History is the story of human experience and the relationship between history and geography is especially intimate. Geography concerned as it is with human environment; interaction represents the spatial dimension of human activity while history represents the time dimension. Geography is by nature the constant companion of historical studies. The historical record is inextricably linked to the geographic setting in which it developed. In other words, history is concerned with understanding the temporal dimensions of human experience (time and chronology). Geography is concerned with understanding the spatial dimension of human experience (space and place). Key concepts of geography such as location, place and region are tied inseparably to major ideas of history such as time, period and events.

In other words, human culture essentially springs from interaction between man and his non human environment. Logically a change in environment whether due to natural causes or human action, can lead to cultural change. Similarly, a qualitative or quantitative change in interaction itself may result in cultural change. A more obvious source of cultural change may be peaceful or violent contact with the bearers of a different culture. Without minimizing the importance of this cultural interaction, it may be safely stated that non human environment leaves its imprint on cultural formations whether we think of environmental influence in terms of “pre determination” or “adjustment” or “exploitation”. Spatial variations in socio cultural formations can thus be seen as the result of environmental as well as cultural interaction. Material and physical condition do certainly influence the nature of society.

Before discussing in detail, the geography (i.e.) “Land”, it would be worth noting that the human beings (in this case Guru Nanak and his successors to the guru gaddi) and their actions and the events of history derive their meaning from the political, economic, social and intellectual circumstances in which they are placed. The rise of any new awareness thus, marked the
catalytic element not in cultural but also in social system. In itself the product of what probably were deep tensions in the existing order, and of the elements which were its more recent accretions, this consciousness posed a serious challenge to the existing system and heralded the emergence of new formations. Without a proper understanding of the socio-cultural and political milieu it would not only be difficult rather decontextualized to appreciate the message of Guru Nanak, in particular and Sikhism at large. What was the nature of socio-cultural context, which permitted this kind of ideological fermentation and expression; what socio-cultural and political milieu contributed, at least not deterred, the growth of Sikhism in its nascent stage. If we perceive the concept of ideology as David N. Lorenzen "a form of discourse, primarily verbal but also behavioral, that directly or indirectly claims to describe the structure and functioning of a society in such a way as either to justify, or to protest against an unequal distribution of social status, economic wealth and political power among different groups within the society."¹ We may work on the basic premises that one of the basic functions of a religious tradition is to articulate a social ideology intended to serve as a sort of psychological glue that helps preserve/generate harmony within the religious community and within the society as a whole. Thus, any such ideological fermentation of Guru Nanak is a response or reaction to existing religious, socio-cultural and political milieu; his own predilections owe a great deal to his background. Therefore, to comprehend and to appreciate this new thought, an understanding of its context and background is advisable. Moreover, as oft quoted "history is a dialogue between the past, present and future."

Punjab: Geographical Understanding

A geographical region, by definition is a distinct part of a larger whole. It is generally defined on the basis of criterion involving physical features, climate, drainage, soils and the like. To these are added flora and fauna. We must admit that geographical region is not uniform in terms of criterion

¹ David N. Lorenzen in Bhakti Religion in North India, Community Identity and Political Action, Delhi: Manohar, 1996, p.3.
evolved to define it. There are "sub regions", each marked by differences in relation to others. No region is marked by cultural homogeneity either. There are cultural "sub regions" each marked by differences in relation to others. There is interaction between the sub regions, just as there is interaction between the regions. Regional articulations are the outcome of intra regional and inter regional articulation. The relation between this regional articulation and regional identity will be discussed in subsequent sections.

The Persian word Punjab derives its name from two words, panj [five] ab [water] means "five rivers" and by implication, the land of five rivers. The Punjab thus is a geographical entity loaded with inherent logistic problems. The problem arises when we try to take it literally as "the land of five rivers". It is not clear however; precisely which region is covered by the term. There are six rivers in the so-called 'land of five rivers' and it is not certain whether the river Indus, the river Satlej or river Beas is meant to be excluded. Furthermore, it is not clear whether the term Punjab refers to the valleys of the five rivers or to the area between the five rivers. The Punjab as a geographical entity is not a precise connotation. Nevertheless; it is assumed that the Punjab strictly refers to the area lying between the Himalayas and the confluence of all the six rivers of the Punjab. In other words, the Punjab proper consists of the five doabs up to the foot-hills.

The vagueness of the Punjab as a geographical entity is further accentuated by its loose identification with a political entity. For the historian too, the Punjab has carried different connotations. The ambiguity of Punjab as a regional concept has allowed historians the freedom to escape the confines of a geographically delineated area. The first difficulty of a historian is to identify his region at a given time and to be clear about the criteria by which it is actually identified.

1 J.S. Grewal, "The Historian's Punjab" p.1-10, in J.S. Grewal, Miscellaneous Articles, Amritsar, 1974. It is a brief survey of the multiplicity of connotations that have been given to the term 'Punjab' in Mughal times to the present day
The term Punjab came into currency during the reign of Akbar. In the documents of the Mughal period; we find the use of the terms Sarkar-i-Punjab and Suba-i-Lahore. The Punjab proper in the Mughal times comprised five main doabs i.e. tracts lying between the two rivers, which were formed and named by Akbar by combining the first syllables of the names of the rivers between which they lie.¹

**The five doabs from east to the west are as follows:**

- The *Bist Jalandhar Doab*; comprising the territory between the *Sutlej* and the *Beas*, *Bist-Jalandhar Doab* is a very fertile tract. It contains the important cities of Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur.

- The *Bari Doab*; It includes the tract between the *Beas* and the *Ravi*. The two most important cities of the Punjab, Lahore, and Amritsar are situated in this Doab. This is also known as Majha or Middle tract.

- The *Rachna Doab*; enclosed by rivers *Ravi* and *Chenab*, this fertile tract comprises notable towns of Gujranwala and Sheikhupura.

- The *Chai Doab*; lying between *Chenab* and the *Jhelum*, this tract has the important towns of Gujrat, Bhera and Shahpur.

- The *Sindh-Sagar Doab*; the tract between the *Jhelum* and the *Indus* is known as *Sindh–Sagar Doab*. *‘Sindh-Sagar’* literally means *‘Ocean of the Indus’*. This area is not very fertile and productive. The important towns of this *Doab* are *Jhelum*, Rawalpindi, Attack, and Mianwali² Khushwant Singh, in addition to these divisions also gives a comprehensive list of Punjabi names for different regions have been [and in some cases still are] used.³

Thus, we can see that the region under consideration is bordered by the Yamuna in the east and the Indus in the west. To its north and north-west lie vast mountain ranges, while its southern extremities are contained by the Great Indian Desert which flings out extensions in two directions.

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¹ Muhammad Akbar, *The Punjab under the Mughals*; Delhi; 1974, p.1
² L.M Joshi, ed. *History and Culture of Punjab* part 1 Publication Bureau, Punjabi University Patiala; 2000, p.4
eastern extension included much of the *Phulkian* states. Chetan Singh’s study shows that the introduction of canals here has pushed back the desert and converted into a fertile agricultural region.\(^1\) The western extension went through *Sindh* and up the Indus Valley to the south-west angle of the Salt Range. The region enclosed within these natural boundaries is a great mass of alluvial brought down by the Indus and other five rivers.

In sum, the greater part of Punjab consists of flat alluvial plains which are drained by the Indus river system, thus creating five doabs. The eastern most of this *Bist-Jalandhar Doab*, as already discussed, is formed by the *Satlej* to the east and the *Beas* to the west. By virtue of its proximity to the northern hills the *Jalandhar Doab* receives a higher average rainfall than the other doabs. Through it also flow two small rivers, the *Black Bein* and the *White Bein*, both of which fall into the *Satlej*. The larger part of the other *Doabs*, however, consists of uplands known locally as bar. The northern portion of these quasi plateaus receives an annual rainfall which averages around 24 inches. Of these the upper *Bari Doab*, which includes Lahore, receives the greatest amount of rainfall westward the average rainfall decreases steadily. The lower part of these *Doabs* (in particular those of the *Bari* and *Sindh-Sagar Doabs*, which include Multan and the districts of Muzaffargarh) included sandy tracts which were some of the driest parts of India.

Spread across the upper regions of the Sindh-Sagar Doab is the Pothuhar Plateau upon the southern and south-western fringes of which rises the Salt Range. Its western boundary is marked by the Indus, while to the north it is bordered by the Himalayan foothills. As already noted, in this region are to be found the towns of Jhelum and Rawalpindi as also the medieval fortress of Rohtas. The rainfall in this region varies from 13 to 30 inches annually. Narrow strips of low lying flood plains [bets] ranging in width between 15 and 25 kilometers are to be found along the main rivers. Their limits are to be defined by broken chains of sand dunes or by an abrupt rise of land along

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\(^1\) Chetan Singh, ibid, p.25
the river banks\(^1\). Steep bluffs of 50 to 100 meters in height frequently separate the higher banks from the adjoining bed\(^2\). The rivers tend to change their course quite freely within these beds and the annual inundation that is witnessed here makes them very fertile.

Thus we see that though Punjab largely consists of a vast plain, it also has easily differentiated sub-regions. These differences probably were even more obvious in medieval times on account of the absence of modern irrigation facilities. This is a factor of utmost significance for it led to divergent socio-economic conditions within Punjab. It was from this diversity that much of the dynamism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Punjab arose. It attests the fact that the history of every country or region is shaped to a great extent by its geographical conditions and the Punjab has been no exception to this truism.

Making a brief survey of the geographical features of the region and acknowledging their role in the making of history, the socio culture of the people of a region, it is the cultural entity of the people which is closely related to its geographical features. For instance, the dress code is also highly influenced by the weather conditions of an area. As noted earlier, the regional articulations are thus the outcome of intra regional and inter regional interaction. The intensity of regional articulation in a particular historical situation may lead to consciousness in which the people of the region are deemed to be different from others. What the people of different sub regions share may appear to be more important than what they do not share with one another. This consciousness of regional identity springs from regional articulation. It creates a kind of self image which is related to objective reality but which may not exactly correspond to it. It would be worth addressing, the usage of the term Punjab. When exactly did it come into currency? Sometimes, it is suggested, as pointed out by J.S. Grewal that we have its prototype in the term Saptasindhu, or Madra Desh, or Panchand. This does not help, because we know little about these “regions” (assuming

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2. National Atlas of India, Northern India, plate 2, 1; 2, 000, 000, 1965. Also see Chetan Singh, p.17
for the sake of argument that they represented regions in terms of
graphy, polity, culture of self image. The term Punjab does not occur in
the compositions of Guru Nanak, although he managed to win over the
people's heart and used the language of the people. The term does not
occur in the Tuzuk-i-Baburi or Baburnama which, otherwise, contains
interesting information on the geography, society and political divisions of
northern India. In Akbarnama, however, the term is used rather frequently. It
is reasonable to infer that it came into currency during the last quarter of the
sixteenth century. It was in the reign of Akbar that the province of Lahore
was the only province in Akbar's empire which had five Doabs. The names
used by Akbarnama, incidentally, passed into popular usage. The usage of
the term “Punjab” did not remain confined to the politico administrative unit
created by Akbar. The inhabitants of the province brought in the usage of the
epithet “Punjabi”. Infact, it's the Punjabi culture which would be more flexible
and fluid in its concept as well as in its operation. In the reign of Aurangzeb,
a chronicler refers to Sadullah Khan, the famous Diwan of Shah Jahan, as a
Punjabi. It is obvious that even during Mughal times some people were
conscious of the fact that people living in a certain geographical region
called the Punjab were naturally to be called Punjabis; that is the people of
the Punjab. Criteria other than the politico-geographical were being
unconsciously added to the original considerations of area and
administration. Interestingly, the term “Punjabi” was used for the language of
the people of the province. The emergence of the dialects of this language
several centuries before the time of Akbar was a great cultural
development. Amir Khusrau refers to the language of the common masses of the region
around Lahore as “Lahauri”. When the province came to be known as the
Punjab, this language could naturally be called “Punjabi” and with the
expansion of the political boundaries of the “Punjab” the orbit of the
language increased as well.

In the late eighteenth century during the Sikh times Waris Shah refers to the
Punjab as a beautiful forehead of Hindustan. In him, there is the awareness

1 J.S. Grewal, Inaugural Address, Punjab History Conference, Twenty Seventh Session,
2 J.S. Grewal’s ‘Historian’s Punjab p.2
that the region called Punjab, though distinct, was a part of the larger unit called Hindustan. Ahmad Yaar, a well known Punjabi poet who wrote *The Shahnamah - i - Ranjit Singh* in Persian, refers not only to the region and the people but also to the language Punjabi. Shah Muhammad, another Punjabi poet writing in the early 19th century, refers to the Punjabi women explicitly as *panjaban*. Also, the Punjabi sentiment is rather strong in his poem and the term clearly cuts across creeds and communities.

Though, not negating the importance of the geographical boundaries, I must confess that one is strongly inclined to agree with J.S.Grewal when he contends that nevertheless, in the narrative part of their [contemporary or near contemporary chroniclers] history of the Punjab, the boundaries of the Punjab expand and contract with the expansion and contraction of the states established in the Punjab. There is no doubt about the primacy of the politico-geographical criterion for them, but they are also aware of the cultural and social entity of the Punjab. Ganesh Das projects the consciousness even backwards when he refers to Rai Inderjit of the ancient times a “Punjabi”.

To take the argument little further one is inclined to comment that even the problems of regional history would arise in the mind of a scholar only as a part of the study of the history of a country as a whole, for the process of social change and the factors motivating it can hardly be observed within the narrow field of a region, that too, in terms of a clearly defined geographical entity. In S. Nurul Hasan’s perception, ours is a large country with considerable variations in its different regions. At the same time, the existence of major differences notwithstanding, there is a remarkable unity in the broad pattern of socio-economic development, culture and administrative institutions.

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1 ibid, p.1-3
In sum, as also contended by scholars like J.S.Grewal and S. Nurul Hasan, that the Punjab, during the medieval period, had developed a personality of its own. It was socially and culturally distinct from the Ganga-Jamuna Doab on the east, Kashmir on the north, the territory of Roh on the west, and Rajputana on the south. It is true that within this region there were variations from place to place and from one social group to the other, but these variations do not militate against the broader historical unity of the Punjab. Infact, no one had ever seriously questioned this unity until the British imperialist decided to partition it on the basis of religion.

A Brief Survey of Political Conditions

A survey of political conditions, that is, to attempt an analysis of the facts, factors and forces that went into the making of a society which provided the characteristic dynamism conducive for the origin and evolution of Sikhism. The period, one would readily note, is all but co terminus with the last days of the Delhi Sultanate and the rise, growth and attainment of the peak of the Mughal imperial power and glory. During the sixteenth century in particular, the region witnessed some of the most significant political developments affecting the entire sub continent. Babur’s invasion of India, Humayun’s recovery of his lost kingdom, and subsequently, Akbar’s defense of his unstable and uncertain inheritance were all initiated in this borderland. It was during this period that the region’s role as the threshold of India exposed it to the pressures of external forces. In other words, geographically and geopolitically the Punjab occupies an area of North India, which had to bear the brunt of the frontal challenge of all the peoples and cultures that were borne from outside of the North-Western borders on to the northern plains of India, and this, from the earliest days known to history. Entering through the north – western passes or from across the Northern Mountains; all foreign elements found in the fertile and tropical plains of the Punjab their first haven where they could spread and settle down if they chose to do so.

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1 It is significant that in the course of the earliest studies conducted by the British administrators, the observation has generally been made that cultural differences on ground of religion are of a comparatively minor nature. Cf. Punjab District Gazetteer. Also see S. Nurul Hasan, Presidential Address.1965
The Archaemenians conquered and made India west of the Indus and its tributaries, a part of their sprawling empire. Alexander pushed right up to the Beas, and though he went back with his army, the strongest political and cultural hold of the Hellenistic Greeks, and following them, of the Parthians, was on the Punjab. Almost simultaneously began the southward swoop down of the Central Asian pastoral and nomadic peoples, avalanche like and in wave after wave, beginning in the pre-Christian centuries with the Sakas and Kushans and ending only with the Islamicised Turks, Afghans and Mughals in the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. To these migrants belonged among others the Abhiras, the Hunas, the Jats, the Gujjaras, the pre-Islamic Turks, to mention only a few. Then there were the Buddhists and Hindushahis of Afghanistan, who have also to be taken into account. Punjab happened to be the land to challenge and confront them all with all attendant shocks, surprises, and disturbances, settle them down, incorporate and integrate them as far as her people could, and in the process to be transformed by them, before the foreign peoples, and their cultures, transformed somewhat in their turn, could push forward and spread further inland. But as B.D. Chattopadhyaya cautions with regard to the history of ancient Punjab a historian should at least make an effort to understand early Punjab in terms of the local cultural evolution, rather than relegating it to one of the history’s eternal “march” regions (where the Indo Greeks, the Scythians, the Parthians, the Kushanas and the Hunas all came and left an imprint of their cultures).1

What the effect would be of such continuous challenges and pressures on the land and its people, can easily be imagined. ethnically and culturally Punjab became a great laboratory where many ethnic types and cultures became eventually fused into one.2 Although this perception of one homogeneous culture needs to be discussed in detail, yet, it clearly hints at exchange of ideas, interaction between different cultures. In other words, the ethnic plurality in the Punjab was matched by the variety in its cultural

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2 Nihar Ranjan Ray, The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society, Delhi, 2nd ed. 1975, p2
tradition. After a cursory glance at the political history of Punjab from earliest times, now it is advisable to focus our attention on the political developments from eleventh century onwards.

From the eleventh century the Punjab became once again a part of large empires when Mahmud of Ghazni annexed it to his dominions in Afghanistan and Central Asia. His successors ruled over the land of five rivers for over 150 years without extending their territory much beyond the river Ghaggar. The last of them was ousted from Lahore by the new rulers of Afghanistan, the Ghurids, before the end of the twelfth century. The Turkish Generals of the Ghurids conquered the whole of northern India, and three Turkish dynasties ruled over the Sultanate of Delhi during the Thirteenth century. During the fourteenth century, much of the Punjab was a part of the large empire established by the Khalji Turks and maintained by the Tughlaqs. The western Doabs, however, had come under the influence of the Mongol successors of Chingiz Khan before Timur, the acknowledged ancestors of the Mughal emperors, invaded India towards the end of the fourteenth century. The Sayyid rulers came into power at Delhi during the early fifteenth century and tried to extend their influence over the Punjab, but without much success. This position was inherited by the Afghan ruler Bahlol Lodhi in the late fifteenth century. Under his successors, Sikandar and Ibrahim Lodhi, the Afghan governor of Punjab extended his influence up to river Jhelum. Meanwhile, Babur was keen to expand his dominions in the direction of India.

Babur writes in his Memoirs, “As it was always in my heart to possess Hindustan and as the several countries had once held by the Turks, I pictured them as my own and was resolved to get them into my own hands whether peacefully or by force”. Babur made five attempts to conquer this country. All his expeditions were led into Punjab and the final and the decisive battle was fought in this province on April 21, 1526 at Panipat.

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2 ibid. p.9
Babur’s first expedition bore no fruit. Within a month of Babur’s exit from the scene, the territories occupied by him were retaken by its old masters, expelling Hindu Beg, in sept. 1519. Babur again entered India through Khyber Pass, but the news of disturbance in Badakshan obliged him to go back without achieving anything. Bad faith and an ill-blood had been created between Sultan Ibrahim Lodhi and Daulat Khan Lodhi, the governor of Lahore. Daulat Khan was called to Delhi but in order to avoid the anger of the Sultan he did not go personally but sent his son Dilawar Khan. This further annoyed Ibrahim who treated Dilawar Khan in a shabby manner and made no secret of how he was disposed towards his father.¹ The estrangement between the Sultan and the governor worsened and in order to protect himself against the well-founded apprehensions from the side of Ibrahim; Daulat Khan sent an invitation to Babur to help him against the Sultan. Daulat Khan wanted to be independent of Delhi in Punjab and did not want to give any superiority to Babur or anybody else for any help received. Babur readily accepted the invitation. He did not like to miss the opportunity to interfere in the affairs of Hindustan.²

Ibrahim got an incling of the conspiracy between Daulat Khan and Babur and sent an army to Lahore. The imperial army captured Lahore without much difficulty and drove Daulat Khan into exile. But Babur came to Punjab in 1524 in response to Daulat Khan’s invitation. He captured Lahore and after a brief stay of four days moved to Dipalpur which fell to his sword. Before returning to Kabul, Babur conferred Sultanpur upon Dilawar Khan, Daulat Khan’s son, and assigned Dipalpur to Alam Khan. Lahore was placed under Mir Abdul Aziz, a close relative of Babur. Sialkot was placed under Khusrau Kukultash.

On Babur’s return from Punjab, Daulat Khan snatched Sultanpur from his son Dilawar Khan and Dipalpur from Ibrahim’s ambitious uncle Alam Khan. Alam Khan went to Kabul and offered Babur full sovereignty over the Punjab in

¹ See R.P. Tripathi Rise and fall of the Mughal Empire, Allahabad, 1957, p. 76.
return for his help to conquer the throne of Delhi from Ibrahim. Babur agreed to the proposal as he considered that, "it would give him a legitimate right to what he had only taken by force." ¹ In the meantime, Ibrahim sent an imperial army to liquidate the rebels in the Punjab but Daulat Khan got an easy victory over Sultan Ibrahim's army. Leaving Kabul in the charge of his 16 years old son Kamran, Babur set out to an expedition of Hindustan. The coming of Babur unnerved Daulat Khan who was again resorting to conspiratorial maneuvering. He conveyed to Babur as written in Baburnama that "if his own faults were pardoned, he would take service with me and surrender Malot", Daulat Khan was pardoned. Daulat Khan was handed over to Kita Beg to be taken to Bhera for imprisonment, but he died on the way when he reached Sultanpur. Having dealt with Daulat Khan, Babur decided for a major action. He writes, 'I put my foot on the stirrup of resolution and set my hand on reins of trust in God and moved forward against Sultan Ibrahim".² Babur set out his troops in proper battle array at the historic battle-field of Panipat. Babur emerged victorious and with it began the long glorious era of Mughal dynasty with a brief interregnum of Second Afghan Empire.

It has often been suggested that after Panipat, Babur could not pay his full attention to the affairs of Punjab. Actually, after Panipat the theatre of warfare and political activities had shifted to western and later to eastern India. Moreover, major events such as the battle of Panipat and Chausa had been overshadowing the perceptions of the contemporary writers, as well as of the modern historians. Hence, we have very little information of what actually happened in Punjab. J.S.Grewal argues, on the basis of analysis of the phenomena of rehabilitation, resettlement and urbanization in the Punjab province under the Lodhi's, that there were "long spells of peace punctuated by spasmodic warfare in Punjab during the lifetime of Guru Nanak."³ To advance his argument, he states, 'After the battle of Panipat, the Punjab remained virtually free from warfare and internal disorder."⁴

¹ For Details See Baburnama, pp. 167, 78  
² Baburnama, op. cit. pp. 380-82  
³ J.S. Grewal, Guru Nanak in History, Punjab University, Chandigarh, 1969, p. 9-10  
⁴ ibid p. 10
After discussing in detail the political developments at the time of the rise of the Mughal empire one would like to remind that the other very important development at the social front was the birth of Sikhism. At this point we would just limit ourselves to a brief chronological parallel drawn between Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism and his nine spiritual successors on one hand and the Mughal Empire, the most formidable political power of the time, on the other. In other words, two hundred and fifty years of the life and activities of the ten Gurus witnessed also considerable changes in the political situation of North India; changes that could not but have affected Punjab and the expanding Sikh society.

The emergence of Guru Nanak was co terminus with the disintegration of the Sultanate of Delhi. Some modern historians refer to the Punjab of those times as a place comparative peace and prosperity. W. H. Mcleod says, 'It seems Guru Nanak was born into a favoured period, at least as far as security and economic conditions were concerned". In J.S. Grewal’s opinion, the western dominions of the Lodhi Sultans enjoyed comparative peace for nearly half a century after Guru Nanak’s birth, and even during these fifty years "the internal peace does not appear to have been seriously disturbed." On the other hand, Indu Bhushan Banerjee, who wrote on the early history of Guru Nanak as “an age of disintegration and an age of almost constant strife”\(^1\) So long as Akbar was on the throne at Agra, Mughal policy of non-interference helped the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh community, both directly and indirectly, to further their socio-religious and socio-economic interests. This explains Akbar's double visit to Goindwal, once to meet Guru Ramdas and a second time, to meet Guru Arjun, and his gift of a tract of land on which was laid the foundation stone of the holy city of Amritsar. This policy of Akbar spans the lives and activities of two Gurus and by far the larger part of those of Guru Arjun, i.e., of the great formative period of Sikhism and Sikh society.

But by the time of Jahangir’s accession to the throne, taking advantage of comparative peace and direct prestige and patronage of the imperial court in

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\(^1\) Indubhushan Banerjee, Evolution of the Khalsa, p.9
the shape and form of more than one imperial visit, the Sikh Gurus could initiate and carry out policies and programs, which not only went to impart to Sikhism a definite form by providing the faith a dependable body of texts carefully sorted out and codified, but also helped the Sikh community to take a definite shape and form. This was also helped further by the patronage which they came to receive from the trading and commercial communities. This patronage and support was indeed very important and significant during the formative period of the faith and the society. But then the tide turned, and during the reigns of Jahangir, Shahjahan, and Aurangzeb, Mughal imperial policy, especially the policy of these three monarchs towards the Sikhs in general and the Sikh Gurus in particular, seems to have been unfriendly, rather hostile.

Guru Nanak on Political Milieu

To place Guru Nanak’s ideological fermentation in the right perspective, we must make an attempt to see the political scenario from the eyes of Guru Nanak, the way he perceived the existing reality. A rigorous analysis of the compositions of Guru Nanak reveals that there is hardly anything in contemporary politics, society or religion that he finds commendable.¹ It becomes still more relevant in light of the fact that the age of Guru Nanak was not fundamentally or even radically different from the previous or the following few centuries. For a rational conceptualization of his position it may be suggested that the entire social order had lost its legitimacy in the eyes of Guru Nanak.

Guru Nanak’s sharp response to Babur’s invasions underlines the most important political development during his life, the transition from Afghan to Mughal rule in the Punjab and in northern India. The Guru was an eye-witness to the massacre of the town of Saidpur [now Eminabad, in West Pakistan] during the third invasion of Babur in 1521; he referred it as a ‘marriage - party of sin’.

"With the bridal procession of sin, Babur issued forth from Kabul and by force demanded the hand of the bride, Oh Lalo."

What pained Guru Nanak the most were the pitiable sufferings of the women-folk carried away and dishonored by the ruthless soldiers of the Mughal army?

Those who wore beautiful dresses and had the partings of their hair dyed with vermilion have their locks now shorn with the scissors, and dust is thrown upon their heads.

Broken are the strings of their pearls. Wealth and beauty have now become their bane. Dishonoured, and with ropes round their necks, they are carried away by soldiers.

When Babur's rule was proclaimed, no one could eat his food.

Guru Nanak was thoroughly familiar with the politico-administrative arrangements made by the Afghan rulers, particularly in the Punjab. This familiarity, reflected in the use of the metaphors, is a measure of his preoccupation with this vital aspect of the social situation. Moreover in Guru Nanak's verses, there is a direct denunciation of contemporary rule. For instance, he said, the rulers are unjust; they discriminate against their non-Muslim subjects by extorting jaziya and pilgrimage tax. The ruling class is oppressing the cultivators and the common people. The rajas prey like lions and the muqaddams eat like dogs; they fall upon the raiyat day and night.

Infact, the Turko-Afghan rule is seen equated as a mark of the kaliyuga.

"The kaliyuga is a knife; the rajas are butchers; dharma is fast vanishing; in the dark night of falsehood the moon of truth nowhere seems to rise."
In Guru Nanak's experience corruption is so rampant in the administration that there is no one who does not receive or give bribe. Even the raja does justice only when his palm is greased but not in the name of God. "They live and die in ignorance of the lord; singed by their own pride, they would burn like the forest reed in a wild fire." 

Here an attempt may be made to sum up briefly Guru Nanak's position in respect of his response to his political milieu. According to Guru Nanak, ruler ship and riches come not as acquisition of men but as God's gift. Guru Nanak does not attach divinity to the office of the King but as a God's gift. The raja as well as the beggar exists because of divine dispensation. Some he has raised to ruler ship; others wander about begging and God is the fountain of the whole authority. It is in God's power to degrade the Sultan just as His power to exalt the man. According to Guru Nanak, if the ruler's order was against the justice and equity, it was not obligatory on the people to honour him and in that lay the seeds of defiance and challenge to the authority of an unjust ruler and his rule. There is a general comment first that the rulers (rajas) are avaricious and full of 'ahankar'. Maya-sanch rajai ahankari maya sath na challai piari. For instance, there is a general reference to 'blood sucking rajas'. Then there is an oft-quoted more direct comment: "The rajas are lions and the muqaddams dogs; they fall upon the raiyat day and night. Their agents inflict wounds with claws (of power) and the dogs lick blood and relish the liver.

Social Milieu

The social situations in Punjab in particular and in Northern India in general during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries was marked by significant changes due to circumstances brought about by the Turko-Afghan rule in the sphere of politics and administration, urban and rural economy, and the sphere of religious and social culture. The "Medieval
History” not only in India, but outside India too was an era of politico social change.¹ The whole of India in her medieval History was a conglomeration of different entities which led to the fragmentation of political paraphernalia and influenced the social fabric of society into many pieces of different traditions. The Punjab was no exception to it. The Punjab too passed through a socio-religious upheavals, it was an age of political disintegration.

The then Hindu Kingdoms of India were disturbed by the invasion of Muhammad bin Qasim as it opened the North West gate for the advent of the Muslims in India and thus Muslim influx started. But by the Ghaznavid invasions the impact of the Muslims began to emerge openly. The last decade of the twelfth and the first decade of the thirteenth century in India, in K.A. Nizami’s opinion were marked by the clash of two degenerating and decaying social systems Turkish and the Rajputs.² The continuities, however, remained as important as changes. Sensitive individuals responded to the changed situation according to their lights and moral fervour. This social background and social position were equally relevant for the nature and content of their response. Social change was accompanied by social tensions of various kinds. These tensions were probably the strongest in Punjab. Thus, relatively egalitarian religious movements had begun to appear in the region much before the reign of Akbar. Their protagonists felt the urge to address themselves to the common people. This could be done only by using the language they spoke. Malik Muhammad Jaisi prefaced one of his Hindi works with the remark that the auliya had always adopted the languages of the countries in which they settled; he specifically mentions Hindi and Punjabi.³ In this context, Shaikh Farid acquires great significance who was writing Punjabi verse, in all probability he must not be alone. J.S. Grewal rightly presumes that although no conspicuous writer is known, but some of the Sufis composed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, verses in Punjabi, thus there is hardly

¹ K.A. Nizami, Studies in Medieval Indian History and Culture, Kitab Mahal, Allahabad, 1966, p. 11-12
² K.A. Nizami ed. Politics and Society During the Early Medieval Period, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, 1974, p. 152
any reason to believe that no Sufi of the fifteenth century wrote in Punjabi verses. The ongoing social situation marked by the social tensions might also explain partly the distinctive responses of Guru Nanak to the social situation in which he lived and moved.¹

The extensive political changes, already discussed affected inter multa ala² the character of the population in Punjab. Yahya Sirhindi in his work “Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi” projects the sixteenth century as an extremely dark age for the people of Punjab for its mal treatment, mal administration, mal behaviour and injustice with the native people. It is projected that the social fabric of the society was spoiled by the constant invasions from the outside boundaries of the Punjab. The social fabric of the society was decaying. The kinglike behaviors of the amirs and maliks and the political distrust had weakened the political bond of the government and it fell into anarchy causing civil wars. The governors indulged into intrigues to become independent and it led to the disintegration.³ Guru Nanak, too, in his compositions denounces the cruelty and the bigotry of the Kings and their officials in the following words:

“The Kali age is Knife; kings are butchers, and righteousness has taken wings.
Where can one find the moon of truth in this dark night of falsehood?”

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there were two main communities in Punjab. However, the third community appeared on the socio economic stage in 1699 soon after the creation of Khalsa. The dominant tribes of the region during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were an important legacy of political changes. Many Baloch and Pathan clans were dominant in the Multan province of the Mughal Empire. The Kharal and Sial tribes were dominant in the lower portions of the Bari and Rachan doabs. The Ghakkhars, Awans and Janjuas were dominant in the upper Sindh-Sagar Doab. Many Rajput clans held lands along the Shivaliks and the border along Rajasthan.

¹ J.S. Grewal The Sikhs of the Punjab, Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed. 1994, p. 27
² Ibid p. 4
³ Yahya Sirhindi, Tarik-i-Mubarak Shahi, Tr. Elliot and Dowson, Vol. IV, p. 32
The ideal norm of the Hindu society was social differentiation. Alberuni observed in the early eleventh century that there were four varnas among the Hindus: the Brahman, the Kshatriya, the vaishya and the shudra. But he also observed a number of "subcastes" in each Varna. Obviously the varnas did not cover all the people. As is well known, these varnas were associated with specific duties, howsoever, it is highly improbable that these classified duties comprehended all the profession followed by these social groups even in Alberuni's day. It is equally significant that the varna system was not acceptable to all the members of the Hindu society.

Nevertheless, the concept of varna was accepted and advocated throughout the medieval period. At the close of the seventeenth century, Sujan Rai described the ahl-i-brahmana as those who subscribed to the varna order of the Brahman, the Chhatri, the Baish and the Shudra. At the same time one must admit the possibility of absorption, upgrading or downgrading of actual social groups within the framework of the varna. The socio-economic position of certain social groups did not always correspond to their ritual status. This would be true, for instance of the Khatris of the Punjab.

The Hindus of the Punjab during the late fifteenth century did not fit completely into the four-varnas order. Punjab does not seem to have known and experienced the countless number of proliferation and ramification of the vertical 'jati' grades and subgrades nor the socio religious rigours of the Brahmanical 'jati' hierarchy. In Nihar Ranjan Ray's opinion Smarta-Pauranik early medieval Brahmanism does not seem to have had a very strong hold on the people of this region even during the centuries preceding the advent of Islam and the consolidation of Muslim political authority. The reasons he ascribes for limited hold of Brahmanism are the prevalence of Mahayana Buddhism for long; and a more important reason may be found in the changing and challenging fortunes of history. This must have had resulted in relatively quicker changes in the socio-political life of the people, generating more social mobility amongst them than anywhere else in India. Such

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1 Edward C. Sachau, tr. Alberuni's India, London 1914, p. 100
2 Ibid p. 102
mobility naturally stood in the way of consolidation of the Brahmanical system of jati.¹

By the close of the fifteenth century the social situation in the Punjab had considerably changed due to the impact of the Turkish conquest and the rule of the Delhi Sultans. The Rajput ruling classes, the Kshatriyas of the Varna concept, had been dislodged from the power. Some of them might have accepted Islam or migrated to the neighbouring hills or deserts. Their significant remnant could perhaps be seen in a few zamindars called Rai. But even at this level, the chiefs of non-Rajput tribes or clans had come into prominence. To equate the Hindu Zamindars, Chaudhris and Muqaddams of the Lodi Punjab with the Kshatriyas of the varna concept would be the best or the worst, way of glossing over a significant social change. The occupation of the old rajput ruling classes with the vital politics of the Punjab was gone. At the close of the fifteenth century one could find individuals tilling the soil but styling themselves as rajput.²

With the loss of the rajput sovereignty, the brahmans lost their traditional patronage and thus, with few exceptions, the position and the legal and formal powers of the Brahmans had undergone a considerable change. Some of the brahmans sought refuge and honour in the neighbouring principalities in the Punjab hills. Some others were obliged to seek livelihood in alternate professions (traditionally considered inappropriate for the Brahmans). This would not be a peculiarity of the Mughal period or of only the other parts other than the Punjab. Vasudeve Upadhyay has noticed that even before A.D. 1200 some brahmans took to the profession of arms, agriculture, trade and money-lending.³

Yet, one cannot discount the probability that the brahmans as a class appear to have increased their influence over the Hindu masses. Notwithstanding the elimination of the Rajputs from power, the brahmans could consolidate

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¹ Nihar Ranjan Ray, op. cit., p.4
² Vasudeva Upadhyay has noted the professions of agriculture and trade among the rajputs even before A.D., 1200 C. Vasudeva, Upadhyay, Socio-Religious Condition of North India, Varanasi, p. 65
³ Ibid, p. 50
their informal authority and personal influence. Maybe it could have its reasons in the brahmans' need for finding an alternate source of patronage. The brahmans now read the scriptures to more numerous but humbler class of patrons, acted as family priests, taught in pathsalas etc. The brahmans emphasis on the meticulous observance of religious rites and ceremonies must have logically increased. In the early nineteenth century, Ganesh Das observed that the ahl-i-dharm among the Hindus were extremely meticulous about their food and drink being "pure": they refused to own a Hindu who associated with others.¹

In sum, the brahmans as a priestly class enjoyed a status of honour and prestige which did not correspond to their economic means. For a closer correspondence between the economic means and social prestige, the Khatris of the Punjab of our period is a good example. They traced their origins to the Epic Age, they were some of the Old inhabitants of the area, probably older than the Rajputs. The profession of arms was no longer important to them besides administration, trade and shopkeeping absorbed their best energies and interests. Although Char-Bagh-i-Punjab is a source of little later period, yet, clearly reflects the inclinations per se of the Khatris. Ganesh Das, author of Char-Bagh-i-Punjab mentions service, writership, trade shop-keeping drapery and haberdashery, trade in silken goods and banking or money-changing as some of old and important pre-occupations of the Khatris of the Punjab.²

The Khatris were not, infact, averse to money-lending (sahukars) and acting as bankers, making use of hundis and tamassuks. Sujan Rai in his work, Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh mentions bima (insurance) as a commendable institutions³. In brief, much of the urban trade and shopkeeping in the towns was in their hands. Though they could be found in the country-side yet, their concentration was significant in towns and cities where they played as significant entrepreneurs. According to Romila Thapar the Khatris of the

² Ganesh Das, Char Bagh-i-Punjab, p. 291
³ Sujan Rai, Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh, p. 24-25
North India had accepted vaishya status much before 1200 A.D.\textsuperscript{1} the Khatris of the Punjab were among those who showed a considerable adaptability and success. The Hindu society in the rural Punjab was marked by a preponderance of the jats, particularly in the upper Rechna, upper Bari and Bist Jalandhar Doabs and on the left side of the river Sutlej. Divided into numerous clans they had their Zamindars, Chaudhri and Muqaddams; but the bulk of the jats consisted of ordinary cultivators. The composition in light of the fact that it is they who accounted for the largest adherents of Sikhism, probably, their mindset and their perception of religion was reasonably satisfied by the focus of nascent Sikhisms at that time. They did not generally refused to pay the ordinary dues to the state, yet, they resented and refused to accept oppression. Probably this attitude to 'rebel' to counter oppressive tendencies made them appreciate the 'rebellious' heroes of Punjab folklore; also perhaps occasionally in taking up arms against their oppressors. There were gradual shifts in the relative importance of the various clans of the jats during the medieval period.

The rajputs, the brahmans, the Khatris and the jats formed, no doubt, the most important social groups of the Hindu society in the Punjab of the period under review but they did not account for its entire non-Muslim population. K.M. Ashraf observes that the popular tradition in Hindustan takes account of atleast thirty-six social groups, including the various subdivisions of the higher "castes"\textsuperscript{2}. Among these social groups are included the occupations of the brewer, goldsmith, weaver, tin-worker betel-leaf seller, shephered, milkman, carpenter, smith, bhat, dyer, flower-seller calico-printer, barber, oilman, musicians, juggler and the mountebank. There is no reason to be sceptical about the existence of these occupational groups in the Punjab, rural as well as urban Punjab. Infact, some more occupations were found in the region of Batale as those of the tailor, potter, thathiar, the mason in specific. Below them were the untouchables, the 'Chandalas' and the like who were divided into the "castes" of their own and were basically considered outside the pale of the society. The condition of the Hindu

\textsuperscript{1} Romila Thapar, A History of India, Penguin Books, 1967, p. 253
\textsuperscript{2} K.M. Ashraf, Life and condition of the People of Hindustan, p. 193
craftsmen was perhaps not much different from that of the Muslim craftsmen. They all lived in poverty. “The introduction of Muslim craftsmen says K.M. Ashraf, “may have done something towards removing the social disabilities of the class as a whole, but in the long run Muslim influence succumbed to the older traditions. When Babur came to Hindustan no appreciable modification in the social character of these vocations was visible, for the finds indicate that all the craftsmen organized in rigid and exclusive castes”.

The conditions of the untouchables was obviously the worst, they lived a wretched life under the shadow of contempt and extreme poverty.

In the period of my study, the last three quarters of the sixteenth century represented an era of cultural comingling. During this phase, like earlier periods, some of the low born Hindus were converted either to Islam or to the Sikh faith. In brief, the Punjab of our period witnessed the emergence of comingling which could be seen in both the communities. It must be noted that the Sufis played a significant role in the evolution of the “syncretic culture”. The mutual interaction and mutual influence in manners, ceremonies owed a great deal to the Sufi influence which contributed in evolving an “assimilated culture”. The history of medieval India, to a very considerable extent, in words of Aziz Ahmad is a history of Hindu Muslim religio-cultural tensions, interspersed with movements or individual efforts at understanding harmony and even composite developments.

As often noted, none of these can be treated as a unified whole, for both formed a part of the much larger entities in the Indian subcontinent. Furthermore, in certain spheres and at certain levels of socio-economic life, a strict distinction between “Hindu” and “Muslim” may not lead to a meaningful social analysis, realizing the problem of conceptualization and the complexity of the social situation in the Punjab around A.D. 1500, yet one can not afford not to discuss in brief about the “Hindu” and “Muslim” community per se to weave the complex fabric of the then social milieu.

1 K.M. Ashraf, ibid, pp. 202-203; Baburname, ibid, pp. 427-428
2 Aziz Ahmad, Studies in Islamic Culture in Indian Environment, Oxford, 1964, p. 73
The Muslim society in the Punjab as in some other parts of India, was as well marked by sectarian divisions as by racial differences. The sectarian differences whether one was a sunni, a shia, an ismaili, mulhid, a batini, an ibahati or a mahdavi was an issue of consideration for social interaction. The Sunnis formed the largest proportion of Muslim population in the Punjab, but the Shias appear to have been well represented in proportion to their total number in the subcontinent. Though the Sufis can in no sense be treated as "sect" their differences with the Ulema could not although be concealed. Differences on the bases of religious belief and practice lent a measure of diversity to the Muslim society in the Punjab.

From a sociological standpoint, the horizontal stratification was more important than the sectarian division of the Muslim society in the Punjab. K.M. Ashraf puts it aptly when he says that an early assumption that an "Islamic" society was bound to be based on the idea of equality is refuted by the socio-economic facts. In the Punjab, as elsewhere, a broad social stratification in the Muslim society is clearly evident. The nobles composed the "social elite" and they enjoyed greater economic advantages than any other section or group. The religious dignitaries such as ulema, sayyids, sheikhs etc. too enjoyed a high social status and may be considered in the upper class of the Muslim society. The middling state was formed by the peasants, soldiers, traders, scholars, writers, the sayyids, the shaikhzadas and the administrative personnel. The craftsmen, personal servants and domestic slaves, both male and female formed the lowest strata. They were poor and down-trodden. Due to their economic condition they led a wretched life.

The discussion would be incomplete if we do not refer to the composition and its associated realities to the Muslims of the Punjab. In retrospect one can easily comprehend that the influx of the Muslims into the land had become virtually inevitable after the annexation of the province to the

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1 For the diversity of Islam in India, see Murray, Titus, Islam in India and Pakistan, Calcutta, 1959, pp. 87-115
2 J.S. Grewal, Guru Nanak in History, P. 36
3 K.M. Ashraf, The Life and conditions of the People at Hindustan, p. 170
dominions of Mohamad of Ghazna. For some time, the Punjab became
in fact the core dominion of Mahmud’s successor. Then for three centuries it
formed a part of the dominions of the Ilbari, Khalji, Tughlaq, Sayyed and
the Afghan rulers. For nearly five hundred years, some Muslim soldiers,
administrators, traders, scholars, men of letters and learned and pious men
had been adopting the Punjab as their home. Some of them had been
married with the indigenous girls and after a long stay in the country of their
adoption, many of them had come to be “Indianized” and perceived
themselves as “Indian Muslims”. The dramatic immigration of the Mughals
and Persians in the early sixteenth century was more conspicuous because
of its rapidity. It was nonetheless a part of an old, albeit gradual process.¹

However, the “immigrants” do not appear to have formed a very large
proportion of the Muslim community in the Punjab of our period. The
proportion of “native” Muslims was perhaps larger. Their existence may be
attributed, obviously to a long process of conversion. In the first place, one
cannot deny the forcible conversion and enslavement of women and children
as repercussions of war. Individual Muslims, in public or private positions,
thought it meritorious to convert the natives to Islam through material
inducement or maybe mere persuasion. In the process of peaceful
conversion the Sufi Shaikhs clearly played a very significant role. For
instance Shaikh Ali-al-Hujwiri, had settled in Lahore during the Ghaznavid
times. According to a later chronicler of the Punjab the Hindu Gujjars of
Lahore were converted to Islam by Ali-al-Hujwiri². It may be enough to say
here that the process of gradual conversion through the Sufis continued
through the medieval period. In the early sixteenth century, Shaikh Daud, for
instance established his Khanqah at Sher Garh in the Bari Doab where
Badayuni was to see him converting the Hindus.³

¹ J.S. Grewal, op. cit. p. 32
² Ganesh Das Char Bagh-i-Punjab, p. 279
³ Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh, III, 28-39. It may also be added here that, according to Mufti
Ghulam Sarwar, Sayyid Bahawal Qadiri founded his Khanqah in the 1540s at a place
later included in the district of Montgomery”. Tarikh-i-Makhzan-i-Punjab, Lucknow,
1877, p.238. According to Ganesh Das, both Sher Garh and Hujre Shah Muqim were
situated in the bar amidst the Dogar and Gujjar tribes, p. 302.
Probably all the major towns of the Punjab had come to have a considerable proportion of Muslim population by the close of the fifteenth century. The close connection of urbanization with administrative arrangement may lead us to infer that almost all the major towns of the Punjab contained a substantial proportion of Muslim population. The proportion of Muslims in the urban population of the Punjab appears to have been much larger than their proportion in the rural population.\(^1\)

In the discussion of the social milieu, it must be noted that the cities and towns served as the centres of Indo-Muslim culture in the Punjab as elsewhere. The contribution of pre-Mughal Lahore to “literature and culture” was by no means negligible. The compiler of the Gazetteer of the Lahore District, 1883-84\(^2\) rightly observes that during the later Pathan and Mughal dynasties, Lahore was celebrated as “the resort of learned men”. J.S. Grewal in his monumental work “Guru Nanak in History” also talks about the importance of Urban Centres in the then Punjab.\(^3\) Multan was another important center of learning. \textit{Mutakhab-ut-Tawarikh} reports that Shaikh Adbullah and Azizullah both from Tulamba, were believed to have set new standards in the pursuit of \textit{mantiq} (logic) and \textit{Kalam} (scholastic) theology.\(^4\) \textit{Tabaqat-i-Akbari} reports that Sikandar Lodi consulted Shaikh Salih of Sirhind at times. In sum, from the \textit{Tabaqat-i-Akbari, Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh} and \textit{Ain-i-Akbari} it is evident that several other towns of the Punjab enjoyed the reputation of being respectable centres of Muslim learning and scholarship: Jalandhar Sultanpur, Ajodhen, Thanesar, Samana, Narnaül, for

\(^1\) For a detailed understanding of the process of conversion see Ahsan Raza Khan along with Baburnama which observes that at times of the whole of tribes like Gakkhars in the Sind Sagar Doab; Jud and Janjuhe tribes between the Nilab and Bhera, some clans of the Gujjars and Jats as well as the Rajputs. See Babur-nama, I, 380, 388, 441 j. Cf Khulasat-ut-Tawariklm, p. 350 Ahsan Raza Khan, “The Problem of the North Western Frontier of Hindustan in the first Quarter of the Sixteenth Century”, India History Congress, Mysore, 1966; Babur-nama, I, P. 380; Tabaqat-i-Akbari, III, 528-39; Khulasat-ut-Tawariku, 293.

\(^2\) Gazetteer of the Lahore District, 1883-84 p. 52-53

\(^3\) Grewal, J.S., Guru Nanak in History p. 52

Thus, it is highly probable that learned men of local repute were to be found in all the important towns of the Punjab.

**Religious Milieu**

The ethnic plurality in the Punjab was matched by the variety in its religious and cultural traditions. All Muslims formally subscribe to the belief that there was no other God but Allah and Muhammad was his rasul [messenger]. However, sectarian divisions had appeared among Muslims even before the advent of the Turks into the Punjab. Imported by the immigrant Muslims, ideological differences were perpetuated by those who came under its influence in India. It is easy to identify three old sects; the Sunni, the Shia, and the Ismaili. A parallel interpretation of Islam was cherished, advocated and developed by the Sufis from the very beginning of the Turkish conquest in Punjab.

More and more people were coming under the influence of Sufis. A large number of Hindus too attended the congregation of the Sufis as their teachings were liberal and non-sectarian. Their importance is reflected in the increasing recognition given to them by the Persian chroniclers from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century like the *Siyar-al-Auliya* and the *Siyar-al-Arifin* written between 1350-1550. The Sufi orders *Silsilahs* proliferated in India as in the rest of the Islamic world. There were important orders of *Chishtis* and *Suhrawardi* established at various places in the country. If anything, the influence of the Sufis in the Punjab was more pervasive than elsewhere in the country. Lahore was known as the abode of many sheikhs since the time of *Ali-al-Hujwiri*, who settled in Lahore during the rule of the Ghaznavids. Multan was similarly a seat of many *Sheikhs*, besides the famous Bahauddin Zakkariya. The *Khanqah* of Sheikh Farid at Pakpattan...

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2. J.S. Grewal, Guru Nanak in History, p. 42
4. J.S. Grewal, Slikhs of Punjab, p. 16
remained an eminent centre from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century. There were Sufis in Hansi, Thanesar, and Narnaul. The town of Panipat was associated with Sheikh Sharafuddin, known as Bu Ali Qalandar. Lesser luminaries adorned other towns and pockets of the countryside. The Sufi sheikhs worked as great syncretic force; their attitude towards the Hindus were sympathetic. The liberal attitude and the philanthropic activities of the Sufis converted a large number of Hindus especially from the fourth varna to Islam.

Punjab was marked by the existence of multiple religious faiths. As noted earlier, Hinduism and Islam were the two main religions of the Punjab during the sixteenth century. However, there were number of religious beliefs and practices in both the religions.  

1. *Brahamanical* religion, the oldest of all the religious traditions of India, was transformed into Hinduism in the early medieval period and with this change was the emergence and evolution of various sects viz. *Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism* in Punjab, which later on in the sixteenth century developed further into various sub sects. The medieval Hinduism was not a homogeneous or a compact system of religion but a family of religious system. Moreover, it was not totally Vedic origin but it included a many fold heterogeneous sects of non Vedic origin too.  

2. It was a combination of many systems and religious ideologies, including Vedic ritualism, *Vedantic* thought, *Vaishnavism*, *Saivism* and primeval cults.  

3. All non Muslim Indians were not 'Hindus' as the term is used today.  

4. There were pockets of Tantric Buddhism in the Punjab hills. In the plains, there were the Jain monks with a lay following among traders and shop-keepers of many a town in the Punjab. Nihar Ranjan Ray contends that we have direct and indirect evidence to show that apart from the *Jain sanyasis*, the *Nathpanthi yogis*, the *Avadhutas* and the *Kapalikas* were well known in the Punjab of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and not merely Guru Nanak

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1. J.S. Grewal, Guru Nanak in History, p. 62  
4. J.S. Grewal op. cit. p. 23
but a few successive Gurus had contacts with them, either as contenders or as part collaborators in an ideological sense.¹

As noted 'Hinduism' was represented by *Shaiva, Vaishnava,* and *Shakta* beliefs and practices. Temples, dedicated to Shiva as the supreme deity, were looked after by *Shaiva Brahmanas,* who also cultivated *Shaiva* literature, the *Agamas* and *Puranas.* The *Shaiva sanyasis* were known for their hard penance and austerity. They belonged to different orders, traditionally considered to be ten, thus they were also known as *Dasnamis.* They generally wore ochre-coloured garments, though some of them went naked. Almost all of them wore tilak on their forehead. Some used three lines, representing Shiva's trident, or his third eye. Some used two horizontal lines with a dot as the phallic emblem of Shiva. The *sanyasis* wandered from place to place, but they also founded establishments called maths. The head of the math could be nominated by the predecessor or elected by his fellow disciples. Within *Shaivism* a new movement arose probably after the Ghaznavid conquest of the Punjab. In this movement, initiated by Gorakhnath, Hathyoga was adopted to be a theological system with Shiva as the supreme deity. They rejected ritualism and metaphysical speculation. In accepting disciples they disregarded the difference of caste. But they regarded women as 'the tigress of the night', a great temptation and, therefore, a great danger in the jogi's path.

Turning to *Vaishnavism* in the Punjab we notice that the Vaishnava texts were known to Alberuni in the eleventh century; the *Bhagavadgita,* the *Bhagvata Purana* and the *Vishnu Purana.* Temples dedicated to Vishnu as the supreme deity, as *Lakshmi-Narayan* or one of his incarnations, were looked after by *Vaishnava Brahmins.* The ascetics among the *Vaishnavas* were generally known as *bairagis.* They recognized merit in ceremonial ritual and pilgrimage to sacred places. Veneration for the cow and the Brahaman, they shared with many other Hindus. They advocated total abstention from meat and liquor.²

¹ Nihar Ranjan Ray, op. cit., p. 8  
² J.S. Grewal, op. cit. p.24
The Shaktas worshipped the goddess in her various forms, giving primacy to the active principle or cosmic force [shakti] which sustains the universe and various manifestations of gods. Worship of the goddess was of two kinds, generally referred to as 'the cultus of the right hand' and 'cultus of the left hand'. Animal sacrifice in honour of Durga or Kali, or any other ferocious form of the Great Goddess, was an essential element of the cultus of the right. The left - handers performed 'black - rites', which, in theory, were meant only for adept, and which involved wine [madya], fish [matsya], flesh [mansa], parched grain [mudra], and coition [maithuna]. The purpose of this ritual was to attain to a state of complete identification with Shakti and Shiva. The practice of this rite was secretive and limited but it made the left-handers [vamacharis] extremely disreputable in the eyes of the majority of the people. According to Nihar Ranjan Ray the religion of the common people of the Punjab and the Punjab Himalayas seems to have been based on the Pauranik version of the Sakti cult. He further points out the vast influence of the Sakti cult in deriving the significance of such toponyms in these regions as, for instance, Ambala which is derived from Amba; Chandigarh named after Chandi; Panchkula, a technical term of Tantrik significance. Kalka is a distorted version of Kalika; Simla is again a distorted version of Symala Devi. Besides, throughout these regions one still finds a countless number of small shrines with all but shapeless icons of crude form placed on their altars, which worshippers, common village folks describe as Mansa, Chandi, Kali, Durga, which are all manifestations of Sakti, the mother Goddess par excellence of Puranic Brahmanism. The popularity of the Sakti cult and these goddesses is indirectly attested by the Sikh sources too when they state that Lehna, the perspective Guru Angad, was going on a pilgrimage to Kali's temple with a group of pilgrims.

This brief account of the major forms of Muslim and Hindu religious beliefs and practices does not take into account a large mass of the common people and their 'popular religion' which bordered on animism and fetishism. Godlings of nature, of disease, malevolent spirits and animal worship, heroic godlings, worship of ancestors, totems and fetishes made a conspicuous appearance in this popular religion.
As in Shaivism so in Vaishnavism arose a new movement known as the bhakti movement. The path of bhakti came to be regarded as a valid path for salvation, like the path of knowledge \([\text{nana or gyan}]\) and the path of correct observance of ritual \([\text{karma}]\). Ramanuja in the south in the eleventh-twelfth century made a significant contribution to the bhakti movement by giving primacy to the path of the bhakti. In the thirteenth and fourteenth century Vaishnava bhakti began to be addressed to the human incarnations of Vishnu, which is Rama and Krishna. The cult of Rama bhakti was popularized by Ramanand in northern India, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Vaishnav bhakti was meant primarily for the upper or middling castes, though its protagonist made some use of the language of the people and they were more indulgent towards the lower castes.

After making a survey of the general religious milieu it would be an interesting idea to make a brief analysis of the perceptions of the Sikh Gurus, particularly Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, on the ongoing belief and practices. He held high spiritual ideas, it was his conviction that the entire universe is suffused with divine light and all creation is His creation. The only source of light in all human beings is the divine light; God alone is the bestower of life upon all living beings. Caste distinction and social differentiation did not harmonize with this conviction. None should be regarded high \([\text{uttam}]\) on the basis of his birth, or caste; and none should be regarded low \([\text{nich}]\). Instead of the Brahmin and Khatris, Guru Nanak identifies himself with the lower castes and untouchables:

\[
\text{Be there the lowest among the low, or even the lower, Nanak is with them.}^{1}
\]

The social reality did not conform to the ideal norm of the varna order. Guru Nanak invites people to come out of the shells of their castes as individuals in search of the path of truth. The idea of equality and universality of spiritual opportunity are the obverse and reverse of the same socio-religious coin. The shudra and the untouchables are placed at par with the Brahmans and khatris significantly, the woman is placed at par with man. The differences of

\[1\quad \text{AG 15}\]
caste and sex, and similarly the differences of country and creed, are set aside as irrelevant for salvation.

Guru Nanak's attitude towards the traditional Hindu deities and scripture is intimately linked up with his attitude towards the pandit; the attitude of Guru Nanak has in-built rejection of the traditional authority of the Hindu scriptures. With the rejection of Hindu deities and scriptures went the repudiation of traditional mode of worship and religious practices. There was no merit in pilgrimage to the sixty-eight sacred places, not even to Sangam in the Prayag where the Ganga and Jamuna mingled with a third invisible stream. There was no merit in the worship of images. Ritual reading of scripture is a waste of time. The performance of hom is equally useless. Ritual charities are of no use either. The protagonist of such beliefs and practices, the pandits, naturally come in for denunciation. In Guru Nanak's perception, Pandit doles out externalities and he is a 'broker' in false practices. He does it in mundane self-interest. With his intrinsic interest in worldly occupations, his pretence of knowledge increases the inner dirt which keeps on multiplying. The sacred thread of the pandits, the sacred mark on his forehead, his spotless dhoti and his rosary are useless without a genuine faith.1

Guru Nanak gives as much attention to the jogi as to the pandit. He has no appreciation for the jogi aspiration to gain supernatural powers or to attempt to attain salvation by psycho-physical or chemico-physical means. Nor does he appreciate their idea of renunciation [udas].

Guru Nanak's attitude towards the Ulema and the Sheikhs is similar to his attitude towards the pandit and jogi. While addressing the Muslims, Guru Nanak shows his preference for the path of the Sufis over that of the Ulema. They who wish to become true Musalmans should "first adopt the path of the Auliyâ, treating renunciation as the file that removes the rust" of the human soul. This relative appreciation of the Sufi path does not mean, however, that Guru Nanak gave the Sufis his unqualified approval.

1 AG 56, 221, 355, 358, 413, 432, 470, 471-72, 635, 1171, 1256, 1290
Guru Nanak's basic attitude towards Islam and Hinduism is explicitly stated in the line;

*Neither the Veda nor the Ketab know the mystery.*

*In the same way the qazi, the pandit and the jogi are bracketed.*

*The qazi utters lies and eats what is unclean; the brahaman takes life and then goes off to bathe ceremoniously; the blind jogi does not know the way; all three are desolated.*

To sum it up, as already discussed, the Punjab had to bear the brunt of frequent foreign invasions by the logic of its geographical location. Every foreign invasion initiated a cycle of 'action-reaction'; this process of interaction and assimilation of new cultures greatly affected the socio-cultural and traditional milieu of the society. There was a constant interaction and exchange between the existing social values and the newer ones which had entered the social scenario. Of course, one does not intend to view it as a homogeneous society where the level of change, impact reflected in the ideology, socio-cultural value system and traditions was of the same nature and intensity at all levels. Yet, one would like to emphasize that due to the recurrent onslaught of varied cultures and traditions, value-system the society must have, inevitably been forced by the compulsion of historical events to be more open and flexible in its acceptance of varied cultures and traditions. In other words, this must have resulted in lesser rigidity in a society as a whole, to resist the newer ideas. The acceptance or at least the non-resistant attitude of the society to the new ideological fermentation of Guru Nanak's ideas and value-system must have been a great contributing factor in preparing a conducive environment for the birth and evolution of Sikhism.

On the political front the time span of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed considerable changes in the political situation of North India, changes that could not but have affected Punjab. It coincided with the demise of the Lodhi rule and the rise and the glorious phase of the Mughal
The emergence of Guru Nanak was co terminus with the disintegration of the Sultanate of Delhi. The Lodhi Sultans and their administration do not seem to have paid proper attention to the political affairs of the Punjab during the first quarter of the sixteenth century. Sikandar Lodhi is known to have remained heavily engrossed in the affairs of Gwalior, which had an adverse impact on the political situation in Punjab. Daulat Kahn Lodhi, who had been appointed governor of Lahore in 1500 AD, had virtually declared himself the defacto ruler of his dominions that extended from Sirhind in the east to Bhira in the west. Daulat Khan Lodhi, the governor of Punjab whose relation with the Sultan were far from cordial, also sent an invitation to Babur to invade Hindustan. (Another such invitation was sent by Ibrahim Khan Lodhi’s uncle)\textsuperscript{1}. Meanwhile, Sultan Ibrahim Lodhi dispatched an army under Behar Khan to divest him of the governorship of Lahore. On his part, Daulat Khan instead of giving a fight, vacated Lahore to retire towards Multan. But in the meantime, Babar had already crossed the Indus and reached Lahore without any resistance. Unfortunately, the Afghan Army which had been sent with a limited purpose to subdue Daulat Khan had to fight the Mughals to check their advance to Lahore. In the ensuing battle in 1524 A.D., Babar having defeated the Afghans army, captured the city and set on fire some of the bazars of Lahore. Next it marched to Dipalpur, stormed and put the garrison to the sword. Although Daulat Khan and Ghazi Khan had a sizeable army at their command and even at Lahore, they were entrenched to engage the Mughals, yet they got panicky, abandoned Lahore and retreated to the fort of Milwat (Mallot). On the other hand, in April 1526 at Panipat, took place the decisive battle between Ibrahim Lodhi and Babur. It has often been suggested that after Panipat, Babar could not pay his full attention to the affairs of the Punjab. Actually, after Panipat the theatre of warfare and political activities had shifted to western and later eastern India. J.S. Grewal, on the basis of his analysis of the phenomenon of rehabilitation, resettlement and organization in the Punjab province under the Lodis believed that there were “Long spells of peace punctuated by spasmodic warfare in Punjab

\textsuperscript{1} Babarnama, op cit, p 440
during the lifetime of Guru Nanak".\(^1\) To advance his argument, he states, "After the battle of Panipat, the Punjab remained virtually free from warfare and internal disorder".\(^2\)

So long as Akbar was on the throne at Agra, Mughal policy of non-interference helped Sikh Gurus and the Sikh community, both directly and indirectly, to further their socio-religious and socio-economic interests.

The policy of Akbar spans the lives and activities of two Gurus and by far the larger part of those of Guru Arjun, i.e. of the great formative period of Sikhism and Sikh society.

It must, however, be realized that each region has its own peculiarities and an effective system of governance tended to respond to local requirements and changing situations. The Mughal administration in the Punjab was flexible enough to accommodate its regional peculiarities.

As far as the socio-religious milieu is concerned the fast changing and challenging fortunes of history of the land to which I have already made a reference, and which resulted in relatively quicker changes in the socio-political lives of the people, generating more social mobility amongst them than anywhere else in India. Such mobility naturally stood in the way of consolidation of the Brahmanical system of Jati. Punjab does not seem to have known and experienced the countless number of proliferation and ramification of vertical jati-grades and sub-grades nor the socio-religious rigours of the *Brahmanical* jati hierarchy.

In addition to the lesser rigorous control of Brahmanical system, the ethnic plurality in the Punjab was matched by the variety in its religious and cultural traditions. Apart from the other theological currents of Islam a parallel interpretation of Islam was cherished, advocated and developed by the Sufis from the very beginning of the Turkish conquest of the Punjab, more and more people were coming under the influence of Sufis. Infact, the influence of the Sufis in Punjab was more pervasive than anywhere else in the

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1. J.S. Grewal, Guru Nanak in History, Punjab University, Chandigarh, 1969, pp. 9-10
country. This was the time period when the bhakti saints were able to win over the masses by an appeal to the emotive principle of faith whereby the path of Bhakti came to be regarded as the valid path for salvation, like the path of knowledge (Jnane or Gyan) and the path of correct observance of the ritual (Karma). In Punjab, Guru Nanak became the icon of Bhakti movement. The socio cultural environment of Punjab proved to be a fertile ground for developing the ideological position of Guru Nanak “Ek Onkar, Nirankar, Nirgune, Nirbhey”. In other words, the entire universe is suffused with divine light; God alone is the bestower of life upon all living beings. Caste distinction and social differentiation did not harmonize with this conviction. None should be regarded “Uttam” or “rich” on the basis of his birth or caste. The shudras and the untouchables are placed at par with the Brahmans and Khatris. The women is placed at par with men and worthy of spiritual success.