations that take place between men and women of the household. How does the patriarchal forces (the society at large) tries to resolve them. Did the Sikh Gurus have any impact on the dominant patriarch ideologies. Could they succeed in formulating or even modifying the formulations of the dominant ideological current and evolve a new social ethos. With this goal, the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib;

¹ Sudhir Kakar, The Psychological Origins, Seminar, No. 437
hagiographic sources known as *Janamsakhis*; the contemporary or near contemporary sources ranging from *Prachin Panth Parkash*, to more propitiatory like *Gubilas Patshahi Chhevin; Gubilas Patshahi Dasvin* to works focusing on genealogy like *Banswalinamah* to *Sau Sakhi* and *Dasam Granth* to name a few, have been analyzed from a gender perspective to come to an understanding of the discourse surrounding gender during this initial phase of the formation of the Sikh tradition. Due attention has been paid to more popular literary or folklore tradition from *Hir Ranjah* of Waaris Shah to *Hir* of Peelu and Damodar to *Kaafiyas* of Shah Hussain. The aim is to come to an understanding of gender themes within the earliest sources, both historical and scriptural.

**Why Punjab??**

The foremost reason for choosing the Punjab region was being a Punjabi myself. And then inherited knowledge of inherent equality between men and women advocated by the Sikh faith getting the hard blows of the present day realities made me look for paradoxes; if any in the past. Apart from the familiarity with the culture and traditions of the land; on a closer academic scrutiny of the region it appeared to interest me as geographically and geopolitically, Punjab occupies an area of North India which had to bear the brunt of the frontal challenge. In Muhammad Akbar’s words “The Punjab was overwhelmed by the intermittent waves of the immigration of hordes of the Aryans, the Scythians, the Greeks, the Arabs, the Turks, the Afghans, the Persians and the Mughals. These groups appearing at intervals and advancing into the peninsula left something to be assimilated by the people already in the province.”

In sum, ethnically and culturally Punjab has been home to the people of many ethnic types and cultures, which constantly interacted and influenced each other. Moreover, the region of Punjab has been a hub of *Bhakti* ideology where Guru Nanak was icon of *Bhakti* ideology. In spite of

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great similarity in the teachings of Kabir, Dadu Dayal, Guru Nanak on issues like caste system, idol worship, perfunctory rituals et al, when I compared Guru Nanak’s attitude towards women and gender in general, there appears to be a subtle break in the similarities between Kabir and Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak’s attitude towards women appeared to be in great contrast to the existing social milieu and strands of ideology. For yogis, whose primary objective was the vanquishing of desire, particularly sexual desire, women were great obstacles to be conquered. Kabir viewed women as “seductive” beings, who tempted men away from their spiritual inclinations. Kabira asked men to shun the company of women as “Kabira tin ki Kya Gat Jo Nit Naari ke Sang”. Sant Tulsidas, the revered hindi poet, the author of Ram Charit Manas placed women at par with shudras and animals when he said “Dhol Gawar Shudra Pashu Naari teeno taran ke adhikaari”. Guru Nanak, on the other hand, criticized the yogis for their solitary ascetic, spiritual search and furthered the ideal of the house holder. The Guru saw the marriage as a sacred institution, spiritual bond between two equal partners, not merely a physical union between two individuals. Guru Nanak propounded that by “living within the family life, one attains salvation”. A strict moral code of conduct was prescribed for men and women in Sikhism, where the duties of both husband and wives were defined.

This kind of contrast, in the then general social milieu and Guru Nanak’s perceptions on this aspect made me curious as to what extent this contrast might have affected the dominant ideologies of patriarchy. Did it actually manage to formulate a new social ethos on gender relations or could just modify to a limited extent only.

Fusion of Traditions

Interestingly, Punjab of this period had been a home to Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. In fact, Muslims out numbered Hindus and Sikhs put together (J. S. G.S. Talib, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, English Translation 4 Vols. Punjab University, Patials, 1990. Hereafter referred to as AG. p 661)
There is a complex interplay between religion and social change. Religious traditions have been important players in the transformation of societies and have always been of utmost importance in determining the status of women, since such factors exert powerful influence on the thought, culture, and behaviors of the people. This analysis becomes even more complex because in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Sikhs had neither emerged as a distinct community nor there was any collective urge with in the community to distinguish themselves from the pre-dominant Hindu culture, traditions, rituals or religion at large. Consequently, the two communities shared inter-cutting, intersecting relations among themselves. In other words, the fortunes of Sikh women have been inextricably linked with that of Hindu women. In fact, to be more factually correct, Sikhism was itself in an evolutionary stage with its changing ideological focuses in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In its course of evolution, a whole lot of dissenting or deviant sects were emerging such as sangat shahi, udasis, Kukas, Namdharis etc. The study is further complicated by the fact that initially there were at least eleven known traditions so to presume any kind of homogeneity with in Sikhism would be inappropriate. In fact, at that point of time, the culture of Hindus and Sikhs was some what co-terminus, thus it would be improper to presume them as two communities having their distinct tradition, values and culture. Harjot Oberoi puts it very succinctly when he writes “Sikh notions of time, space, corporeality, holiness, kinship, societal distinctions, purity, pollution, and commensality were hardly different from those of the Hindus. Also the two shared, the same territory, language, rites of passage, dietary taboos, festivals, rituals and key theological concepts. The concept of personhood with in the two traditions and their solutions for existential problems were quiet alike.” ¹ This kind of common culture is further attested by the heterodox textuality of the contributors of the Guru Granth Sahib combining elements from Muslim, Sufi, Hindu and Bhakti traditions. In the similar sprit the inclusion of Hindu Gods and Goddesses, icons

¹ Harjot Oberoi, Ph.D. Dissertation, Canberra, Australia, Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1987 as quoted in Harjot Oberoi 1988 "From Ritual to Counter Ritual... J.T.O. Connell, M. Israel and W.G. Oxtoby (eds) Sikh History and Religion in the 28th Century Toronto; Centre for South Asian Studies University of Toronto, P. 142.
in the premises of Golden Temple till very late is another reflection of common culture.

This fusion of tradition did not leave the Muslim component of population untouched. Kinsley puts it very appropriately when he says “Religion was primarily a localized affair, often a matter of individual conduct and individual salvation. For much of their history, the people of the sub-continent went of their rituals, pilgrimages and acts of religious piety without objectifying religion into an exclusive entity. Religious traditions were based on local traditions and not on pan-regional organization of communities. Islam may have been the only exception to this, but then, Indian Islam, heavily coloured by Sufism, is of a radically different genre from its counterpart elsewhere.”

This holds true in the context of Punjab as the influence and presence of Sufi Shrines is more than obvious in the region. Inclusion of poetry of Baba Farid in Guru Granth Sahib and the fact that one of the four persons who laid the foundation stone of Golden Temple was esteemed Miyan Mir cannot be ignored. Similarly, the extensively remarkable influence of Sufi Poets like Warris Shah, Shah Hussain, Bulleh Shah and a whole lot of them on popular culture of Punjab is more than evident. The kind of imprint their works left on the culture of the land is still apparent after centuries. Or for instance a Muslim girl named “Kaula” being influenced by gurubani accompanied Guru Hargobind and stayed in his hometown for the rest of her life. This fusion of tradition to such a great extent makes the analysis still more complex.

**Literature Review: Concerns and Limitations**

An attempt has been made to make a nuanced study from gender perspective of different genres of literature ranging from historical to hagiographical and also the popular literature and folk songs. Yet one has to admit the limitation posed by the sources. First of all as pointed out by S. Nurul Hasan the destiny of the Punjab being so closely linked with the rest of the country, there is no

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worth while medieval history or chronicle dealing exclusively with the region. ¹ The historical data regarding the Punjab has therefore to be culled from the general medieval chronicles. Apart from the difficulty of collecting evidence which is widely scattered, bits of pieces of information have to be collected and inferences drawn. In context of the gender studies, the problem gets magnified many times. It's like studying the position of women from the men's lenses. Secondly, the available sources are hagiographic in nature, associating legends and miracles with the Gurus. Or at best, they deal with battles, administrative concerns, economic transactions, struggle with the Mughals and genealogies, in which women had little place as wives and mothers of the Gurus. Extraordinary women do find their way into oral traditions but here one has to be very conscious of not falling into the trap of treating exceptions as common reality. These exceptional women can not be held up as examples of normal larger reality by which to measure the gender egalitarian ethos in any society. It reminds one of Simon Digby's opinion that every source has a discursiveness of its own kind. While examining and exploring about society, we can not afford to ignore either the sphere of ideas, or the socio-economic and political processes that influenced people at a specific time. Gurevich, a well known Soviet scholar of modern European history has rightly observed, that historical research is a dialogue between two cultural backgrounds, i.e. between the culture of the research epoch and that of the researcher himself. ² It becomes still more critical in context of medieval society and thus, should be handled with care.

It must also be underlined that, given the fact that women have not generally written their own histories historical accounts are written through the lens of the male gender. What was and is important to men thus becomes the thrust of the sources and focus of historical analysis. Man a social instrument which is responsible, if not solely then quite substantially for the fate of women. Most of the textual sources are either silent on women or at best prescriptive with an inherent gender-bias. In other words, they represent the perspectives of

² A. Gurvich, Categories of Medieval Culture, Moscow, 1984, p.8
male members belonging to the upper echelons of the society. What ever the source material is handed down to us from the historical past was considered worthy of being preserved by men. In this entire process, may be the treasures of knowledge might have been lost. There are rare instances of women writers in Sikh history. When they do appear their contributions have often been interpreted as mere guises for the men who were the “real” voices of history. For instance, the hukamnamas by Mata Gujri, wife of Guru Teg Bahadur, at a critical juncture of Sikh history which are regarded as binding on the whole Sikh community, yet credit is given to her own brother Kirpal Singh. These hukamnamahas are not, in fact, unanimously accepted as written by Mata Gujri. A set of serious scholars like Ganda Singh believe that they were written by Mata Nanki, wife of Guru Teg Bahadur. However, the net result is that the value attached to a particular source suffers a setback putting a question mark on its reliability.

The Guru Histories are by and large, silent about the wives of the Gurus. From Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, the wives have been treated as part of the historical background not as individual in themselves.... Needless to say, the overwhelming impression we receive from the reading the text of Sikh history is that women do not have a history. From the silences surrounding the women of history their lives and experiences can be perceived only as inconsequential. Yet, we know that besides the history composed by men, there exists a “her story’. Many aspects of this “her story” has been wiped out so that it is quite difficult to reconstruct its basic elements.

Another major limitation is that what ever little information is furnished by the sources, it is more often than not about the upper echelons of the society. We can easily presume that as wives, sisters or daughters of the Gurus’ or Rajas’, they certainly did not lead lives that were very much akin to their common contemporary sisters. In many ways, then they conjure up false images as to the roles and status of women in society. Adding up to our challenges in words of Clarence McMullen is the gap between the normative and operative belief although his analysis is placed in context of contemporary society but it holds still more true for any medieval society. McMullen defines as “Normative beliefs and practices are those which are officially stated and prescribed or
proscribed by a recognized religious authority, which can be a person, organization or an official statement. Operative beliefs and practices, on the other hand, are those actually held by the people."

One tends to tap information from the oral tradition with a twin intention of getting a closer glimpse of the common masses, their concerns and aspirations and secondly to overcome the lacunae, at least to an extent of the sources emanating from upper echelons of the society. But this exercise also has inherent limitations of its kind. The written texts assembled from oral traditions are part of a collective oeuvre. Certain parts must have been re-accentuated, certain potentials from the images actualized, others allowed to fade over time. In this sense, the works are inscribed in an extended rather than a discrete moment of production. They represent intentions, beliefs, desires which stretch beyond the individual and thus, need to be used with caution when designated as a definable mode of social perception.

To expect homogeneity in terms of culture, values, rituals, rites, taboos in any society are not only inappropriate but is in fact threatening the very nature of human society. The co-existence of multiplicity of traditions becomes still more apparent in context of Punjab, where the three communities, the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs not only co-existed but to a great extent shared the culture. Thus, one has to be consciously alert of the attempt of the sources to flatten out the diversity. Diversity, especially in context of the Indian sub continent is a pre-eminent reality. This brings us to important aspects of social institutions-the caste system and the class which play a pivotal role in the day to day functioning of the social relations. The caste system, in context of medieval India, is inextricably linked to gender relations. In fact, the diversity of cultural practices amongst different castes becomes most apparent in case of gender relations, for instance the marriage-forms or even the marriage rituals.

In sum, this entire question of position of women in Punjab needs to be placed in the context of caste, class and community and at the same time the fusion of traditions needs to be acknowledged. To see "Hindus", "Sikhs" or "Muslims" as water tight social compartments would be misleading. We also need to recognize the basic fact that any human society can not be homogeneous and
there is need to place social and economic institutions in their ecological and physical setting. Any attempt to flatten out the diversity by the primary sources or to “idealize” by the successive writings goes against the basic reality of any human society that is - heterogeneity and multiplicity of cultural practices coexisting with each other; To use Neeta Kumar’s words we have to look for “fault-lines” in our sources to understand the complexities, the struggles and turmoil of the age.

It would be appropriate if we make a brief survey of different genres of literature and the kind of information they provide.

**Punjabi Sources**

**Guru Granth Sahib** is the first and most important original and contemporary source for the lives of the first five Gurus and of the ninth Guru Teg Bahadur. Several incidents in their lives are reflected in their compositions which are incorporated into the sacred volume. These compositions also reflect the social, religious and political atmosphere of those days and the views of the Gurus regarding the prevailing social customs, religious rites and political conditions in the country. The contents of the Guru Granth Sahib also called Adi Granth contains (5894 hymns) compositions of the first five Gurus, the ninth guru, fifteen Bhagats (Jai Dev, Nam Dev, Trilochan, Parmanand, Sadna, Ramanand, Beni, Dhanna, Pipa, Sain, Kabir, Ravidas, Farid, Surday, Bhikhan) and eleven Bhattas (Mathra, Jalap, Harbans, Talya, Salya, Bhai, Kulh, Sahar, Nal, Kirat, Gayand, Sadrang). Among the 922 hymns of the Bhagats, the highest number of hymns vis-à-vis 541 is composed by Kabir.

The compositions of the Gurus are not mere hymns addressed to God since they took a lively interest in the secular welfare of the people, they are outpourings of the heart prompted either by certain historical incidents or by discussion with the masters of other religions, or in the nature of advice or admonition to disciples and other enquirers regarding the conduct of their lives.

Nothing excels the description of Guru Nanak on the condition of the people on the occasion of the sack of Saidpur (Eminabad) during the third Indian
expedition of Babar in 1520-21. His revolt against established formalism and his protest against people giving up their language and dress just to please the ruling class, are reflected in the _Asa di Var_. The _Japji_ and other hymns embody his views on Godhead, the relationship between the One Formless Self-existent Creator and His creation, man, and the conduct of human life in this world.

Similarly, the Shabdas of the other Gurus and Bhaktas set forth their views on social and religious subjects, refer to the reforms introduced by them, and trace the gradual growth of the Sikh thought and the evolution of Sikh Sangats into a distinct community.

The Ramkali Ki Var of Satta and Balwand is more historical than religious in nature and is a very important contemporary document for students of Sikh history.

The hymns of Guru Amar Das in the Wadhans Ki Var point to the jealousy of the anchorite (Tapa) of Khadur towards Guru Angad. The fourth Guru Ramdas refers in the _Gauri Ki Var_, to the avarice of a Tapa of Goindwal on the completion of bauli and to the complaint to Khatris of that place against Guru Amar Das, which of course was dismissed as unfounded. In the _Tukhari Chhant_, he describes the visit of Guru Amar Das to Kurukshetra and Haridwar.

The Sadd of Sundar is an eye witness account of the death of third Guru. It explains the Sikh attitude towards death and points out the futility of the then prevailing ceremonies. The jealousy exhibited by Prithi Chand on the nomination of his younger brother, Arjun to the gaddi of Guruship is hinted at and condemned in _Rag Suhi_ and the _Gauri Ki Var_. The admonition of their father, Guru Ramdas, addressed to the quarrelsome son, is given in the _Sarang Rag_.

In the _Majh Rag_ are to be found the three letters of Guru Arjun addressed to his father from Lahore and a complimentary note composed on his return to Amritsar in 1581, which formed the part of the test placed before him to prove his suitability to the Gaddi.
Guru Arjun sings in the *Suhi Chhant* of the construction and completion of *Hari Mandir* and in the *Sorath Rag*, he describes the advantages of the *sarover* or the tank of Ramdas. There are about a dozen hymns in the *Bilawal, Asagaund, Sorath- Gauri, Deva-Gandhari* and *Bhairo Rags*, referring to the birth and illness of Guru Har Gobind and to the murderous designs against his lives by the agents of Prithia.

The *Shlokas* of Guru Teg Bahadur, composed during his confinement at Delhi and incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Gobind Singh clearly indicate his detached view regarding impending death. The 54th *Shloka* in this composition is believed to be a courageous reply of Guru Gobind Singh at the age of nine to his father's *shloka* [53], sent to him at Makhowal to test the fitness of his successor.¹

The inclusion of Bhagat Bani in the Adi Granth illuminates the process of scriptural adaptation in the Sikh tradition. The process of the integration of the Bhagat Bani in the Sikh scripture was based on the recognition of two major points. First, there was harmonization in it with the Gurus' thoughts in broad outlines. Second, its differences with the Gurus' thoughts at essential points were highlighted to demonstrate the distinctive Sikh viewpoints. These additional reflections of the Gurus were crucial for shaping the emerging Sikh identity.²

There is an ongoing debate about the Adi Granth as Guru: and the controversy³ related to its translation, which is well represented by two contrasting view points. The intent here is just to touch upon the sharp contrast in the viewpoints and perceptions about Guru Granth Sahib which is well represented by the following quotes.

"The Word enshrined in the holy book was always revered by the [Sikh] Gurus as well as by their disciples as of Divine origin. The Guru was the revealer of

³ Verne A. Dusenbery, Word as Guru: Sikh Scripture and its Translation Controversy", History of Religions, Vol 31 No 4
the Word. One day, the Word was to take the place of the Guru. The line of personal Gurus could not have continued for ever. The inevitable came to pass when Guru Gobind Singh declared the Guru Granth Sahib to be his successor. It was only through the Word that the Guruship could be made everlasting.¹

Since the day of Guru Granth Sahib being installed in Harimandir, on August 3rd 1603, the holy text has been the centre of Sikh life. Ceremonies relating to birth, initiation, marriage and death take place in the sound and sight of it. The community’s ideals, institutions, and rituals derive their meaning from the Guru Granth. The other viewpoint, well represented by scholars like McLeod who says that the historian who seeks to it as a source for a wider knowledge of the culture of the period must work hard for a limited return.²

The second scripture is the “Dasam Granth”, a substantial collection associated with Guru Gobind Singh. Guru Gobind Singh was a prolific writer and went through the whole epic literature of the Hindus. The following are believed to be his important works:

- Jaap Sahib;
- Akal Ustat;
- Bachittar Natak;
- Chandi Chrittarr;
- Chaubis Avtar;
- Swayyas;
- Zafar Namah (Persian)

All the above works constituted the “Dasam Granth”. Although, it too bears the title of the Guru, most of it is seldom read. This can be explained partly by the difficult nature of its language and partly by the considerable attention which it devotes to tales from Hindu tradition. The later feature has produced chronic controversy and largely accounts for the ambivalent attitude towards the

¹ Harbans Singh, 'Guru Granth Sahib' Guru Eternal for the Sikhs, Sikh Courier 12, number 14(summer 1986); 8.
“Dasam Granth” which still prevails with in the panth.¹ There are, however passages, from it which command the highest respect and some of these are prominently incorporated in the daily devotional prayers of the panth. All these works are attributed to Guru Gobind Singh. But the most interesting and important source which requires a little detailed discussion is Charitro Pakhyan (Vol. IV of Dasam Granth) specially in context of a study on women.

Charitro Pakhyan (Tales of Deceit), also known as Triya Charitra, essentially is a collection of 404 tales about the wiles of women. Charitro Pakhyan covering 7555 verses of Charit Kavya is the largest composition in the Dasam Granth. The 404 tales may be divided into categories such as tales of bravery, devotion, or intelligence of women, (78), of the deceitfulness and unscrupulousness of women, (269), of the deceitfulness of men (26). The sources of the Charitro Pakhyan are no fewer than eight ranging from The Mahabharat, The Ramayan and the Purans. The tales from Panchtantra and Hitopadesh are included side by side with a few selected from Persian books like Bagho Bahar and Chahar Darvesh. The inexhaustible treasure of folk-lore has been used effectively in this compilation by Guru Gobind Singh.² It appears that the framework is based on the contemporary incidents, anecdotes or scandals which might be floating about the folk-lore. It is, therefore, presumed that the author reflects the life and the sentiments of his own days. In this regard, Dharam Pal Ashta observes “In most of the tales, however, the themes are love, sex debauchery, violence, crime or poison. They are extremely racy and frankly licentious.”³ In the sexual intrigues women are often the seducers. Such stories may not be a pleasant reading but they do imply lessons of warning to the reader against feminine wiles. Most of them belong to the upper classes among whom the women lead, an easy and idle life, for the most part, and few being ill-matched or over sexed take to sex intrigues to break the monotony of their dull life. The royal harems appear to be the center of such intrigues which spring from sexual rivalries and jealousies. The mysteries of harem life and the scandals that the slaves

¹ W.H. McLeod, Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism, Chicago: University of Chicago,1984, p.2
³ Ashta, ibid, p. 151-153
whispered about the persons like Manucci, collected and treasured, might have exercised some influence on the commoners and affected their morality adversely.\textsuperscript{1} As Dharam Pal Ashta notes, while indirectly they instruct men in good moral behaviour, they warn the unwary against womanly enticements. However, the collection also contains a dozen tales in which women play no part at all, as well tales of heroic and honorable women. There are still others which relate to men’s wiles against women who are the victims of men’s high-handedness. Although, women are portrayed as victims also but inherently as powerful over men; yet, most of the themes are of love, sexual intrigue and violence. In the depiction of sexual debauchery, women are often the seducers. One verse sums up their intrigues: “There is no end to the fancies of these women. Even the Creator after having created them repented. Even He who has created the whole universe accepted defeat, after he had probed into the secrets of women”. It is suggested that there is some practical wisdom in these tales. They appear to illustrate perversities of love and sex, which may be traced to the frailty of some and intrigues of others. The chief merit of these tales is moral suggestiveness. While indirectly they instruct men in good moral behaviour, they warn the unwary against womanly enticements.

Further Dasam Granth enjoins the following:” Whatsoever calamities befall a shrewd man, he will endure facing countless tribulations. But in spite of all this, he will not disclose his secrets to women”.\textsuperscript{2}

Many historians and theologians have downplayed the importance of this work; its actual authorship has also been a point of heated controversy. By and large, it has been posited as unlikely to have stemmed from the tenth Guru. This perspective must be traced to the early twentieth century. More importantly, however, Sikhs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries held the Dasam Granth at par with Adi Granth. According to Ashta, while these stories may not be a pleasant reading, but they do imply lessons of warning to the reader against feminine wiles.\textsuperscript{3} These tales, also, reveal the intellectual level and ethical ideals of the society in general and women Sadhus in

\textsuperscript{1} ibid p. 151
\textsuperscript{2} Ashta 1959:154,156. Dasam Granth p.418
\textsuperscript{3} Ashta, 1959:153
particular. Women are shown capable of doing anything good or bad, with in human endeavour and this is no less true of the Sadhus, true or false.

Thus, regardless of whether it's authorship can be attributed to Guru Gobind Singh or not, the work is of considerable importance in understanding gender construction during this period because of its main emphasis on women which is rare to be found in any other contemporary work and more importantly, that the Sikhs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries held the Dasam Granth at par with Adi Granth.

Next to the Guru Granth Sahib, in authenticity, is the Varan of Bhai Gurdas [1551-1629], who was a contemporary of five Gurus [from Guru Angad to Guru Hargobind] and very closely associated with four of them [from 3rd to the 6th]. Moreover, he was one of the few chosen and favoured disciple, next only to Bhai Buddha, who had the unique fortune of anointing as many as five successors of Guru Nanak with the tilak of Guruship. He witnessed the peaceful days of reign of Akbar, the execution of Guru Arjun, the martial response of Guru Hargobind to this event and his armed conflict with the Mughal fauzdars during the reign of Shahjahan. Thus, Bhai Gurdas lived in a phase of Sikh history that was marked by crisis and transition as pointed by J.S. Grewal.¹

As already noted, the Vars of Bhai Gurdas² have been held in esteem next only to Guru Granth Sahib, they are regarded as key to Guru Granth Sahib. Apart from the contents of the Adi Granth and the Dasam Granth, they are the only compositions traditionally approved for recitation in Gurudwaras (4.5[10]). There are thirty nine Vars in all, each consisting of a number of pauris, stanzas, of five to ten lines, adding up to approximately nine hundred stanzas of about seven thousand lines. Bhai Gurdas’ other important work was Kavit Saviyyain, 556 Kabits, which are of philosophical nature.

The Vars of Bhai Gurudas contain references to matters connected with political, economic, social and cultural life during the Mughal period. Besides the general charge of injustice against the rulers and of corruption against the qazis, there are references to the umara, the mansabdars, the mir-i-saman, the bakshi, the dewan, the karori and many others connected with the civil and military affairs of the Mughal government. There are references also to the bazigars, who entertained the common people with their acrobatics and to dhadis, bhats and nais, who, entertained the common people with their Var, Kabits and Sadds. The love stories of Laila Majnun, Sassi Punnu, Sohni Mahiwal and Hir Ranjha had already become a part of the Punjabi folklore; have also been dealt in Vars of Bhai Gurudas. The mythological figures in the Guru Granth Sahib like Prahalad, Poodna, Balmik etc have also been explained in the Vars. In the first and the eleventh Var of Bhai Gurudas, we find a lot of information. In the first Var, he depicts the life and travels of Guru Nanak, Guru Nanak’s visit to Mecca and Baghdad has been mentioned for the first time. In the eleventh Var, are given the names of various Sikhs, who had been near and dear to the Sikh Gurus, the names of castes and places where the Sikhs lived, it also gives a lot of information about the spread of Sikhism and the centers of Sikh faith. Bhai Gurudas was familiar with the Sikhs at Goidwal and Ramdaspur. He refers to several other sangats in the Punjab as well notably those of Lahore, Patti and Sultanpur. But the Sikh sangats were not confined to the province of Lahore; there were eminent Sikhs in Sarhind, Thanesar, Delhi, Kabul and Kashmir, Agra and Allahabad, in Bihar and Bengal, in Rajasthan, Malwa and Gujrat. Thus, it is interesting to note that the evidence of Bhai Gurudas on the Sikhs is not confined to Punjab.

The important ideas and attitudes of Bhai Gurudas appear to be closely linked with his understanding of secular history.\(^1\) The polity and economy of Mughal Empire, which made it possible for the followers of Guru Nanak and his successors to move into distant cities and towns widened the horizons of the contemporary world, and awareness which is reflected in the Vars of Bhai Gurudas. He talks not only of Hindus and Muslims but also of Buddhists and Jains, Christians and Jews. Among the Muslims, he refers not only to Mullahs

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\(^1\) Grewal ibid p. 29
and Sufis or to the Sunnis and the Shiās, or to the four schools and seventy
two sects of Islam, but also to the Rafīzīs, the Mulahīda and the Manafīqa. He
refers not only to the Mughals, Pathans, the Turks and the Sayyīds but also to
Armenians and Rumīs, the Habshīs and the Firangīs.

In the social sphere, there are references to polygamy and polyandry, to
divorced and abandoned women. There are references to a large number of
sub castes and occupations. This varied information suggests that Bhai
Gurdas was widely aware of social environment.

**Janamsakhis:** The word *Janam* means “birth” and *Sakhi* literally means
“testimony”. In its literal sense, the composite term accordingly means a “birth
testimony”. While the sacred writings of Guru Nanak offer some information
with regard to his attitudes towards women, the *Janam-Sakhi* literature of the
Sikhs, written during the first half of the seventeenth century, well after Guru
Nanak’s time, further add to the picture. There are primarily three traditions of
the Janam-Sakhis:

- Puratan Janam-Sakhis;
- Miharban Janam-Sakhis and
- Bala Janam-sakhis.

Given the nature of the *Janamsakhis* they cannot be understood as
necessarily biographical but rather as responding to the needs of the later
community with which this genre developed”.¹ No *Janamsakhis* are close
to Nanak in terms of compositions, and their true value is therefore to show,
how he was perceived by later groups within the Panth. It is an image which
testifies to the fact that in history, what is believed to have happened can
commonly be more important than what actually did happen. In fact, It is not
possible to write a social or economic history of seventeenth century Punjab
from *Janamsakhis* alone, but they do nevertheless provide many useful
glimpses. The narrators of the *janamsakhis* never divorced themselves from
their rural context and as a result, there are recurrent references to the village
community and its way of life. We are given glimpses of birth ceremonies,

¹ W.H. McLeod, 1989
naming ceremonies, marriages and funerals. A child sits with his teacher and is shown how to read. Labourers bring in the harvest for thrashing or carry grass to the village for the buffaloes. Women attend to their cooking duties in their well plastered kitchens etc. The fact that these features are recorded unconsciously adds considerably to their value as there could be no possible reason for mis-representation on such points, for any failure to accord with the experience and understanding of the narrator's audience would merely defeat the purpose of anecdotes. In the *Janam Sakhis*, rural Punjab speaks with an authentic voice, and although they rarely tell us more than a small part, yet the *Janam Sakhis* nevertheless provide a valuable supplement to the Persian chronicles and European reports of the same period. However, while claiming full authority on the life and works of Guru Nanak, the *Janam Sakhis* give rather meager introduction regarding the female members of the family.

It must also be noted that these *janam sakhis* cannot be read literally and to be treated as authentic. Most of the scholars admit that it was written at a point of time when “karamat” (miraculous) was taken as a measure of piety; of superior being. It must also be noted that the information furnished by the *janam sakhis* should be corroborated with other sources but certainly these *sakhis* form an important genre of sources and can not be dismissed just as a piece of literature. Dr. Fauja Singh puts it very aptly that the *janamsakhis* should be placed somewhere between the two genres of literature. One can not afford to dismiss the fact that the kind of image that is presented of Guru Nanak is historically, a reflection of the image people/common masses wanted to perceive of him.

The Gurbilas Tradition and Later Historical Works: The eighteenth century provided conditions congenial to an aggressively militant spirit and for Sikhs this is the heroic period of the Panth's history. As the form and

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dominant philosophy of the Panth changed, so did its religious perceptions and the literature which gave them expressions. The Janam Sakhis continued to retain considerable measure of their earlier popularity but during the eighteenth and nineteenth century a new approach to the lives of the Gurus appeared. This was the Gur-bilas or “Splendor of the Guru” style, a treatment which exalted the courage of the Gurus and lauded their skill in battle. Inevitably, its exponents concentrated their attention on the two great warrior Gurus, on Guru Hargobind and pre eminently on Guru Gobind Singh. Like the Janam Sakhis, the Gur-bilas literature is far more important as a testimony to the beliefs of the writers and their contemporary circumstances than to the actual lives of the Gurus. In a sense, the tradition is an extension of the Janam Sakhis’ impulse and style, both forms being clear expressions of devotion to the Guru. It was, however, a very different kind of piety which produced the Gur-bilas and it was one which shifted the focus from the first Guru to the tenth.

The first example of the Gur-bilas style to appear was Shri Gur Sobha by Sainapat. Three other products of the Gur-bilas tradition which also deserve to be noted Gur-bilas Patshahi Dasvin (Sukha Singh), Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin (Koer Singh), and Gur-bilas Chhevin Patshahi, attributed to a poet called Sohan. Although the latter two claim to be eighteenth century works, it has been shown that both belong to mid nineteenth century. Rattan Singh Bhangu’s Prachin Panth Parkash deserves a special mention. Three years after Rattan Singh had completed his Prachin Panth Parkash, another major work was brought to its conclusion, and this was Bhai Santokh Singh’s Nanak Parkash and Gurpartap Suraj Granth. Other gurmukhi sources, which deserve a special mention are Mahima Parkash (Sarup Das Bhalla), Panth Parkash, and Tawarikh-i-Guru Khalsa by Giani Gian Singh. We also have Banswali Namah Dasan Padshahian Da by Kesar Singh Chibbhar.

The Shri Guru Sobha of Sainapat, one of the rarest contemporary accounts of the life of Guru Gobind Singh, is an admixture of Braj and eastern Punjabi. Its historical importance may be judged from the fact that the author was closely

1 W. H. McLeod, ed. trl, Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism, 1984 p.1
2 McLeod, ibid pg 11
associated with the Guru as the resident poet in his darbar at Anandpur and was an eye witness to most of what he has recorded. The main theme of the book as indicated in the invocatory passages is the praise of Guru Gobind Singh. At least six of the twenty adhyayas or chapters, besides several passages in others, are devoted to directly panegyrizing Guru and the Khalsa. This work basically focuses on description of different wars fought by Guru Gobind Singh. It also discusses the war of succession among the sons of Emperor Aurangzeb, the Guru’s meeting with Emperor Bahadurshah and the Guru’s assassination at Nanded. Infact, Sainapat is the only author who helps us with his rational account to clear, to a large extent, the mystery woven around the death of Guru Gobind Singh. His account of the institution and organization of Khalsa deserves the particular attention; it helps elucidate contemporary terminology in at least two instances; Sainapat uses the term misl as the military sub unit; and Khalsa is defined as the Sikh community in direct relation with the Guru subsequent to the elimination by him of the intermediary masands or local community leaders in different parts. In sum, a fairly well defined outline of Guru Gobind Singh’s life emerges from the work as a whole. However; there are a few errors in his description of the Guru’s travels in Rajputana on his way to Deccan which can be easily corrected with the help of other records.

Gur-bilas Chhevin Patshahi is the written collection of all the oral anecdotes about Guru Har Gobind; his birth, childhood and early education [Cantos 1-3]; his marriage [Canto 5]. It can neither claim to be contemporary nor original. The manuscript preserved in the Punjab University Library, Chandigarh, under accession number 1176, is of anonymous authorship. The contents of the Gur-bilas are almost identical with those of the other Gur-bilas, commonly attributed to Kavi Sohan. There are many dates given in the text but most of them do not tally with those commonly accepted in the Sikh tradition. The author, nowhere refers to the works, he relied upon, though he does state that Guru Har Gobind’s life has been presented before him in great detail and that he was narrating only in brief. The entire volume is divided into several parts, each part dealing with important episode from Guru’s life.
Gur-bilas Patshahi Dasvin (Koer Singh) and the work by Sukha Singh with the same title give some important pieces of information. Gur-bilas Patshahi Dasvin by Koer Singh covers the entire span of Guru Gobind Singh’s life. It is the first work to record the details of early years of his career. It also contains references to Guru Gobind Singh passing on the spiritual succession to the Guru Granth Sahib, which was to be the Guru after him. It is a poetized account completed in 1751. Out of a total of 2938 chhands, 2901 are written in Braj bhasha and remaining 37 in Punjabi. As far as his sources of information, the poet seems to have had access to two preceding works, Guru Gobind Singh’s Bachitra Natak and Sainapat’s Shri Guru Sobha. More than that, he has relied on information personally obtained from Bhai Mani Singh. The Gur-bilas is, however, not free from faults. Its dates are often erroneous; for instance, 1689, instead of 1699 for the creation of the Khalsa and 1709 instead of 1708 for the death of Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded. A notable feature of the work is the evidence it furnishes about the martyrdom of Bhai Mani Singh and his companions in 1734. Koer Singh seems to have been an eye witness and mentions the names of some of the Sikhs who were executed along with Bhai Mani Singh. No other contemporary source contains this information.

Sukha Singh’s Gur-bilas was completed in 1797, when he was barely 29. The poetry is more Braj than Punjabi, but the script used is Gurmukhi. Comprising 31 cantos, the work gives a detailed account of the events of the life of Guru Gobind Singh and of the causes which led to the battles he had to fight. His work combines a rare insight into the prevailing political conditions and also into the moral issues involved in the resistance launched by Guru Gobind Singh. Gur-bilas, however, is not a straight chronological record of events, poetic imagination and pious adornment predominant over factual narration. Though most of the historical facts of the book are true but the writer has made it an amalgam of history, fiction and oral tradition. Some of the mythological and fictitious events are also included.

The Parchian of Seva Das is an eighteenth century collection of fifty (50) Sakhis or anecdotes from the lives of Ten Gurus. Only one Sakhi each relates to first eight Gurus; four are connected with the Ninth, Guru Teg Bahadur, and
the remaining Thirty Eight narrates incidents from the life of Guru Gobind Singh. The work is hagiographical rather than historical in nature, although several episodes agree with similar accounts in other sources such as the Gur-bilases and Suraj Granth. The language is old Punjabi. The Sakhis are narrative in style but didactic. Almost all of them convey some tenet or the other of Sikhism.

Mahima Parkash by Saroop Das Bhalla is a versified account in Gurmukhi script on the lives of Sikh Gurus, completed according to inner evidence in 1776 AD.¹ The first volume (pp. 348) contains 65 Sakhis relating to the life of Guru Nanak, whereas the second volume (pp. 900) comprises another 172 Sakhis of which 16 deal with the life of Guru Angad, 32 are about Guru Amar Das, 8 about Guru Ram Das, 22 each about Guru Arjun and Har Gobind, 22 about Guru Har Rai, 4 about Guru Har Krishan, 19 about Guru Teg Bahadur and 27 about Guru Gobind Singh. At the end of these, there is one more Sakhi about Banda Singh Bahadur. The main sources utilized by the author according to his testimony, were Puratan Janam Sakhi and Adi Sakhian, and information received from the descendents of the Gurus and some other prominent Sikhs. This is the first work of its kind giving a connected account of the lives of all the Gurus. However, it is not plain history, nor is it free from inaccuracies.

Mahima Parkash Vartak recently published contains anecdotes from the lives of the Gurus.² Mahima Parkash Vartak contains in all 164 Sakhis or anecdotes dealing with the Gurus as follows; Guru Nanak, 20; Guru Angad, 10; Guru Amar Das, 27; Guru Ram Das, 7; Guru Arjun, 15; Guru Hargobind, 20; Guru Har Rai, 17; Guru Har Krishan, 1; Guru Teg Bahadur, 4; and Guru Gobind Singh, 43. With respect to Guru Nanak, the work follows in the main the older Janam Sakhis such as the Puratan. For example, like the Puratan Janam Sakhis, it places the birth of Guru Nanak in the month of Baisakh and like the Puratan, it does not mention the name of Bhai Bala. The structure of the work is episodic. Each Sakhi is independent and has its own motive.

¹ Saroop Das Bhalla, Mahima Parkash 2 volumes, ed. Govind Singh Lamba, Khajaan Singh, Languages Dept. Punjab: Patiala, 1971
² Mahima Parkash Vartak, ed. Dr. Kulvinder Singh Bajwa, Singh Brothers, Amritsar: 2004
Some of the stories are didactical; some interpret *Gurbani* in the style *Miharban Janam Sakhis*, while others deal with historical events. *Mahima Parkash Vartak*, is the earliest known work dealing with the lives of all ten Gurus. Its influence is traceable in at least two other accounts, both written in eighteenth century- Seva Das Udasi's *Parchian* (1741) and Saroop Das Bhalla's *Mahima Parkash* (1776). Some of their stories are apparently drawn from this source.

*Prachin Panth Parkash* by Rattan Singh Bhangu is a chronicle in homely Punjabi verse relating to the history of the Sikhs from the time of the founder, Guru Nanak to the establishment in the eighteenth century of principalities in the Punjab under *misl* sardars. The work completed in 1841 A.D. is owed to the Britisher's curiosity about the Sikhs and about their emergence as a political power. Rattan Singh drew upon the available Sikh sources such as *Janam Sakhis* and *Gur bilas*’ and on the oral tradition that had come down to him from his parents and grand parents. The famous Sikh martyr Matab Singh of Mirankot, was his paternal grand father, and Shyam Singh of Karora Singhia *misl*, his maternal grand father.¹ The details and sequence of the events here provided have been generally accepted in later Sikh historiography. The earlier period has been dealt with sketchily. The descriptions of Guru Nanak's life is relatively more detailed, but with miraculous element predominating as in the *Janam Sakhis*. The succeeding seven Gurus have been barely mentioned, except Guru Har Gobind whose battles against the Mughal forces are briefly touched upon. In his account of Guru Teg Bahadur’s martyrdom, Rattan Singh follows Guru Gobind Singh’s *Bachitgar Natak*. He attributes the fall of Mughal Empire to the emperor’s sinful act of beheading the Guru. S.S. Hans in his article, “Rattan Singh Bhangu’s purpose of writing *Prachin Panth Parkash*” comments that Bhangu is not a mere chronicler of the past, he is deeply involved in the present and he is capable of rising above the contemporary predicament to see that the Sikh kingdoms’ only hope lies in the capacity to wage bitter and unequal struggle against the future enemy, in the ability to convince the enemies of Sikh claims

¹ For details see Harbans Singh, *Encyclopedia of Sikh History*
to sovereignty and lastly in their own strength. Rattan Singh Bhangu is probably the greatest historians of Sikhs, who wrote the kind of history, demanded by the requirements of the age, instead of being a mere chronicler of events leading to the establishment of the Sikh rule on the very eve of its downfall.

*Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth* by Santokh Singh is a voluminous work of the highest literary merit in *Braj* verse portraying in comprehensive detail the lives of the Ten Gurus of the Sikh faith and the career of Banda Singh Bahadur. Notwithstanding certain drawbacks, which scholars with trainings in modern historiography may point out, it remains the most valuable source book on Sikh history of the period of the Gurus and indeed, on the very roots of the entire Sikh tradition. *Suraj Parkash*, as it is popularly known, is worthy to rank with the classics in this genre. The work is divided into two parts; the first *Sri Guru Nanak Parkash* in two sections is the story of the life of Guru Nanak. The second, *Sri Guru Pratap Suraj* proper, is divided into portions, *ruth* (season), sub divided into chapters called *Anshu* (rays). According to Ganda Singh, Bhai Santokh Singh has not been able to penetrate beyond the crust of prevalent accounts. He considers all the Punjabi works on the subjects, from the *Mahima Parkash* to *Sau Sakhi* and other similar works as equally authentic. The historical accuracy of *Suraj Parkash*, therefore, does not remain unquestioned.

Giani Gian Singh's Panth Parkash and *Tawarikh-i-Guru Khalsa* are two of his notable works. He was a theologian and preacher of Sikh religion belonging to the *Nirmala* sect. Panth Parkash, published in 1880, is a history of the Sikhs in verse. As the title suggests, it is an account of rise and development of the Guru Panth, which is Khalsa or the Sikh community. Scattered throughout the Panth Parkash are references to at least 23 different sources which the author consulted or made use of. He has specially mentioned Rattan Singh Bhangu’s *Prachin Panth Parkash*, Bute Shah’s *Tawarikh-i-Punjab* and Bhai Santokh Singh’s *Suraj Granth*. Other sources referred to include *Gur-bilas Dasvin*

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2. Ganda Singh, Major Sources of Early Sikh History, ibid, p.18
Padshahi, Banswalinamah and Dabistan-i-Mazahib. Thus, Panth Parkash covers a vast span of Sikh history from Guru Nanak to annexation of Punjab by the British and death of Maharaja Duleep Singh. The last three chapters contain an account of some Sikh sects and cults- Udasis, Nirmalas, Nihangs, Kukas or Namdharis, Gulabdasias, Satkartarias, Niranjanias- and the author’s reflection on contemporary social situation, with some autobiographical details.

His other important work is Tawarikh-i-Guru Khalsa is divided into five parts. The first, Guru Khalsa, deals with the lives of the Ten Gurus. The second, Shamsher Khalsa deals with the military exploits of Banda Bahadur and the Sikh struggle against the Mughals and the Afghans. The third, Raj Khalsa deals with Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the Anglo-Sikh wars. The fourth, Sardar Khalsa, gives information about Sikh rulers, Sikh chiefs and Sikh sects and the fifth, Panth Khalsa, throws light on Sikh Gurdwaras and Sikh sects.

Giani Gian Singh was a devoted religious scholar but not a critical historian. His approach to history was traditional, and the impulse behind his historical writing was the projection of the glory of the Sikh past. Some of the facts, dates and sequences of events in the Panth Parkash do not bear scientific scrutiny, yet the work enjoys much popularity and prestige, it is expounded formally in Sikh Gurdwaras and has served to shape the historical imagination of Sikhs over the generations.

Banswalinamah Dasan Patshahian ka is a poeticized account of the lives of Gurus by Kesar Singh Chibbar. Bhai Kesar Singh Chibbar was the son of Bhai Gurbaksh Singh and the grandson of Bhai Dharam Chand was the great grandson of Bhai Parag Das (who had embraced martyrdom in the battle of Ruhila in 1621) and cousin of martyrs of Bhai Mati Das and Bhai Sati Das. Thus, Bhai Kesar Singh Chibber belonged to a family which had been associated with the Guru family for about one century. The term Banswalinamah means a genealogy. Another term used in the text is “Kursi Namah”, which is Persian term for “genealogy”. However, this work cannot be termed as purely genealogical. It is a rapid account in rather incipient Punjabi

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verse, of the Ten Gurus and of Banda Bahadur. The book comprising 2564 stanzas is divided into fourteen chapters. The first ten deal with the Ten Gurus. There is a chapter each on Banda Bahadur, Ajit Singh, adopted son of Guru Gobind Singh. The last chapter of the book alludes to the state of the Sikhs in the early decades of the eighteenth century, persecution they faced at the hands of ruling authorities. Although his work leaves out few important events yet there are some details which are available exclusively in this source for instance an important event like Guru Gobind Singh awarding “Gurugaddi” to Guru Granth Sahib. Significantly, the author also tries to prove the superiority of the Brahmins even among the Sikhs which may be due to his own Brahmin ancestry. In any case, this is contrary to the principles of Sikhism which rejects caste system. Therefore, the work is not free of limitations, the description of historical events and mythological elements occasionally overlap in this work. Its peculiar feature is the wealth of chronological detail it contains about the lives of the Gurus and the members of their families. But the reliability of the dates recorded by the author is not established.

*Hukumnamah* (ed. Dr. Ganda Singh) is a compound of two Persian words. *Hukum*, meaning command or order, and *Namah*, meaning letter, refers in the Sikh traditions to letters sent by the Gurus to their Sikhs or Sangats in different parts of the country. This collection includes two *hukumnamahs* from Mata Gujri; Nine of Mata Sundri and Nine of Mata Sahib Devi. Thus, it emerges out as an important attestation of the power and authority enjoyed by them. Needless to say that *Hukumnamahs* are invaluable historical documents. Names of persons and places to which they are addressed provide clues to the composition, of early Sikhism and its spread. They do furnish the missing links and give contemporary authentic account of the events. Most of these *Hukumnamhas* are dated correctly which help to fix the chronology of certain events. The *Hukumnamahs* are important linguistically as well and provide crucial clues for tracing the development of Gurumukhi script and Punjabi prose.

*Guru Kian Sakhian* (ed. Piara Singh Padam) is basically based on the references about Gurus appearing in the *Bhatt Vahis* literally the *Vahi* (register of the records) maintained by *Bhattas*. Before twentieth century, the
records of the genealogies and the specific events of the life of the kings, warriors and the Holy men etc were maintained by the Bhattas in their registers called Vahis. The same functions were performed by the pandits in Haridwar and Mattan (Kashmir). The Pandits had clients from all sections of the society but the circle of the Bhattas was limited to some elite sections. The Bhattas had preserved precious data about the families of Guru Sahib and some other Sikhs for the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Guru Kian Sakhian a collection of 112 sakhis beginning from Guru Hargobind Singh to Guru Govind Singh was written in 1790 by Bhai Saroop Singh. Four of these sakhis relate to Guru Har Gobind, nine to Guru Har Rai, four to Guru Har Krishan, sixteen to Guru Teg Bahadur and seventy nine to Guru Gobind Singh. It is a Guru history of 73 years of its own kind and gives new pieces of information. However, the extensive use of Bhattvahis in the Guru Ki Sakhian makes it little less dependable as the Bhattas were not scholars and they were recording these details primarily to fulfill their roles of "jajmani" and "purohiti". The language of Guru Ki Sakhian is a mixture of Punjabi and Hindi. Interestingly, at a couple of places, we find English words, this is plainly anachronistic; it has been so successfully tempered with as to render the authentic portions inseparable from later interpolations. It has, therefore, to be used by the scholars with caution.

Guru Rattan Mal (Sau Sakhī) is a collection of approximately 100 "Sakhis" (stories) which deals with the important events in the life of Guru Gobind Singh. Basic tenets of religion, code of conduct and political events have formed the main contents of these narrations. This work is probably the first work in Punjabi which criticizes the shrewd diplomatic policies of the English. There is a controversy about the authorship of the work. Some people believe it to be written by Guru Gobind Singh; however the thrust of the sakhis do not appear to be in line with the ideological thought process of Guru Gobind Singh. Analyzing the work, it seems more plausible that it is written by Sahib Singh on the basis of the stories narrated by Ram Koer Singh who used to be always present in the services of Guru Gobind Singh. The work is esoteric and prophetic in nature. The book has some historical value too, but has to be
used with great caution because of several anachronisms, mis-statements, interpolations and motivated turns given to the text by different scribes.

As is evident from the above discussion, the contemporary or near contemporary gurmukhi sources focus primarily on the guru period, their ideological formulations and shifting emphasis, principles of Sikhism, institutions and cultural values. Although these sources primarily focus on guru families providing some information on guru- mahals and other female members of the Guru families, yet, in context of their widening appeal, composition of sangats, we also get valuable references of common women and her position in religious sphere and household matters.

Apart from this genre of sources, we also have folk- literature and folk songs. Folk poetry in regional languages is perhaps the most important expression of feelings and sentiments of the common people or illiterate masses on various themes and subjects. According to Terence Browne, “Even lyric poems are social facts just as Potato crops, tractors and new industries are”.¹ J.S. Grewal appropriately writes that “unfortunately, there is no general awareness among the historians of our country about the value of literature for social and cultural history. Once we learn to treat literary works as the product of history, it is possible to know much more about the past than what the writers wanted us to know.”² Around 1300 A.D., Amir Khusrau had observed the people of province of Lahore conducted their daily business of life through a language, peculiar to the region. He called it, Lahaurh. This was one of the several dialects spoken by the people. These dialects were popularized by the people, the most notable among them was the Sufi Sheikh of the Punjab, Sheikh Farid-ud-din-Ganj-i-Shakar, popularly known as Baba Farid. The compositions of Baba Farid were cherished and preserved by his successors at Ajodhan and a large bulk is preserved in Guru Granth Sahib. In his verses, we find enshrined the diction and idiom of the new Punjabi language which by this time had come into its own. Although Baba Farid was proficient in Arabic and Persian, yet his literary command over Punjabi was amazing. A nineteenth

² ibid, p. 338
century Punjabi poet refers to him as the first and one of the greatest poets of Punjabi. His imagery comes from the countryside, and speaks in a manner that could appeals to the peasant, blacksmith, potter, boatman, fowler. In sum, the tenor of Baba Farid’s poetry was social as well as religious. Grewal, rightly comments that in the field of religious poetry, Farid found a great successor in Guru Nanak, but only after a span of two and a half centuries.

Among the Muslim writers of Punjabi, Shah Hussain is regarded as the first major writer after Farid. Shah Hussain was born in 1538 A.D. at Lahore and died in 1601 A.D. at the age of 63 years. In the sixteenth century, Shah Hussain wrote *kaffias* using some of the metres which were used by popular minstrels, and composing in “*Ragas*”, in which Guru Nanak and his successors were composing. His *kaffias* till date are regarded as matchless for their lyrical excellence in kafi genre, he was followed by Sultan Bahu, Bulleh Shah and Gulam Farid, during the seventeenth, eighteenth & nineteenth centuries respectively. The most common activity mentioned in the *kaafiyas* is spinning and weaving referred in 26 of his *kaafiyas*, as well containing very interesting references about common women’s concerns and their daily routine, enlivening community life. Shah Hussain transformed the entire spirit of Sufi poetry in Punjabi literature. He broadened its sphere from mere philosophical Sufism to encompass the whole gamut of man’s feelings.

The secular and oral tradition of Punjabi lore surfaced as the literary phenomenon during the seventeenth century. Most probably Damodar wrote his romance of Heer- Ranjha towards the later times of Akbar’s reign and Peloo’s “Mirza Sahiban” belongs to the same period. While Damodar wrote the first comedy in Punjabi, Peelo is credited with writing the first tragedy of the language. The first version was written by Damodar – strangely enough no subsequent Punjabi poet who composed the *kissa* of *Heer*, Muqbal, or Waaris Shah has mentioned Damodar’s name. Damodar has composed his *kissa* in the *Jhangi* dialect, a sub variety of *Multani*. Considering that even

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1 J.S. Grewal, Punjabi Literatures, 1750-1850, p. 152
3 op.cit. Grewal, p. 153
4 Shah Hussain, A notice in Biographical Encyclopedia of Sufi South Asia, pp. 140-141
Multani did not make much progress as a literary language, Damodar’s narrative did not attain literary status. Though much later, his narrative was meant to be sung with musical instruments and thus his literary work was very close to oral tradition. The most popular version of Heer- Ranjha was authored by Waris Shah. Waris Shah was born in 1735 A.D. at Jandiala Sher Khan, district Shekhu Pura (Pakistan). George Grerson Usborn, Richard Temple, all appreciated Waris for his supreme command and rich vocabulary of Punjabi language. Amrita Pritam calls Waris “A Solace for the Sufferers, A Balm for Bruised Hearts”. Waris’s Heer is the true representation of a Punjabi girl. She has got the same limitations which the Punjabi girl faces during her youth. Characterisation of Ranjha sketched by Waris is the true replica of Punjabi young men, he goes deep in the analysis of his character. Apart from describing in detail the farmer’s life in Punjab, Waris Shah has given vivid details of nature. Different types of snakes, fruits, trees and natural remedies are also mentioned by Waris in his verse. Waris Shah’s poetry has not left any sphere of the life untouched. It turns out to be a great repository of information for the real position of women and the socio-cultural customs, or even evils associated with her. Waris Shah’s Heer- Ranjha saga apart from describing different customs at the time of marriage also describes the various methods used, in the killing of infant daughters which included strangulation, poisoning, drowning and suffocation. Warris Shah had both the Hindu and Muslim sections of the populace in mind, when he talked about people of Punjab.

In terms of the timeline, Damodar was followed by Hafiz Barkhurdar, who wrote in times of Shah Jahan, Barkhurdar penned the popular story of Sassi and Punnun. He is also known to have produced the first known Punjabi version Yusuf and Zulaikha, a popular theme with several Persian poets and based on Quran. The other story, Barkhurdar took up was a purely indigenous tale, the story of Mirza and Sahiban. This story too was placed in the lower Rachna Doab, involving two well known tribes, the Sials and the Kharals.¹ Barkhurdar knew that Peelo’s version of Mirza Saahiban was sung by popular minstrels (dums) that version, in all probability, belonged to the oral tradition. Hafiz Barkhurdar produced the first literary version and recognized Peelo’s great merit.

¹ Grewal, Punjabi Literature, 1750 1850 op cit, p 154
Peelo refers to Raja Rasalu, Dulla and Jaimal and Fatta, who were all subjects of heroic poetry in the Punjabi oral tradition. There were others too, but no Punjabi writer appears to have taken up a heroic theme for literary treatment in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Ahmed Gujjar and Muqbal composed still later. Ahmed Gujjar wrote in reign of Aurangzeb in the late seventeenth century, followed by Muqbal in the reign of Mohamad Shah in the early eighteenth centuries. Muqbal was the immediate predecessor of Waaris Shah, already discussed, who wrote after 1750. Muqbal wrote a Jang- Nammah relating to Hasan and Hussain, the tragic heroes of the battle of Karballa along with his kissa of Heer- Ranjah. In sum, it can be said that largely the themes of literary works were drawn from Punjabi, Indian and Muslim sources. It must also be noted that these heroes of popular Punjabi saga formed a respectable reference in the works of Bhai Vir Singh and many others. These characters had become the part of popular culture and were held in high esteem as is evident in the anecdote where Guru Hargobind visits the "Majnu ka Tilla" and explains his accomplices that the way Majnu got emotionally annihilated totally by his love for Laila, similarly, the Guru Sikhs should have the same devotion for the Akal Purakh. This kind of equation of Laila Majnu to spiritual quest of a true devotee testifies that Guru Hargobind had approved of such unadulterated, single minded love and devotion.

The folk songs are also a great treasure of knowledge and address the aspirations of women from their life at large and marital life, in particular. The folk songs sung at the time of marriage ceremonies seem to be giving a platform to vent out her agonies in an appealing and entertaining manner. Though the value of the oral traditions as a source has great potentiality which are till date, largely un-tapped, however, while using popular literature or folk songs etc, one has to be extra careful and should have sensitivity towards the complex nature of the texts. A straight forward linear reading eliciting certainties is equally problematic. The written texts assembled from oral traditions are part of the collective oeuvre. A whole lot of variations may have

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1 For further information see R.C. Temple, Legends of Punjab Gurbilas Padshahi Chhevin, op. cit. p.315

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been introduced; certain parts must have been re-accentuated, certain potentials in the images actualized, others allowed to fade over time in the process of writing down of oral traditions. Kum Kum Sangari in context of her study on Meera, aptly observed that “In this sense, the songs are inscribed in an extended rather than a discreet moment of production.”¹ The folk literature might, in fact, represent the intentions, beliefs, desires at least to an extent of a period in which they are penned down.

**Persian Sources**

Next comes the category of contemporary Persian sources. Although there are many Persian contemporary sources but they provide very little; rather no information on the position of women in Punjab. However, their corroborative role for weaving the complex picture of society and its values can not be denied. Furthermore, with the exception of the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*; information on Sikhism and the Sikhs before the time of Guru Gobind Singh is rather meager. Moreover, there is a much greater concentration on Banda Bahadur than even on Guru Gobind Singh.

As may be expected, the bulk of information relates to political history. This by itself is not a limitation. There is little information on political history in the contemporary Sikhs sources. Therefore, this information from non-Sikh sources is all the more valuable. In conjunction with later Sikh sources, this information forms the bedrock of the political history of the Sikhs during this period.² However, not only the *Dabistan* but also a number of other works provide information on the social and religious life of the Sikhs, which can provide useful insights in the light of evidence coming from Sikh sources. In any case, the image of the Sikhs which the non Sikh writers formed from time to time is in itself a form of evidence for a social historian. To substantiate the point it would be useful to briefly analyze the nature and thrust of different sources.

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¹ KumKum Sangari, *Meera Bai & Spiritual Bhakti*, ibid, p27
² J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib, *Introduction* in *eds. Sikh History from Persian Sources Translations of Major Texts*, Delhi; Tulika, 2001, p2
A number of genres are represented in Persian sources throwing light on Punjab. This in itself is a reflection of the intellectual and cultural richness of the period. First of all, there are well known general works like the Akbarnama, the Kulasat-ut-Tawarikh, the Tazkiratu's Salatin-i-Chaghta, the Munutakhabal-ul-Lubab, and the Mirat-i-waridat. Then there are the histories of short periods or regions, like the Nuskha-i-Dilkusha, the Ibratnamas of Muhammad Qasim and Imadu's Sa'adat. There are memoirs of the emperor Jahangir; official and semi official documents are represented by Ahkam-i-Alamgiri, the Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mulia, and the reports sent from Delhi by the representatives of other courts.

There are descriptive works like the Chahar Gulshan and Tashrihu'l Aqwam. And then there are works which refuse to be easily categorized like Dabistan, the Tazkira Pir Hassu Teli, the Nairang-i-Zaurana and the Jangnama of Qazi Nur Muhammad.¹

The contents of the Persian works relate to four phases of Sikh history "The Sikh Gurus and their followers before the time of Guru Gobind Singh; the life of Guru Gobind Singh; the Sikh uprising under Banda Bahadur and the Sikh resurgence from about 1750 to 1765. However, we will be basically focusing on the sources dealing with our period.

I. Tuzuk-i-Baburi or Babar Nama: This autobiography of Babar throws light on the political, social, economic and geographical conditions of Punjab and India at the time of Babar's invasion.

II. Ain-i-Akbari and Akbar Nama

The work by Abul Fazl tells us about the historical events from 1556 to 1602 and the Mughal administration. Abul Fazl was the contemporary of Guru Arjun. Abul Fazl is considered to be the official historian of the Akbar's reign and no history of Akbar's time is complete without reference to Akbar Nama. However, Muhammad Akbar in his work "The Punjab under the Mughals" writes that the account of Punjab in Ain-i-Akbari is very meagre and incomplete. In his opinion the chapter on Punjab is by far longest and most important in the

¹ J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib eds Sikh History from Persian Sources, p. 18.
Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh by Sujan Rai Bhandari. Muhammad Akbar points out that in treatment of the Punjab, Abul Fazl is silent on industries, mines, important cities, holy men and other points on which he has usually a wealth of information in the case of other subahs, on the other hand, the author of Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh was a native of the Punjab and thus, he has lovingly recorded every piece of information he could collect about his own province. His account is, therefore, accurate, complete and up to date and no way inferior to the best descriptive chapter of the Ain. Towards the end of the 16th century, the Sikh movement was becoming important enough to attract the notice of “outsiders” including the state. Akbar’s visit to Guru Arjun in 1598 is presented by Abul Fazl, in the third part of Akbar Nama, as a matter of imperial grace. But this gesture of goodwill had an inbuilt political dimension too. The term used by Abul Fazl for the religious position of Guru Arjun is “Brahamanical”, which is either an intentional slip or just shows that Abul Fazl had little knowledge of the religious aspect of the Sikh movement.

III. Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri: It is variously called- Tarikhi Salim Shahi, Tuzake Jahangiri, Karm Nama Jahangiri, Iqbalnama and Maqalate Jahangir.

This autobiography of Jahangir is full of references to Punjab and contains a clear account of the causes leading to Guru Arjun Dev’s martyrdom who was contemporary of Jahangir. In the Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri the emperor claims to have watched the Sikh movement with disapproval. He did not like Guru Arjun converting “ignorant” Muslims to his own faith. Indeed, we know that the Sikh faith was open to Muslims. Bhai Gurdas mentions Mian Jamal among the prominent Sikhs of Guru Arjun. However, this was not the only professed reason for Jahangir’s actions against Guru Arjun, his blessings to the rebel Prince Khusroo become the crowning cause of capital punishment.

IV. Dabistan-i-Mazahib, “School of Religious Doctrine” or more popularly known as “School of Manners” first came to light in 1787. This manuscript was brought into prominence by Sir William Jones, the founder of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta. Since that time it has been considered as the

1 Muhammad Akbar, “Punjab under the Mughals”, Delhi: 1974, p.15,16 and 17
2 ibid p.3
only independent contemporary source of early Sikh history.¹ This book long believed to have been written by Mohsin Fani but now believed to be Mubid Zulfikar Ardistani. The author of Dabistan-i-Mazahib was a personal friend of Sixth Guru, Hargobind. He stayed with him for some time and was often in correspondence with him and was present at Kirath Pur on the occasion of his death. Infact, on Guru Hargobind in particular there is no contemporary evidence which is as valuable as that of Dabistan. He was also close to Guru Har Rai, the Seventh Guru. The author of the Dabistan does not say much about Guru Angad, Guru Amardas and Guru Ramdas. With the exception of few minor errors, his account of the earlier Gurus and of the beliefs and practices of the Sikhs, recorded on the authority of the best informed people, can be safely depended upon. The chapter called the "Nanak Panthia", which covers some twelve pages of the Dabistan,² is the first known account of the Sikh people in Persian. The Dabistan was translated into English by Shea and Troyer for the Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland in 1843. The translation of "Nanak Panthia" in Punjabi was published by Sardar Umrao Singh Majithia in the June 1930 issue of the Khalsa Review and by Ganda Singh in Phulwari of Phagan Chet, 1987 Bikrami.

The Dabistan gives not only comprehensive information but also extremely significant for our understanding of the pre Khalsa panth. The author provides extremely useful evidence on the change in the attitude of the Mughal Emperors towards the Gurus and the change in the attitude of Guru Hargobind towards the state. Dabistan becomes still more significant when combined with the evidence of Bhai Gurdas who wrote mostly in the early decades of the seventeenth century. The Dabistan does not provide information on all the dimensions covered by Bhai Gurdas. The evidence of the Dabistan reinforces the suggestive evidence of Bhai Gurdas who was acutely conscious of the change after the martyrdom of Guru Arjun. The Dabistan also contains the extremely useful information on the organization of Sikh community which indicates in several ways that the Sikhs had a religious

¹ Nawal Kishore edition, 1321 ah
² Kirpal Singh, "Perspectives of Sikh Gurus" The Punjab- Past and Present Vol XVIII-II Oct 1984 Sr. No 36, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.35
identity of their own. The Gurus appointed their representatives, called Masands, for the twin purpose of initiating others into the Sikh faith and collecting offerings from the Sikhs. The author of the Dabistan gives information on some of the important Masands of the Gurus. He also indicates at several places that the Sikhs were not much concerned about the caste distinction.

V. Khulasat-Ul-Tawarikh by Sujan Rai was nearing completion in the 22nd year of the spiritual reign of Guru Gobind Singh (AD 1696), as mentioned by the author on page 70 of Zafar Hasan’s edition of 1918. This would make him a contemporary of the last four at least, if not five, Gurus, from Guru Har Rai to Guru Gobind Singh. There has been varied opinion on the importance of the work. As the author belonged to Punjab, he was greatly impressed by the Sikh movement and gives some important information about Sikh and Sikh Gurus. Mohammad Akbar in his work, “Punjab under the Mughals” considers Khulasat a more important and significant work concerning Punjab than Ain-i-Akbari. According to him, Sujan Rai’s account is accurate, full and up to date, and in no way inferior to the best descriptive chapters of Ain. According to Muhammad Akbar in the century that intervened between the “Ain” and the “Khulasat”, changes occurred in the Mughal Empire. The names of the Sarkars, the numbers of the Mahals, the amount of the revenue and the description of the towns, as given by the author of the “Khulasat”, enables us to institute an interesting comparison with the “Ain”. Both “Ain” and “Khulasat” tell us about the existence of number of mines as well as the weather in the area. According to Ganda Singh, Sujan Rai’s description of the religious life of the Sikhs of those days and their deep rooted devotion to Gurus is significant. Other important Sikh topics dealt with in this work are the religious position of Guru Nanak and his successors, Akbar’s visit to Guru Arjun, the death of Guru Teg Bahadur in Delhi in 1081 AH( 1675AD), and brief notes on historical places like Nanak Mata, Guru Ka Chak (The present Amritsar), Makhowal (Anand Pur) and Kirat Pur.

1 Mohammed Akbar, op. cit, pp. 15-17
2 Ganda Singh, ibid, p. 14
3 ibid, p. 12
According to J.S. Grewal, although Sujan Rai, a Bhandari Khatri, belonged to Batala, a place associated with the marriage of Guru Nanak, may be expected to have reliable information on the Sikhs. But he does not seem to have been a close observer or a meticulous researcher. His account of the Gurus is not only brief but full of mistakes. He refers to Guru Nanak's Gnosticism and his verses. Guru Nanak, he says was born in 1469 at Talwandi Rai Bhuna. He showed miracles from very young age. He travelled widely before he got married at Batala and settled in a village on the Ravi. He died at the age of 70-80 years in the reign of Salim Shah. This date is wrong like several other dates in Sujan Rai's account of the Gurus. Grewal further points out, that writing in 1695, Sujan Rai remains silent on the martyrdom of Guru Arjun and the martial activity of Guru Har Gobind and Guru Gobind Singh. Sujan Rai is the only historian, who refers to Guru Har Rai's association with Dara Shikoh in his flight to Punjab.¹ Sujan Rai supports the statement of the Sikh writers that Guru Har Rai came to the assistance of Dara Shikoh on the banks of the Beas with the object of retarding the progress of his brother Aurangzeb against him.

VI. Muntakhib-Ul-Lubab by Khafi Khan throws light on the history of the Mughal emperors from the beginning till 1722 AD. Khafi Khan has described the rise of Sikhs under Banda and he has furnished great details, though in the usual abusive language often used for the Sikhs in those days. A careful study of the writings of Khafi Khan will yield valuable details and information about the Sikhs. About the early Sikh history that is 1469 to 1708 AD, Khafi Khan has not written much. About Guru Gobind Singh, Khafi Khan has written only the following lines; “During those days when Bahadur Shah had set out on his march towards the Deccan a person named Gobind, one of the leaders of the notorious sect, came to his presence and accompanied him with two or three hundred horse men, lancers and footmen and two or three months later, he died from a wound of a daggers though his murderer remained unknown”.²

¹ Ibid p. 37
Banda and his companions entering Delhi is also graphically described by Khafi Khan.

Guru Gobind Singh receives considerable attention from non-Sikh writers but almost entirely for the post Khalsa phase of his life, that is, the last eight or nine years. Even the institution of Khalsa does not receive much attention. What gets emphasized in non-Sikh sources is the political activity of Guru Gobind Singh and his followers. By far the most important evidence on Guru Gobind Singh comes from "Ahkam-i-Alamgiri" and the "Akhbar-i-Darbar-i-Muolla".

"Ahkam-i-Alamgiri" is a very important source of information of Aurangzeb reign and significant document for the study of Guru Gobind Singh's last phase of life. It was written by Inayat Ullah Khan. He had been a news writer in Aurangzeb's reign and later he was appointed teacher of Zeb-un-nissa, daughter of Aurangzeb who recommended him to her father for employment. The extracts from the "Ahkam-i-Alamgiri" have an importance of their own. The first one refers to the destruction of the Sikh temple in the town of Burya in accordance with imperial orders. The mosque built in its place was destroyed by the follower of Guru Nanak, who killed his custodian too. The primary concern of the emperor was with the conduct and the appointment of qazi and the muhtasib. The spirit of aggression against the Mughal authorities and even more so the confession of murder, strongly suggests the reaction of Khalsa against the aggressive action of Wazir Khan, the faujdar of Sarhind, who had already provided support against Guru Gobind Singh. The second extract from Ahkam-i-Alamgiri leaves no doubt that detailed report of Wazir Khan's action against Guru Gobind Singh was sent to the emperor and was seen by him. The third extract from the Ahkam is an order addressed to Munim Khan, the Deputy Governor of Lahore in which he is told that on a petition from Guru Gobind Singh to be allowed to see the emperor in person. These extracts from the Ahkam are useful in themselves what is even more important; they add a new dimension to the evidence of Zafar Namah, and the Gurshobha.

The newsletters called Akhbar-i-Darbar-Muolla were not exclusively news of the imperial court as the title would suggest but were generally the summary
of the news submitted to the emperor by the official news writers, Waqia - Nawis, Waqai-i-Nigar etc. The representatives of various states and provinces of the country stationed at the capital passed on these news to their respective masters. Such collection of letters was available at Pune and Jaipur. Late Dr. Ganda Singh examined these letters from 1707AD to 1718AD for Sikh History Research Department, Khalsa College, Amritsar. These letters relate to the last years of Guru Gobind Singh and Banda Singh Bahadur. English translation of Dr. Ganda Singh's selection had been done by Dr. Bhagat Singh, which was published in Punjab- Past and Present.¹

Other important sources include Abdu'r Rasul's Nairang-i-Zamana is an account of his journey through Rajasthan. Among other things, he describes an armed conflict between the followers of Guru Gobind Singh and Rajput garrison of the fort of the Chittor. Writing in 1759-60, Rai Chaturman takes notice of "Hindu Sects" in his “Chahar Gulshan”. “Nanak Panthis" are included in this section of work. In his view, Guru Nanak was a Vaishnava who worshipped Ram. But his followers held that he was opposed to Vedas. The Sikhism had become a separate faith, whether because Guru Nanak himself established a new path or because his successors introduced innovations. In any case, it was necessary to give an account of the Nanak Panthis because in every country and city they were found in thousands. Rai Chaturman's account of Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Teg Bahadur is based on Sujan Rai Bhandari's work. He tries to improve upon his source but without any success. According to Rai Chaturman, Guru Gobind Singh ascended the spiritual seat of his father in reign of Bahadur Shah in 1710-11(Actually 1675). J.S. Grewal questions Rai Chaturman’s chronology. If it is presumed that Guru Gobind Singh guided his disciples for twenty one years (which would place his death in 1731-32!). He himself instigated an Afghan to take revenge for the death of his father in the hand of Guru Teg Bahadur, and the Afghan killed him. Rai Chaturman goes on to talk of Ajit Singh, Hathi Singh, Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib Devi as the surviving members of Guru Gobind’s family. Ajit Singh, who had been recognized by the Guru as his son after the death of all his three sons. With permission from the imperial court, was

¹ Ganda Singh, Punjab Past and Present, Punjabi University, Patiala, April 1967, pp. 133-135
enthroned on the spiritual seat. Whereas the other contemporary Sikh writer like Sainapat states explicitly that Guru Gobind Singh did not select any specific person to be his successor instead he declared that Guruship henceforth was vested in Khalsa and the scripture. Thus, J.S.Grewal concludes that Rai Chatterman’s evidence on Guru Gobind Singh is grossly wrong.¹

Bhim Sen’s Nuskha-i-Dilkusha does not take much notice of Guru Gobind Singh who is stated to be “a descendent of Guru Nanak” after his decisive victory over Prince Azam. The work says that “Guru Gobind Singh obtained the good fortune of presenting himself before the emperor.” The reference to Guru Gobind Singh’s meeting with Bahadur Shah is found in both Persian and Punjabi sources. What is interesting about the Bhim Sen’s notice is that it was not based on information emanating from Sikh sources. His account was based on what he had heard about the Sikhs. For instance, he states that Guru Gobind Singh did not follow the ways of religious men and was proud of his soldierly profession. Bhim Sen refers to Guru Nanak service (naukari), his association with religious men, his disciples in the territory of Lahore and Multan, his compositions and his deputees. No country, city, township or village was there without his followers. Offerings were carried to his descendants who are his successors. They spent their lives in splendour and some of them took to the path of rebellion. Guru Teg Bahadur was among them. He called himself Padshah and a large number of people gathered around him. When Aurangzeb came to know of his activities, he summoned the Guru to the court and he was executed. As Grewal states we may be sure that Bhim Sen relied on what he had heard from some people who had only a general, rather vague ideas of early Sikh movement. Nevertheless, Bhim Sen’s reference to the cause of Guru Teg Bahadur’s execution is significant. Most of the non-Sikh sources mention Guru Teg Bahadur’s militancy as the reason for Aurangzeb’s action. By contrast, the Sikh sources like the Bachitar Natak and the Gurshobha dwell exclusively on the religious dimension of the Sikhs.

¹ J.S. Grewal, ibid, p. 18.
Mirza Muhammad in his *Ibartnama* looks upon Guru Gobind Singh as introducing some new “customs” of Guru Nanak and his successors who are seen more or less as Hindu recluses. The Sikhs who accepted Guru Gobind Singh’s core group of disciples came to be known as Khalsa. With their support, he began to establish his power over Zamindars of the neighborhood through warlike means. Wazir Khan repeatedly sent forces against him and the Guru lost two of his sons in battles. When Bahadur Shah was marching from Peshawar to Delhi, Guru Gobind Singh in fact, accompanied the imperial camp to win over the grace of Bahadur Shah, Guru Gobind Singh was in Rajasthan at that time, Mirza Muhammad rightly says later that the Guru accompanied emperor to the Deccan. There he was killed by an Afghan who bore enmity towards him. He was cremated according to the customs of Hindus. Although Mirza Muhammad’s *Ibartnama* contains derogatory language for Banda Bahadur and the Sikhs but his account is important as a contemporary witness.

**Foreign Travelogues**

In addition, we also have the contemporary Spanish and French sources such as Father Gurreiro’s Spanish Account (letter dates 25th Sept 1606 A.D. and 8th August 1607 A.D.) and Father Du Jarrics French Account 1614 A.D.¹ Their works are of great value as they throw light on the condition of the people, the state of trade and industry. In a way, their observations have freshness and weight of their own. But apart from the events in which they participated or which they personally witnessed, their report merely reproduced bazaar rumors and the stories current among the populace, and can not be set against the contemporary works. Eugenia Vanina puts it more succinctly when she points out the limitations of the approach where some scholars base their studies of medieval India entirely on European records, which of course, are very useful as sources. She says that “during the period under review [16th to 18th Centuries is the focus of her work] European travelers were more interested in cloth and spice prices than in the spiritual riches of India. Even those who were interested in this subject were, in spite of their wisdom and

insight, separated from Indian culture by a huge wall of religious superstitions, ignorance and arrogance of the representatives of the ‘highest’ culture and most true religion.”

**Secondary Literature**

In this section, I am led by two primary objectives. Firstly, it is an attempt to map the major analytical positions that dominate the historical work produced with in the sub-discipline of Sikh Studies in specific, and in a larger framework of Punjab in general. This exercise is undertaken with the hope that both the common ground and points of conflict with in the field can be brought out. In other words, an attempt has been made to identify the most important ways in which Punjab of the past has been dealt with. Secondly, it attempts to underline a series of epistemological and methodical problems that influence the historiography over the past few decades. It insists on the inherent need to acknowledge heterogeneity of Punjabi society. Instead of attempting an over simplified, homogenous and linear presentation of Punjabi society, we need to remember that the regions inherently diverse and hybridized population reflects the reality that Punjab has long stood at the confluence of the Islamic and the Indic worlds and the cultures of Central and South Asia. However, this section also discusses few earlier authors on Punjab and their academic contributions in the field. In the foregoing discussion of secondary literature, one becomes conspicuously aware that the tradition of historical writings on the Sikhs at any rate has been longer and stronger than historical writings on the Punjab. Consequently, very often the Sikh history is equated with the history of the Punjab. However, the history of a part can not be equated with the history of the whole. Nor can the part, especially an important part, be ignored in the history of a whole.

**Early Scholars**

Modern historical writings on the Sikhs is a legacy of the British. Indian Historians appearing on the scene in the past half a century have written

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largely with reference to British Historians for instance later authors' works revolved around. J D Cunningham who published his "History of the Sikhs" in 1849.1 However the first attempt at a real study of the Sikhs was that of John Malcolm, "Sketch of the Sikhs (1812)", but he himself admits that the information available to him was extremely limited and often unreliable.2 H S Wilson's Civil and Religious Institutions of the Sikhs (1848) is based largely on Malcolm.3 The same is a little less true of Cunningham's monumental History of Sikhs, the first open minded attempt “To give Sikhism its place in the general history of humanity”4. For his impartial discussion of the Anglo Sikh War (1845-46) and the British responsibility for it, Cunningham lost his political appointment in Bhopal, but won the hearts of the people of Punjab.

Presenting the movement initiated by Guru Nanak, as a faith that was meant not merely to reconcile but to transcend Hinduism and Islam, J D Cunningham postulated a close connection between the Sikh polity and Sikh faith through the mediation of Guru Gobind Singh, whose essential teachings in Cunningham's view were no different from Guru Nanak. Grewal aptly comments that Cunningham's attempts at discerning a thread of continuity amidst change lends to the treatment of Sikh History a dimension that is altogether missing in the works of other British Historians of the Sikhs. Infact the sort of perspective on Sikh History which we find in his work is rather rare in the entire range of historical writings on the Sikhs. Grewal points out Cunningham's treatment of Sikh History however does not take into account the complexity of historical process under discussion.

Ernst Trumpp, an oriental specialist was sent to Punjab by the India Office to translate Sikh scriptures, produced the first English version of the Adi-Granth (1877). Trumpp's insensitive handling of religious verse, and especially caustic comments on Sikhs in the introduction offended the Sikh community significantly. For instance, in his introduction to the Adi-Granth, he wrote “The Granth is a very big volume, but I have noted incoherent and shallow in the

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1 J.D. Cunnigham, A History of the Sikh, Delhi; S Chand & Company, 1966 (reprint).
2 Included in The Sikh Religion; A Symposium, ed. Susheel Gupta, Calcutta, 1958, pp 84-145, hereafter: Symposium
3 Also in Symposium, pp 54-70
4 op. cit, p. XX
extreme, couched at the same time in dark and perplexing language, it is for us Occident the a most painful and stupefying task to read even a single raga.”1

Fifteen years later another European, Max Macauliffe, British Administrator posted in Amritsar, began a similar project, designed to over-turn Trumpp’s treatment. He called Trumpp’s Adi-Granth “highly inaccurate and un-idiomatic. Macauliffe’s Six volume work entitled “The Sikh Religion, Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors” in 1909 created a vision of Sikh Scripture and history that has remained tremendously influential with in the Sikh Panth. Macauliffe insisted that Sikhism was a distinctive religion and its history was characterized by a constant battle against Hinduism. Popular Hinduism, he argued, was like a “boa constrictor of the Indian forests.... its winds round its opponents, crushes it in its fold, and finally causes it to disappear in its capacious interior.” Sikhism was threatened with this same fate, “the still comparatively young religion is making a vigorous struggle for life, but its ultimate destruction is inevitable without state support.”2

The above publication was followed by an important work of Khazan Singh on “The History of Sikh religion” in 1915. Khazan Singh offers a philosophical exposition of Sikh concepts on God, Guru, Soul, Karma, Khalsa etc. In the same year appeared a sympathetic study by a British lady- Dorothy Field-under the title “The Religion of the Sikhs”. This is in the tracition of Macauliffe who showed both understanding and appreciation of the Sikhs for she had personal contact with many Sikhs.3

As is evident, during the 19th century, the major figures were Europeans-Cunningham, Trumpp, and Macauliffe. In the 20th century, the field has mainly belonged to Indian scholars- Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Kahan Singh of Nabha and Principal Teja Singh being perhaps the most outstanding Punjabis. The non Punjabi nationalist historians too wrote on the Sikhs like Indubhushan Banerjee with his “Evolution of the Khalsa” and N.K. Sinha with his “Rise of

2 Macauliffe, Sikh Religion,l, VII.op.cit.
3 For a detailed understanding on the issue, See Gobind Singh Mansukhani, The Origin and Development of Sikh Studies in Kharak Singh, Gobind Singh Mansukhani and Jasbir Singh Mann, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh:1992,pp.129
The Sikh Power" and his "Ranjit Singh". Hari Ram Gupta's voluminous work on Sikh history belongs to the category of "nationalist" historiography. However, these were individual scholars who worked virtually on their own. Khalsa College in Amritsar, where Dr. Bhai Jodh Singh and Dr. Ganda Singh were the major figures, seems to have been the only place which provided a broader institutional base for the development of this field of study.

The second phase of Sikh Studies can perhaps be dated from 1962 when Punjabi University was established in Patiala. With the establishment of the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation in Chandigarh and the Guru Nanak Foundation in Delhi in 1965, Sikh Studies gained momentum.

The normative tradition of historical writing which evoked ideal types historical role models who embodied the ideals of the Khalsa, looked back to a more distant Sikh past. The heroic martyrdom of the ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur and the martial spirit of the Tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, served as exemplary models, as did the great protector of the fledgling Khalsa, Banda Singh Bahadur. Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha's pamphlet "Hum Hindu Nahin" in 1898 was simultaneously an attack on the power of the Hindu reformers of the Arya Samaj in Punjab and also a response to the Sanatan tradition that remained popular with Punjabi aristocrats and the rural masses. This normative tradition of historical writing was consolidated in the early 20th century by the likes of Bhai Vir Singh and after partition it was increasingly professionalized by a new generation of scholars, most notably Teja Singh, Ganda Singh and Harbans Singh. Prof. Teja Singh's early works are booklets on "Guru Nanak and His Mission", (1918), "The Sword and Religion" (1918). However, his more important works came later "Essays in Sikhism" (1944), "Growth of Responsibility in Sikhism" (1948). The reason for these later publications was that the third and the fourth decades of this century were full of struggles for Gurdwara Reform and non-cooperation with the government for limitation of political rights.

However, in 1944 appeared an important publication by Sher Singh entitled "Philosophy of Sikhism". This scholarly work became a pace-setter for later

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1 Mansukhani, op. cit. p.129
researchers in Sikhism. Sher Singh’s exposition of ideological identity and of Sikh philosophical concepts like Wismad was quite remarkable. Another important work of this period was Prof. Kapur Singh’s “Parasherprasan” or The Baisakhi of Guru Gobind Singh (1959). This book contains a valuable exposition of the Khalsa Panth and the rationale of its distinctive features and symbols.

After the independence of India, Sikh Studies tended to be more critical than philosophical. Both Ganda Singh and Harbans Singh wrote that we might term “corrective histories” works that challenged interpretations of Sikhism popular outside the community (such as the belief that Nanak’s teachings were essentially syncretistic) and disputed evidence that indicated diversity in Sikh identity and practice within the historical record. This corrective approach is most obvious in Ganda Singh’s edited collection of European accounts of Sikhism, where his glosses and footnotes not only correct European misapprehensions, but also rebut European claims that Sikhs engaged in practices that contravened the injunctions of the Rahit. In short, this framing of the Sikh past became the dominant vision both within the Panth and at least within the Khalsa and was increasingly regarded by informed non-Punjabi South Asians and British commentators as the vision of the Sikh history.¹ To use Ballantyne’s terminology, the “internalist” approach attempted to correct the way of framing the Sikh past that has dominated the Sikh historiography over the last century. He further points out that despite significant methodological, epistemological and political differences that we can identify as marking four different versions of the internalist scholarship (normative, textualist, political, and cultural), those working within the internalist tradition are united by a common analytical orientation. Internalist scholars prioritize the internal development of Sikh “tradition”, rather than the broader regional, political and cultural forces that shape the community from the outside.²

The second phase of Sikh Studies as already pointed out, can be dated from 1962 and gained momentum 1965 onwards. This phase is marked by the

² ibid.p.2
Tercentenary of Guru Gobind Singh’s birthday in 1966; in 1969 the Quincentenary celebration of Guru Nanak and then came the Tercentenary of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s martyrdom in 1975. All these occasions were celebrated on a large scale, whole lot of seminars and conventions were organized along with the publication of many monumental works. The major works on Guru Gobind Singh’s Tercentenary was Harbans Singh’s biography of “Guru Gobind Singh”, R.S. Ahluwalia’s “The Founder of the Khalsa”, and G.S. Talib’s “Impact of Guru Gobind Singh on Indian Society”. The Quincentenary celebration of Guru Nanak resulted in a collection of 54 papers, presented in the convention of Punjabi University, Patiala, under the title “Perspectives on Guru Nanak”. Other important works published were “Life of Guru Nanak” by S.S. Bal, “Philosophy of Guru Nanak” by S.S. Kohli, “Guru Nanak, His Life, Time and Teachings” edtd by Gurmukh Nihal Singh; “Life of Guru Nanak” by Gobind Singh Mansukhani.

On the occasion of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s tercentenary of martyrdom, the significant works include “Guru Tegh Bahadur, Martyr and Teacher” by Fauja Singh and G.S. Talib; “Bibliography of Guru Tegh Bahadur” by Trilochan Singh; Guru Tegh Bahadur Commemoration Volume by Satbir Singh, and Ranbir Singh’s work on the Ninth Guru deserves a deep study.

The 400th Foundation celebrations of the city of Amritsar in 1977 included a number of books on Amritsar, the Golden Temple and Guru Rambdas. On the same lines, the Quincentenary celebrations of Guru Amardas Birthday in 1979 included a number of publications of which Narain Singh’s “Life Sketch of Guru Amardas”, Fauja Singh’s “Perspectives on Guru Amardas” and G.S. Talib’s “Bani of Guru Amardas” deserve special mention.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s 200th Birthday celebrations in 1980, produced a number of good books on his life and achievements. The important works are Fauja Singh’s “Maharaja Ranjit Singh – Politics, Society and Economics” and J.S. Grewal’s “Maharaja Ranjit Singh and His Times”.

Now, after a brief discussion about these important celebrations and the monumental academic work generated through combined efforts of the academic fraternity, a broad observation that emerges from most of these
works, if not all, is somewhat perplexing. While these internalist models often recognize that the Sikh community has been molded by the broader structures and institutions and cultural patterns of Punjabi life, they share a tendency to abstract Sikhism from this crucial socio-cultural background. Although this tendency varies between approaches and individual historians yet one can safely comment that this internal scholarship tends to privilege religious identity over social and commercial affiliations or regional identity and Sikhism is extracted from the dense webs of economics, social relations and political relations that have molded its development in Punjab and beyond.¹

Several historians break with the internalist tradition through their explicit emphasis on the importance of this regional context. The most important among them is Prof. J.S. Grewal. Grewal’s works cover a wide spectrum of issues ranging from the history of Punjab, Sikh Gurus, the social history etc and his works are especially commendable as he takes care of the sensibilities of the community, cultural history and its nuances. Grewal has consistently grounded his exploration of Sikhism in the history of Punjab. In fact, of all the historians working on Sikhism, Grewal has published most widely on Punjab history more generally and his research consistently foregrounds the importance of the region’s geography, its institutions and political structures, economic fortunes and cultural ethos. In light of this insistence, his work typically uses a broader range of sources and deploys a range of approaches- from literary analysis to discussions on political economy – in picking out the nuances of the multi-faceted nature of Sikh history. For Grewal, Sikh history is a dynamic story of the shifting relationships between this community and its regional environment. It is commendable that Grewal’s works are equally well received in “traditionalists’ as well as in “skeptical’ circles. He has mastered the craft of making a nuanced, analytical study of his sources and putting across his sources in a manner that it is very difficult to disagree. It is telling that the recent festschrift for Grewal was entitled “Five Punjabi Centuries: Polity, Economy, Society and Culture.”²

¹ Ballantyne, p.9
Indu Banga's writings primarily covering the late 18th century to the 20th century, have consistently foregrounded the importance of Punjab as a context. In part, Indu Banga's significant work on Ranjit Singh's kingdom, a state that is frequently imagined as being explicitly Sikh, yet rested upon the Maharaja's skilful balancing of different faiths and ethnicities in both his administration and military establishments. Banga's emphasis on the importance of the regional context also reflects her strong interest in the economic and agrarian history of the region, the crucial milieu within which Sikhism emerged and developed.

The main thrust of the socio-religious evolution of the Sikh Panth in the 16th century and its socio-political evolution in the 17th century forms the major themes of Sikh history during the time of the Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh. The religious tradition of the Sikhs is historical and scholars in the Punjab have paid considerable attention to the historical development of their tradition. The works of Dr. Ganda Singh, Prof. J.S Grewal and Khushwant Singh have made scholarly impact and have enjoyed wide usage.

Another trend in studies on Punjab at large and Sikhism in specific is of Western scholars. The idea to use this categorization is not on the basis of any presupposition of any kind of ideological homogeneity among them but just for the convenience of discussion. The most important pioneer among them is W.H. Mcleod whose works have always managed to ignite a strong reaction among "traditionalists" and a series of works to "meet his challenge and expose his (McLeod's) distortions.... effectively rebutted the conclusions of McLeod." ¹ One must here underline that McLeod is not only held responsible for his works but rather borne to bear the vehement reaction for the works of Harjot Oberoi, Pashaura Singh, N. Gerald Barrier, Doris Jakobsh and the list goes on who has joined the "bandwagon". He has been blamed to "affix a most damaging brand of Sikh "academics". ......One can not imagine if anyone has done so much damage to the Sikh image at so high an academic level as Dr. Hew McLeod." ²

¹ Mansukhani, op. cit.pp.131
² A letter of a correspondent to the may 1994 issue of the Sikh Review referring to the Editorial in the January issue.
However, one must admit that even when one does not agree with McLeod’s analysis but one can not dismiss his works which cover a wide spectrum of Sikh history. His works have managed to create a powerful impression on Sikh Studies, whether it is in the forms of ripples ranging from vehement reaction or counter works written with an intention to “effectively rebut the conclusions of McLeod.” For instance, Gurdev Singh’s “Perspectives on the Sikh Tradition” (1986), Daljeet Singh’s “Sikhism” (1979) and “The Sikh Ideology” (1984) and a later book entitled “Advanced Studies in Sikhism” in response to McLeod’s work “The Evolution of the Sikh Community.” At the same time, there are more positive opinions as well like that of J.S. Grewal when he writes “The life of Guru Nanak presents serious difficulties due to the lack in our understanding of his environment. Nearly every book written on the life of Guru Nanak is based primarily and almost exclusively on the testimony of the janamsakhis. There is one exception: “Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion” by W.H. McLeod. In this book, the janam-sakhi traditions are subjected to rigorous analysis.” Grewal further says that McLeod rightly emphasizes that janamsakhis are not biographies; they tell us much about the age in which they became current but not about the age of which they speak.” Ballantyne writes that “much of McLeod’s work proceeds from the close analysis and discussion of a particular key term or concept. McLeod firmly respects linguistics and cultural differences, highlighting the problem of translation and has frequently argued that Sikhism, where possible should be understood on its own terms rather than according to a Judeo-Christian framework. He has for example been a firm advocate of the use of the term “Panth” to describe the Sikh community, preferring it to other terms such as “sect” or “denomination”.

The influence of his domineering works is also apparent in the works of Pashaura Singh, Harjot Oberoi, N. Gerald Barrier and now Doris Jakobsh. All these scholars have written extensively on Punjab in general and infact Doris Jakobsh has worked on gender. We can have a discussion about Jakobsh work in the successive section; for the lack of

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1 See the list of his works in bibliography
2 Grewal, A Perspective on Early Sikh History, in eds. Mark Jurgensmeyer and N. Gerald Barrier, Sikh Studies - Comparative Perspectives on A Changing Tradition, pp. 34-35
3 Ballantyne, op.cit.p.13
4 See the detailed list of her works in bibliography
space it would be suffice to say here that all these scholars have added a new dimension to the Punjab Studies per se.

Our discussion of secondary works would be incomplete if we do not bring a set of scholars in the purview of our discussion, who have recently started focusing on the position of women in Sikhism. Till date the question of gender has been afforded little attention from scholars within Sikh studies. What has not caught the imagination within Sikh scholarly exercise will not be recognized as important by those outside this area of study. However, this new academic enthusiasm is well represented by the works of Surinder Suri, Kanwaljit Kaur, Manjit Kaur to name a few.¹ Before discussing their works one would acknowledge at the outset that they have made a fresh attempt to study Sikh history from a gender perspective.

In most of these works, the respective authors are so highly appreciative of Sikh gurus and their ideology that they forget that any human society cannot be viewed in black and white terms; it’s bound to have shades of grey. In their urge to project the Sikh Gurus as ardent advocates of women’s equality, the respectable position of women in Sikh society, they forget the distinction between “the normative and operative beliefs.” “The status of women was not an issue in Sikhism. Equality was implicit....... Women are considered as an integral part of society who must not be excluded by any ritual or doctrinal consideration. Since rituals tend to be exclusive, they cannot be made part of true faith. In other words, the position of women could be a touchstone for the genuineness of a faith”.²

With regard to inherent egalitarianism between Sikh men and women, one writer notes that “The Sikh women have enjoyed superior status compared to her counterparts in other communities. She has earned this by showing the ability to stand by the side of her husband in difficult times.”³

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¹ See bibliography for the detailed list of their contributions.
Yet, if women and men are inherently equal in Sikh tradition in terms of roles and status, why are they not given similar representations in the pages of Sikh history?

In these works, one notices, an attempt to idealize the aspects of history and scripture as they pertain to women, glorified examples are presented of Sikh women who lived exceptional lives in different roles as the normal, larger reality. These exceptional women are then typically held up as standard by which to measure gender egalitarian ethos of Sikh tradition. The most obvious examples that come to one’s mind are like “Sikh Bibiyan” by Simran Kaur, and M.K. Gill’s work entitled “Role and Status of Women in Sikhism”. Both the titles give an impression about being a study of position of common women in Sikhism. However, the former deals with the women- daughters, mothers, wives of the Guru’s families and the latter (Gill’s work) focuses on what she presented as the institution of “guru mahals”, the wives of the Gurus. It would be highly erroneous to imagine the condition of women of guru families to be anywhere closer to the position and status of common women. The exceptional lives of the women of guru families or of few examples like Mai Bhago are projected as constructs of a larger reality.

While acknowledging the painstaking efforts these scholars have made to gather information and formulate some sort of a biographical note of all the women related to Guru households in different roles which form the thrust of most of the works of Gill’s works as well as other scholars. Although Gill admits that the “Guru histories are by and large, silent about the wives of the gurus. From Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh the wives have been treated as part of the historical background, not as individuals in themselves ...........”1Yet, Gill chooses to emphasize and make the reader believe that the guru mahals were very integral to the development of the fledgling Sikh movement. For the silence in the sources she comments that “it is the silence of respect that is accorded to the womanhood in the Punjabi culture and ethos. It helps surround her with an invisible cloak of dignity......

The silence that surrounds the Guru’s family is an intrinsic feature of Sikh

1 Gill, The Role and Status of Women in Sikhism, Delhi, National Book Shop, 1995, p. 52.
tradition." Here, one begs to differ that to view the life and position of women of guru mahals as a mirror of general "role and position of women in Sikhism" to use her nomenclature is a fallacy. As wives and sisters of Gurus, they certainly did not lead the lives that were very much akin to their contemporaries. In many ways then, they conjure up false images as to the roles and status of women in Sikh society. And then negating the obvious, namely that even the guru mahals have not been viewed as consequential in the history of the Sikh tradition, to project the guru mahals as very integral to the very development of the fledgling Sikh movement is like creating a mirage for our own selves. Unfortunately, it also tends to oversimplification and at times contains an element of wishful thinking.

Fully appreciating the contributions of this set of scholars, of at least opening the arena of feminist studies among the indigenous scholars; preparing the life-sketches of women of guru families and also penning down the contributions of Mata Sundri which attempt to give her some credit, if not the desired level, for guiding the Sikh Panth in one of its most crucial phases for a long span of 39-40 years. Yet, at the same time I would also like to point out that this framework of idealizing the contributions of gurus and not admitting the gap between the "normative" and "operative" beliefs; that there is no "black" and "white" picture in any human society, that there are shades of grey which are infact closer to "the reality" of social relations. This framework, somehow in an urge to project, rather "create" an image of the Sikh Gurus as ardent advocates of women’s liberation; of egalitarian ethos seems to be self-defeating and in fact, hampers the real credit that can be awarded to the Gurus for their ideology, in which making it a "reality" they might not have succeeded as desired or as projected by these scholars. Admittedly, there are many elements within the Sikh scriptural tradition which are emancipatory but somehow, in this oversimplified, linear presentation of knowledge they get lost somewhere in between.

Now, it would be appropriate to discuss a set of scholars who are trained in the modern historical methodology; applies the same scrutiny of rationally

\[1\] Gill, 1995, p. 53
analyzing the study of religion as well. Quite often it invites vehement reaction from religious leaders as well as scholars who are of the firm opinion that the question of faith can not be subjected to any critical analysis. Though there are major differences of opinion among these historians as well, yet they broadly agree in their openness to study religion and its different aspects in a critical manner. It is well represented by Harjot Oberoi, Pashaura Singh, Mark Jurgens Meyar, N.G. Gerald Barrier and Doris Jakobhsh. In fact, Doris Jakobhsh has written on gender in Punjab.

In their opinion, the principles of silence, negation, accommodation and idealization have formed the general framework guiding contemporary or near-contemporary writings on women and the feminine in general in Sikhism.\(^1\) This set of scholars, somehow, I feel tend to over rationalize, find an explanation or hidden agenda for the Gurus critical comments, as evident from the following examples. In their urge to highlight what has not been criticized, reprimanded they tend to almost negate whatever has been commented upon, while Guru Nanak grieved the rape of women during the time of Babar, these scholars feel that he did not censure the social order on the whole. While aware of the social challenges facing the widows of the day, Nanak censured them for their unrestrained desires. Another limitation these scholars point out that he did not re-evaluate social institutions such as marriage and marriage practices to make them more equitable for women. Moreover, his silence regarding sati is rather surprising there was also no critique of female infanticide, again, a practice closely aligned to the upper caste\(^2\).

Guru Nanak's vision of ideal women has also been perceived as only limited to procreation, the procreation of souls specifically. An oft-quoted verse:

"We are conceived in the women's womb and we grow in it. We are engaged to women and we are wedded to them. Through the woman's cooperation, new generations are born. If one woman dies, we seek another; without the women there can be no bond. Why call her bad who gives birth to rajas? The

\(^{1}\) Doris R Jakobsh, Relocating Gender in Sikh History: Transformation, Meaning and Identity, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2003 p3

\(^{2}\) ibid
women herself is born of woman, and none comes into this world without the
woman; Nanak, the true one alone is independent of women”.¹

In the opinion of these historians although these words have been lauded as
the slogan of emancipation for women in the Sikh tradition, they had none to
do with the rejection of prevailing traditions or ritual purity and support of the
social hierarchy of the time. For women give birth to sons, especially those of
noble birth; how then could they be considered ritually impure?

The second example is concerning Guru Amar Das. During the tenure of Guru
Amar Das, both scriptural and popular sources attribute a shift towards the
inclusion of women in the Sikh Panth. The tradition credits a definitive
criticism of society beyond that of religious ineptitude; much of this criticism is
directed towards the situation of women in society. With regard to sati, the
third Guru stated, “They are not satis who are burnt alive on the pyres; rather
satis are they who die of the blow of separation (from their husbands).”² Later
accounts present Guru Amar Das as having denounced the custom of purdah;
he did not allow visiting queens to remain veiled in his presence.

Female infanticide was also condemned by the Gurus. Rather than
appreciating their criticism these historians claim that this practice may well
have stemmed from Guru lineage only. According to Punjabi lore, Dharam
Chand, a grandson of Guru Nanak was humiliated at his daughter’s marriage
by groom’s family. Chand was so incensed that he ordered all Bedis to
henceforth kill their daughters as soon as they were born rather than bear
such humiliation. In their opinion Guru Amar Das’ condemnation of the
practice may well have stemmed from a need to distance the Sikh panth
under his leadership from the original Guru lineage that was at the forefront of
the practice of female infanticide.

These scholars tend to read the ideology of the Gurus from present day’s
notion of men-women equality. It is anachronistic to weigh on the modern
scale of equality. In those days if women were made to command respect for
her “feminine” qualities to see her role in the smooth functioning of a society

¹ Adi Granth, p. 473
² Adi Granth, p. 787
as a “contribution” that also need to be acknowledged. If a voice of dissent was raised for evils against women such as female infanticide, sati, purdah etc. If she was seen/ respected as an equal partner in religious assemblies (sangats); worthy of salvation. If Sikhism stresses family values and faithfulness to one’s spouse. “The blind man abandons his own, and has an affair with another woman, he is like a parrot, who is pleased to see the simbal tree, but atlast dies clinging to it”.1 Sikh Gurus declared that marriage is an equal partnership of love and sharing between husband and wife. Married life is celebrated to restore to women her due place and status as equal partner in life.

“They are not said to be husband and wife, who merely sit together. Rather they alone are called husband and wife, who have one soul in two bodies”.2

It should not be nullified because it could not succeed in bringing the dramatic, revolutionary change. Moreover, undoubtedly it is a long drawn process to change the perceptions and attitudes leading to any societal change. Thus any endeavour need to be contextualized in the existing socio-cultural milieu.

In sum, we need to admit that any attempt to idealize the ideology and the behaviors of the Gurus does more harm to the acknowledgement of their contributions. Harjot Oberoi rightly cautions out “how heterogeneous elements in Sikh history, those labeled deviant, marginal, threatening or unimportant are negated in order to generate homogeneity and represent the Sikhs as a collectivity which shared the same values and movements.”3 We also need to realize that any human society on any aspect whether it is a question of women’s position or any other socio-cultural dimension can not be and should not be even, attempted to be projected in black and white. It is bound to have shades of grey. Moreover, as appropriately pointed out by Clarence McMullen, we need to make a distinction between the normative and operative beliefs.4

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1 A G, p.1165
2 A.G. 1788
3 Oberoi, 1994, p. 34
4 Clarence O’McMullen’s work Religious Belief and Practices in the Rural Punjab as powerfully makes the above point though for 20th century village. But it holds true for any human society, in context of my study of 16th and 17th centuries Punjab it is equally valid. Delhi, Manohar, 1989.
Conclusion

To sum up, it can be inferred that all the primary sources have an intention which determines their content, nature and thrust. In Simon Digby’s words all the sources are discursive in nature they can not be viewed as authentic just by the virtue of their being contemporary or near contemporary. Only upon an unveiling of the presuppositions of writers and their writings, a thorough evaluation of the inherent biases and attitudes and practices within these writings, one is hopeful of an analysis somewhat close to reality. If historical research is a dialogue of cultures, it should be held on equal terms. Very often, we face difficulties because scholars sometimes look into medieval sources only for information and ideas that are interesting for twentieth century researchers. But medieval authors had different ways of thinking and to comprehend their viewpoint in right perspective, we must listen to what they say of themselves, and on this basis try to find answers for our questions. For instance, the very notions of “progressive” and “conservative” have a special meaning in context of medieval society and should be handled with care.

One term that is in wide currency amongst Sikh historians, however, requires careful scrutiny and that is “tradition” as a catchall phrase that describes textual corpus, practices and discourses produced by the Sikhs. Yet, this term is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, “tradition” frequently stands in contradistinction to modernity representing the authentic essence of a pre-modern community. Secondly, and following on from this, the use of “tradition” as a concept tends to imagine a homogeneous and strictly unified community. With reference to Sikh history, “tradition” means that which is handed down to within the Panth. The material thus handed down has not been subjected to rigorous scrutiny. It is known to be true because it is said to be derived from sources which are known by the Panth to be absolutely secure. Webster analyzed five works on Guru Nanak, so as to discover at what points, if any, religious beliefs undermine sound historical judgement and concluded “Yet this essay suggests a general reluctance, even among the best historians to
question radically their received religious tradition—specifically in this case the janam saakhi tradition."¹

A very cautious handling of the source material becomes still more relevant as a traditionalist historian (this categorization/nomenclature of “traditionalist” and a “sceptical” historian are borrowed from McLeod W.H.²) repudiate the authority of disciplines like history, sociology, anthropology, women’s studies and religious studies. The viewpoint of traditional historians is well represented by G.S. Dhillon as follows:

“A proper study for religion involves a study of the spiritual dimension and experience of man, a study which is beyond the domain of sociology, Anthropology, and History. Religion has its own tools, its own methodology and principles of study which take cognizance of higher level of reality and a world-view which is comprehensive and not limited”.³ While, Sukhmander Singh has argued that methodologies relevant to Christian ideology where scriptures developed as a result of history and culture are inapplicable to Sikhism where Sikhism is revelatory and authenticated by the prophet himself."⁴

In other words, for a traditional historian the material handed down is known to be true because it is derived from sources which are known by the Panth to be absolutely secure. Not all historians of the traditionalist school would carry the definition so far as that, but essentially they would agree with its substance. The general tenor of their interpretation makes this clear. And opposed to it are historians who embrace the sceptical view with its rigorous examination of sources. In an extreme form this approach requires everything

to be questioned and nothing to be affirmed there is evidence to support it satisfactorily.

One would like to end with a note that it is important to expound on both the positive and the negative messages. To know only the negative message is disempowering; to uphold only the positive images is a naïve and superficial empowerment. To proffer both leads to a more accurate and genuine discussion of the feminine dimension with the Sikh tradition. It also enables us to clearly contextualize the role played by the Sikh Gurus in the then existing social milieu.

Now after a discussion of the primary sources and the review of the secondary works, it would be appropriate to briefly discuss the thrust and focus of the chapters.

**A Glimpse of Chapters**

The thesis is divided in two sections. The first section, comprises two chapters – the first one describing the land and its people and second chapter “Bhakti Sants on Women: A Comparative Trajectory between Kabir and Guru Nanak”; which basically intends to contextualize the study in terms of the geographical, social, religious and economic background (thrust of the Chapter-1) and the different strands of ideological formulations under the aegis of the Bhakti movement (focus of Chapter II).

Part-II of the thesis is entitled “Stri Svabhav: Stri Dharam and the Prevailing Realities”. This section has a detailed preface to the section which basically addressed the questions that need to be focused in the successive chapters. This section includes three chapters. Ideally, this entire section should be read as ‘one’ as the position of women, its varied determinants, its social aspects and various social institutions are so much interconnected and interdependent that they make a complex social web where a holistic approach needs to be followed. Yet, for the practical convenience to make it a lucid reading it has been subdivided into three chapters. Chapter III “Marriage” which basically focuses on marriage; marriage and caste and its varied forms. Chapter IV which focuses on the Social Space of Women and Chapter V “Social Discrimination against Women”. In Chapter VI the thrust is on as the
Chapter I entitled "Land and its People" – No ideology can be properly understood without contextualizing it in its specific historical, social, economic and political milieu; as well known religion plays pivotal roles in social values and social changes, which is the thrust of my study. There can be a gap in what is the historical context of the message of his exponents and its receivers. Finally, how is the message accepted and interpreted by the audience? How popular is it and how is it understood and utilized by the receivers. Milton Singer has aptly described this type of analysis as "The articulation of textual and contextual studies".¹ In other words, the context is closely related or rather it is a consequence of the "Land" and "It's People". Thus, a detailed survey of the area, its geographical and physical features and socio-cultural milieu of Punjab has been studied. A brief survey of the political context is relevant for appreciating the conducive ground for the birth and development of Sikhism. It needs to be appreciated that the total number of Muslims in core region was larger than that of Sikhs and Hindus put together. Moreover, Punjab, which is literally land of five rivers and a place which geographically and geo-politically had to bear brunt of the frontal challenge, it is difficult to undertake any significant social study oblivious of these realities. In sum, ethnically and culturally, Punjab has been a home to people of many ethnic types. To capture the intricacies and nuances of the complex social fabric marked by variability and heterogeneity and to understand the complex process by which it eventually fused into somewhat homogeneous people, and cultivate a "Punjabi" identity, the context and the socio-cultural processes must be awarded the due importance. Here I have tried to discuss the main ideological strands prevalent in the area. What were the ruptures, if any, in the social fabric which prepared a conducive socio-cultural background for the rise and growth of Sikhism. An attempt has been made to analyze whether Sikhism owed its success more to its background or was more a consequence of their ideological, moral and ethical yet simple,

practical, progressive ideas right from its inception. A refreshingly liberal approach which interwined both religion and society succeeded in winning over the hearts of masses.

Chapter II entitled “Bhakti Sants on Women: A Comparative Trajectory between Kabir and Guru Nanak” – Section I of the Chapter briefly talks about the role of ideology and relationship of religion and society. It attempts to touch upon the existing condition of women which enabled me to contextualize the ideological position of important nirguni and saguni Sants on women. An understanding of the social context is relevant for appreciating the background, understanding the continuum and contextualizing their messages. In next Section, I deal with the perceptions of women of Bhakti Sants like Kabir, Tulsidas etc comparing it with those of Guru Nanak and his spiritual successors. One is tempted to undertake the study of the comparative trajectory which emerges from the sharp contrast in their perceptions on women. Very often women were held in low esteem by bhakti sants like Kabir and Tulsidas. They were neglected as living picture of lust and greed. Kabir, who otherwise spoke vehemently against caste system, disparity in society, idol worship etc. spoke ill of women and her “deceitful nature”. Sant Kabir asked men to shun the company of women as “kabira tin ki kya gat jo nit nari ke sang”. She was looked down upon as a potential temptress. Sant Tulsidas placed women at par with shudras and animal, when he said “dhol gawar shudra pashu nari, teeno taran ke adhikari”. Kabir has been accepted as the most significant representation of the ideological underpinnings which viewed women as an evil. Thus, although perceptions of other saguni sants are included, yet, Kabir has been dealt in specific, as a natural choice because it was only Kabir who had so many sayings about (read against) women attributed to him. Thus, due to his loud and clear vehement opinion he provided potent ideological baseline for a comparative trajectory. Against this backdrop, it is significant that Guru Nanak made Sikhism conform to enlightened, simple, practical, progressive and humane ideals right from its inception.

The comparative analysis made me realize that Guru Nanak, within the patriarchal framework created a large space for women much larger than
other Bhakti Sants, yet the picture is not so simple and Guru Granth Sahib, at some places, has an ambivalent attitude and it includes passages where the women is projected in negative light.

Part-II of the thesis is entitled “Stri Svabhav: Stri Dharam and the Prevailing Realities”, the discussion on varied aspects of women’s life clearly bring out that they are closely interconnected and interdependent. Thus, this section should be ideally read as one piece but just for convenience, it has been sub-divided into three chapters. In this section, I have tried to examine the position, rights, role and status of women in the family in her varied roles, as a mother, sister, wife, daughter, mother-in-law and her individual identity. Women’s role in rituals and spiritual life; public sphere; women and work; her role in economy; property rights; position in the context of institution of marriage. An attempt has been made to contextualise the social customs like Naala on other forms of widow remarriage and to study and evaluate the economic logics operating behind the practice of widow remarriage in context of the division of property. It has also been studied that the custom of sati was rare or widespread in Punjab. We also have the instances of polygamy in the case of Gurus. If polygamy was the reality and its extensive prevalence then what was the nature of the relationship among co-wives and the kind of tactics they used to catch the attention, win over the love and care of their husbands? Questions like position of a girl child; differences in rituals performed at the time of birth of a son and a daughter; social position of a woman not being able to bear a child or giving birth to daughters only; female infanticide; responses of the society to parents doing female infanticide; witch craft, insanity, and other customs providing a platform to women to vent out her social aggrandizement etc have also been addressed under the title of “Weapons of the Weak”.

Constant effort has been made to capture the gap between the injunctions of the Guru/Gurus (normative belief) and the existing reality (operative belief). On one hand we have a set of normative norms well represented by the ideals of Gurus and in contrast we have the reality in operation which is in contradiction of the normative. I will be dealing with aspects like female infanticide; differences in rituals at the time of birth of male and female child; sati; polygamy; widow remarriage and its allied customs. One of the emphasis
would be the respective Gurus’ viewpoints on these social evils but more important aspect would be to capture the gap between normative and the reality. For instance, as has been often noted Guru Amar Das was highly critical of female infanticide. He, in fact, instructed the Sikhs to shun the company of “Kurrimaar” (Killer of a girl child). However, Guru Gobind Singh’s strict prohibition of the killing of female babies pointed to a practice which has gone on largely unchecked since the guruship of Amar Das, the first Sikh guru known to have criticised female infanticide.¹ This kind of academic exercise infact called for a rethinking of historiography as a whole; often necessitating a pushing against the well established boundaries of academic/ scholarly endeavors. This process has been characterized by Nita Kumar² as finding the “fault lines” in the larger patriarchal structures; the positioning of a spot light on areas where inconsistencies or cleavages in general activity occur. If there is an attempt to justify this gap between the normative and operative aspects or the best suited technique it is to level out the aberrations and construct a homogenized unilateral social fabric.

When dealing with this section, it needs to be underlined that no human society can be so homogeneous that one can perceive the position of women and her status in different roles as one unilateral general truth. Infact it cannot, and even attempted to be seen, existing as one unilateral generalization. One has to acknowledge the variations at all levels like class, caste, communities and even regional variations. Thus, an effort has been made to place this entire question of position of women in the context of caste, class and community; recognizing the basic fact that any human society can not be homogenous and there is need to place social and economic institutions in their ecological and physical setting and accept the multiplicity of cultural practices co existing with each other. One will have to be very careful that the social fabric of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, its nuances and complexities are not viewed from the mindset of modern day. To view the then realities from today’s yardstick of women’s position and her role would be anachronistic and it would be a self defeating exercise.

² Nita Kumar, Women as Subjects: South Asian Histories, Charlottsville: University Press of Virginia, 1994
We get a glimpse of the forms of the protests against male dominance, domestic violence in sources like Charitro Pakhyan and folk songs etc and also about the notions of honour and morality, notions of fidelity and chastity etc. For instance seclusion and isolation became a symbol of status in a Brahimical Patriarchal system. It was interesting to examine the virtues associated with an “ideal- virtuous” woman as there is projection of 32 virtues “Batti Gunni” in a woman in Guru Granth Sahib which were cherished in normal life. The questions which have been dealt with are, what was the mechanism for regulation of social life at the level of family, inter personal, inter caste and inter community relationships, what was the role of customary practices in determining the position and rights of women and did the customary practices manage to give some breathing space or at times platforms to vent out her bottled up anger against the existing system. (Like the rituals of beating up dever, younger brother of husband at the time of marriage).

With this background and in this framework, as already mentioned just for the lucid reading, it became imperative to divide this section into three chapters. Chapter III entitled “Marriage” focuses on the institution of marriage in detail and acknowledge its importance as an extremely vital social mechanism which regulates the social sexual life of human society. It highlights the perceptions of the Sikh Gurus on marriage where they termed it so important that they proclaimed, “Living within the family, one obtains salvation”. They advocated a position of respect and dignity to women’s role as a wife and urged men to be loyal to their spouses. In this chapter one attempts to observe the intricacies of the complex relationship between the marriage and the caste. The intricacies and the complexities reminds one that no human society can be so homogenous so that one can present a unilateral general truth about the institution of marriage. One is inclined to acknowledge that the variation existed at all levels like class, caste, communities and even regional variations. It also talks about the varied forms of marriages. It is interesting to examine the virtues associated with an “ideal virtuous’ woman as there is projection of 32 virtues “Batti Gunni” in a woman in Guru Granth Sahib or the expectation of the society at large and specifically the in-laws. It also tries to
assess the impact of exogamous marriage on women, her social presence and her own understanding of her position. The chapter also tries to understand the varied forms of customs like ‘Karewa’ and ‘Chadar Dalnaa’. It strives to understand the economic logistics, if any, behind the system of widow remarriage which successfully succeeded in keeping the possession of land within the husband family and different manifestation of patriarchal guardianships. It also discusses the practice of child marriage and its logistics, polygamy etc.

Chapter IV entitled “Women’s Position in Social Sphere” focuses on the social space of women and has attempted to make a study under the aegis like marriage rituals and ceremonies and other life cycle rituals. A detailed study of marriage rituals and other life cycle rites is made to clearly see whether the women played a significant role in the rituals or was she marginalized or her social position and expectation of subordination was equally manifested in the rituals as well or may be legitimized by the element of religion which is represented by the rituals.

Position of lower caste women, women’s role in economy and inheritance laws etc. have also been awarded due attention. This chapter is concluded with a section on weapons of the weak where many customs like moh-mahi, beating up dever, younger brother of husband at the time of his marriage have been studied in detail. Folk songs have been studied in detail to assess whether they provided an effective platform to women. What was the role of customary practices in determining the position and rights of women? Did the customary practices manage to give some breathing space or at times platforms to vent out her bottled up anger against the existing system. In this chapter an attempt has also been made to study the complexities of the family as the basic social unit; tried to construct the position of women in her varied roles as a mother, wife, daughter, mother-in-law and her individual social identity, if she had any. It tries to capture the complexities of relationships-bond of love and dependence in the family.

Chapter V entitled “Discrimination Against Women: Social Evils” deals with the social discrimination against women. A study has been made on evils
like, female infanticide, sati, purdah, prostitution and polygamy. This chapter necessitated a very cautious handling of the material and the approach so as not to view the then existing social fabric, its nuances and complexities from the mindset of modern day. To view the then realities from today’s yardstick of women’s position and role would not only be anachronistic but rather a self defeating exercise. For instance if the polygamy was the reality then what was the nature of the relationship among the co-wives and the kind of tactics they used to win over the love and care of their husband? Questions like position of a girl child; differences in rituals performed at the time of birth of a son and a daughter; social position of a woman not being able to bear a child or one of giving birth to daughters only; female infanticide; responses of the society to parents committing female infanticide, witch-craft, insanity, dowry etc. have also been addressed. The Chapter concludes with the brief recapitulation of Sikh Gurus’ perception on women.

In Chapter VI entitled “Development of Sikh Panth: Construction or Deconstruction of Women’s Identity”, I have tried to identify and study the shift in the dominant concerns of the community with the passage of time, looking for historical and logical connections between the activity and ideas of the various phases. An attempt has also been made to relate the transformation, the changing face of Sikhism to the women’s position and her role in religious pursuits; a gender analysis. For instance, the early gurus lived with in or near the Majha area of Punjab, a region which was and still known as a strong Jat constituency. Given the egalitarian nature of the Jats in the early Indo-Islamic period, it is possible that it was women in particular who were attracted to the message of emancipation of the Sikh Gurus and, consequently, to the full participation in developing the Sikh community. It was Guru Amar Das, who is by tradition accredited to make a definitive criticism of society beyond that of religious ineptitude; much of these criticisms directed towards the situation of women in society. He vehemently condemned social evils like sati, purdah and female infanticide. In brief, women would have had the most to gain from rejecting the restrictions placed upon them by an orthodox brahminical system and embracing the egalitarian message of the
early Sikh gurus. The third guru’s criticism of the societal norms pertaining to women would conceivably have encouraged their movement into Sikh fold.

It was during Guru Amar Das’ time that missionaries were appointed to extend the message of the Sikh panth beyond the immediate surroundings of Goindwal. Thus the manji system was created, a word literally meaning “string bed” and referring to the seat of authority. Manji were leaders of local gatherings who were directly accountable to the guru and thus an extension of his influence. While sources conflict with regard to the actual number of manjis as well their gender, there is evidence that there may have been women sent out to preach the guru’s message of emancipation. The very possibility of women being included in such esteemed emissaries speaks, at least to a growing concern about women. Women missionaries would have proven most effective in the recruitment of other women into Sikh fold which would have, in consequence, greatly affected the religious leanings.

During the time of the fourth Guru, the manji system was transformed into the order of masands. The masands had a dual responsibility: they were to preach the message of the gurus and collect the voluntary tribute from the followers. Thus, the new order was tailored to suit both the missionary activities and the economic interests of the gurus. According to all accounts, women were excluded from the new system. Significantly, the fourth guru was highly critical of women in his writings. Similarly, when the development of militancy among Sikhs reached a pinnacle with the tenth guru, the role and the share of women also got affected. Doris R Jakobsh views the episode of Mata Jito adding sweets to water to be used at the site of initiation as “a feminine element thus came to be added to this male-dominated rite of initiation”. With the process of institutionalization, gender differences within the Sikh panth became increasingly pronounced. With increased institutionalization, traditionally established role for men and women became more socially and materially feasible and were thus consolidated.

Conclusion – The study attempts to remind the close connection between the role of religion and social change. The thrust of my research draws its
Perspective by and large from Joan Wallach Scott's (1988) very appropriate and sharp observation that "Gender is an on-going fluid process whereby sexual differences acquire a socially or culturally constructed meaning." A historical focus on Gender thus goes far beyond the mere addition of women to the pre-existing male dominated historical narrative. In fact, Scott insists that a study of women must also include an analysis of formation of the male gender; a shift from "women's history" to history of gender. The category of gender not only illuminates unequal relations of power between male and female but helps one understand that unequal male female relations are extended via metaphors to varied areas of social life so as to signify unequal relations of power in general. The study also intends to highlight that in the study of any religion and it's role, we need to go beyond traditional methods of exegesis to a "hermeneutics of suspicion"; Paul Ricoeur defines this "hermeneutics of suspicion" as "set (ting) out from and original negation, advancing through a work of deciphering and struggle (ing) against masks, finally........put in the quest of a new affirmation."  

Only upon an unveiling of the presupposition of writers and their writings, only upon a suspicious reading entailing a thorough evaluation of the inherent sexist attitudes and practices with in these writings, is one enabled to go beyond this suspicion to what Ricoeur terms the transformative "power of affirmation".

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1 Joan Wallach Scott, History of Gender and Politics. New York University: Columbia Press, 1988