CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Political Sociology is mainly concerned with the analysis of the interaction between politics and society. It studies the social background of political process and its impact on organised politics (Dasgupta, 2011: 2). In other words Political Sociology refers to the relationship between society and politics. Social structures influence the political actors and vice versa. The social trends, movements/sects have deep relationship with political process. As far as the sect is concerned, it is relatively small religious group that is an offshoot of an established religion or denomination. It holds most beliefs in common with its religion of origin, but has a number of novel concepts which differentiate them from that religion.

Religion, which revolves around the idea of God, is inherent in the very nature of man. According to Swami Vivekanand, religion is a constitutional necessity for man and plays role mightier than anything else in one’s life. The indescribable feeling which we sometimes experience when we see the starry heavens or the vast expanse of the ocean or even the snow clad mountain peaks touching the sky also provides a fertile soil for the growth of religious sentiments. It is mixed with something that directs our mind towards the idea of a power much higher and potent than ourselves. More important than the feeling described above as a basis of the dependence on something higher and more powerful which almost experience at some crucial moments in his or her life. Besides the lower mind, man also has a higher mind which connects him with the divine and is intimately associated with the birth of religious sentiments. It is in virtue of the presence of this higher mind that man is something more than nearly a
body of mind and soul because of which he is superior to the lower animals. Man shares in common with the lower animals many things like eating, sleeping and procreation. He is however distinguished from them by his faculty of forming a conception of his Maker and worshipping Him (Suda, 1978: 1-5).

Religion makes various promises and serves various needs for different groups. For the mighty of the earth, it supports the established system, and for the poor and lowly, it gives reassurance that there is a better world, here or in the future, and promises that they will not always be the wretched of the earth. For these same people, the ecstatic side of religion relieves boredom and alienation. (Steward & Glynn, 1971: 213).

God is considered to be the primary religious symbol. Through this symbol man tries to establish a living meaningful relationship with the reality that he finds present throughout the universe. But there are other secondary symbols also which play their roles in religions. Such secondary symbols are mostly constituted by such mythical personalities as Ram, Krishna, Jehovah etc. Around such personalities several mythical stories are found and they constitute a very significant part of the religion in which they flourish. These myths and symbols enable the religious man to establish a living communion with his deity.

In other words, it is through these religious symbols and myths that the whole society participates in the reality of a single deity and the members are tied up in a common bond of religious unity. The religious symbol sometimes becomes a symbol of social unity and the members unite together in several kinds of social, religious and
sacramental bonds (Tiwari, 1986: 218-19). Moreover, the image of God was designed to exert both a salutary influence on human beings and to control their behaviour (Damle, 1982: 27).

Anxiety and tension tend to disrupt social life. Situations, which produce these emotions, include ‘crisis of life’ such as birth, puberty, marriage and death and in all societies these life crisis are surrounded with religious ritual. We see rituals addressed to specific situations which produce anxiety. Rituals reduce anxiety by providing confidence and feeling of control. The group unites to deal with situations of stress, and so the unity of the group is strengthened. So religion provides means of adjusting and ‘a tonic to self-confidence’. In this way religion maintains social stability by allaying the tension and frustration which could otherwise have capacity to disrupt social order.

Religion is always concerned with salvation. The central religious question is, ‘What shall we do to be saved?’ The answer to it justifies religious practice. Just what salvation means varies from one culture to another, and so do the ways of attaining it. Men may seek salvation from immediate and pressing ills that afflict them; or salvation may be seen as the liberation of people and the establishment of a new dispensation; or it may be a pre-occupation with after death (Wilson, 1970: 21). Thus the major function of religion is the provision of meaning to events that man does not expect or feels ought not to happen, events that are frustrating and contradicting. It makes sense of these events in terms of an integrated and consistent pattern of meaning by allowing intellectual and emotional adjustment.
The faithful of religion believes that it answers many personal needs. A youth can gather with his age-mates to sing sacred hymns; women can publicly express their inner feelings through rites. A main religious search is that of finding a particular holy person in whom one can discover the real truth. To this person, a man or woman can give unalloyed allegiance and from him he can receive inner strength (Mandelbaum, 2000: 526). The sheltering canopy of religion is best held over a man by his own mentor, his guru.

Mahajan (2002: 1) reports that recent years have seen the revival of mystical religious traditions in a new and modified incarnation. The form and nature of religion is changing to keep pace with the times (Vasudev, 2003). There are many gurus and people that understand this well; instead of rejecting religion, they modernised it and ‘used contemporary language to give it life’ (Chopra and Raval, 2003: 15). Modern gurus appeal very effectively to the feelings and emotions of the present generation by taking advantage of religious tendencies of the people, particularly because of superstitions and beliefs about what happens after death. All of this raises important questions about the nature of religion itself (Robertson, 1969: 407). Even more young people today believe in God, in spirituality, and in life after death than fifty years ago. New religious places, meditation centres and ashrams of various orders attract a large number of people. Vasudev (2003: 42) observes in a middle class context that ‘it is the 30-plus who stand out. The rough and tumble of life have left discernible marks. Their hands are folded in prayer, here is a smile on their lips but a sense of loss lingers in their eyes. They want a spiritual balm to rethink their position in relationships, jobs and society on the whole’.

People are often not openly critical of any brand of spirituality. Today’s youth buy books written by holy teachers, wear their likeness
around their necks, carry the laminated portraits of their gurus in their wallets and attend their *satsangs*.

A guru initiates them while whispering a sacred formula (mantra) in their ears. This is believed to embody the divinity invoked and to possess magical powers. It is used in prayer and incantation. It comprises words and sounds taught by the guru to his disciples. The disciples, by practising this, produce or crystallise something in their mind. They are instructed not to disclose both the mantra and its feelings.

The need for finding a guru is to forge a close bond and whose words are taken as an authoritative guide to life. The guru himself is the disciple of yet another holy man, often one who has departed the present life, a link in an intergenerational chain of disciples preaching the words of some great soul of the past. The guru inducts his pupils into the way shown by the founder. Many persons find great personal rewards in being the disciple of a guru (Mandelbaum, 2000: 527).

**Sects (Deras) and Gurudom of Gurus**

Sect is defined as a group of people with a set of religious or political beliefs. (Cambridge Learner’s Dictionary, 2013:643). As far as religious sect is concerned, it is an offshoot of an established religion, sharing some common beliefs, but also including some novel concepts distinct from the mother religion. The sects go back to their religious and historical past to assert their self-confidence and for spiritual and intellectual sustenance (Karunakaran, 1969: 72). It adopts some novel and different principles. This way, it launches a new tradition. Synonym of religious sect in Punjabi is dera. Derived from the Persian word dair, the word dera means monastery or convent (Singh, 1997:
Theoretically speaking, a dera is supposed to be a residence for monks, who should by definition be more concerned with religious rituals and less attached to worldly matters. However, the term is also used for a faction or group with common views and leadership. Thus a dera may reject some norms existing in the mainstream religion and replace those obsolete elements with new practices.

Though the followers of such deras mostly come from all sections of society but generally, most followers seem to be from marginal or poor classes. They were found to be mostly concerned to seek or attain a sense of stability and often of honour. Followers may feel a sense of security, for example in terms of birth after death, by participating in satsangs, kirtans and religious workshops (Lal, 2009: 224). Vasudev (2003: 42) notes that ‘[i]t is as if there is a resurgence of the bhakti movement’. Non-believers are often astonished by the range of activities of the deras and are lured by their tactics, which frequently emphasise certain forms of asceticism, reconciling many non-believers to ‘religion’ and attracting them to such sectarian groupings. A dera may also involve itself in different projects in the name of public welfare. For this, it expects and often demands charitable contributions and donations from followers and governmental agencies within and outside the country.

A dera is headed by a person who normally calls himself a guru. This Hindi word, coined from Sanskrit guruḥ (‘heavy’ or ‘venerable’), is commonly used for a charismatic leader or guide, a religious or spiritual teacher. The guru confers the benefits of sacred learning on human beings and acts as an advisor to those who seek spiritual guidance. People seek and often find in their guru a nurturing and non-competitive figure whose spiritual superiority is unquestioned. A
guru can lift his disciples out of the abrasive tussles of everyday social relations through sermons and guidance.

Besides, there are highly educated *swamis*, a title which means lord or master. The Hindi word *swami*, coined from Sanskrit *swamin* (‘owner’, ‘prince’, ‘one’s own master’) indicates an element of respect and people use this word for the head of a religious order, interchangeably with guru. *Swami* is also the name given to the Hindu god Vishnu, regarded by his worshippers as the supreme deity or saviour.

The heads of the deras skilfully use the religious sentiments of the masses for the popularity of their sects by using various means. They make the writings of earlier saints part of their sermons, moulding them according to their needs. Sudhir Kakar speaks in this regard of ‘spiritual globalisation’ (Chopra and Raval, 2003: 15). At the same time, though these dera heads preach with reference to earlier saints, they present their own status as equal to a god and inculcate blind belief among disciples, which sometimes results in fanaticism. It is a small step for such fanatics to then act as a religious army for the headman of a dera, ready to sacrifice their lives for the cause of a dera or the agenda of the leader.

Generally speaking, a guru is a person who should selflessly show the right path to the spiritually ignorant. But many modern gurus skilfully manipulate their gurudom, so that after attaining an advantageous position, some became potentates who believe in self aggrandisement. They through refined methods, politicise themselves and their followers. Charismatic, great orators, motivators and organisation builders, as Mahajan (2002: 1) noted, these modern gurus are sophisticated, glamorous and popular, like film stars. Today,
spirituality has become a fashion, spiritual organisations have become
trendy and some of these tele-gurus make full use of the mass media.
Television, print media and increasingly the internet are used to
spread their teachings. More and more media coverage makes certain
gurus renowned, and in return they are alleged to favour media
managers. While the media could perform a constructive and educative
role, instead they cash in on the burgeoning religious groupings.
These modern gurus preach about charity and prayer, but also show
the path to worldly success, good health and big wealth. Chopra and
Raval (2003: 12) note with reference to a middle class urban scenario
that ‘[t]he new generation teachers aren’t deified, remote saints, but
accessible, aware buddies-cum-psychiatrists who help navigate
through the minefield of modern life’.

In more rural settings of Punjab, these modernising trends are likely
to be less pronounced and traditional patterns of authority remain
more prominent. A dera is usually tightly controlled and all the deras
have identical methods to organise their followers. Their functioning
is often very impressive and they create hierarchical structures in
which close confidants of the head form the top management.
Competition among these managers for closeness with the guru is a
frequent phenomenon and creates its own politics. Women, young
people and old men are organised into different wings for preaching
and mobilising the non-believers. They always strive to have more
followers, as deras face competition from other deras seeking to
increase their followers and political patronage. There is a tendency
that children of the followers join the same dera as their elders. These
religious groups are on the one hand arrayed against each other; on the
other hand they also work in cooperation for promoting certain
common goals (Damle, 1982: 35). While all religious sects propound
similar spiritual ideas and ethical ideals, every sect ultimately wants to safeguard itself and its adherents from any kind of influence or interference by other sects. In particular, efforts to convert people belonging to other sects create many tensions.

Each dera has defined boundaries, techniques and methods of preaching and revolves around the charismatic leader, which strengthens social, economic and political recognition and turns the dera into an established institution. State patronage in various forms comes almost automatically. Since the large numbers of dera followers are considered a formidable vote bank, and annoying these could harm their political interest (Chhabra, 2009: 47), no political party can dare to ignore them. As sects get more politicised, conflicts emerge over competition for various facilities and benefits from different governmental and non-governmental agencies.

The devotees, inspired by success and fired with zeal, make the cult a pervasive force in their lives. They use it as their primary social identification and try to widen the influence of their guru. This requires organised efforts. The participants regularise their religious activities and become known as cult members. As their organisation becomes established and their new identity becomes known and accepted, the band of devotees develops into a sect (Mandelbaum, 2000: 524). Occasionally, such a cult or new sect gathers strong momentum, perhaps because of favouring certain social, economic or political conditions (Bendix, 1960: 202-5). The institutional guru may attract personal disciples, but he is more likely to be a kind of religious headman who periodically makes a stately tour of his faithful flock. He regulates their conduct, adjudicates their disputes and refreshes their sectarian allegiance (Mandelbaum, 2000: 532).
Sometimes, the faithful in their localities marry within their group, hold panchayats for the group and observe certain standards of pollution and purity. They become virtually a new community.

**Sects (Deras) in the Punjab**

The dera tradition in the Punjab started with the puritan seminaries of a class of devotees called *Nirmalas* and with the *Udasis*, an order of ascetics founded by son of Guru Nanak Dev many centuries ago. Actually, many people used to come to Guru Nanak’s home and the elder son Baba Shri Chand often make arrangement of accommodation and food. When Guru Nanak Dev declared Angad Dev as the second guru of Sikh religion, Baba Shri Chand established a new dera known as Udasin. These were the same Nirmala Sikhs whom Guru Gobind Singh had sent at Banaras to learn Sanskrit language. During their course, they had to wear saffron clothes. When they came back, Guru Gobind Singh pronounced them as *Nirmalas* because they were very keen in their cleanliness. Later, the Gulabdasias, persons who belonged to the sect of Gulab Dass, who held liberal views on religious matters and founded a sect during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, became prominent *deradars* in centres of religious teaching. In the multi-religious environment of the Punjab, Hindus went to temples, Muslims to mosques and Sikh learners to deras for contemplation and study (Grewal, 2007: 64). A famous Punjabi folk song clearly denotes that deras were predominant in Punjabi culture as centres of learning.

According to Kahn Singh Nabha, the modern word dera was prevalent as *dehra* during medieval period. Dehra denotes *deh* (body). The temple erected on the place where last rites are performed is known as *dehra*. Last rites may be in the form of cremation or engraving the
corpse. Kahn Singh Nabha quoted many people as examples (Kaur, 2011: 20-21):

a) Dehra Sahib is a grave of Phool Shah who was ascetic of Udasin tradition. It is situated near Hoshiarpur at village Bahadur. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had donated One Thousand acres of land to this place.

b) Dehra Guru Arjan Dev is a place near Lahore fort where he was cremated by Guru Hargobind, the sixth guru of the Sikhs, in 1669.

c) Dehra Baba Gurdita is situated in Kiratpur where he was cremated after his death.

d) Dehra Guru Teg Bahadur is at Anandpur Sahib where he was cremated.

e) Dehra Baba Ram Rai is in Doon hills where he was cremated. The place, later on, is known as Dehradoon.

f) Dehra Baba Nanak Dev is a place where smadhi of Nanak Dev is made. The place is now known as Dera Baba Nanak.

In this way, the word dera is a changed version of dehra. Dehra denotes a place of cremation or *smadhi* (grave). Later on dera became popular and is being used in different contexts.

Guru Amardas, third Sikh guru, has launched *masand* system to preach the Sikh faith in far away places. The Punjabi word ‘masand’ is originated from Persian word ‘mansad’ which means *manji* (cot). 52 masands including 3 women were imparted task to preach the Sikh faith and to collect different articles needed for Sikh guru. They did their job with full enthusiasm. That’s why Guru Amardas had imparted them manji (Takhat). The place was their residential cum preaching centers. As masands were heads of Sikh religion, many people started
paying obeisance to them in respect. This way, the tradition of dera was established. The masand system worked for years. When tenth Sikh guru Gobind Singh noticed deterioration in the masand system as they were projecting themselves as all in all; in a way perfect Sikh gurus and became an ally of the Mughal government, he abolished the masand system. In practice, the tradition did not come to an end. It changed its shape with the passage of time and evolved theirselves in the form of dera (Kaur, 2011: 23).

These deras were allotted large lands and properties by various Sikh rulers and chiefs for maintaining the religious centres attached to them. Gradually some deras concentrated on acquisition of land, wealth and power. Rather than caring for teaching religious texts and maintaining religious centres, they became virtual empires and were used for personal aggrandisement (Grewal, 2007: 64).

Another strand intertwined with religion in Punjab is that of caste. Punjab has the largest proportion of scheduled caste population (31.94 per cent as per 2011 census, www.welfarepunjabpunjab.gov.in/scpopulation.html). These people remained discriminated against on several counts and often continue to be disallowed access to village common places. Most of the lower caste groups have separate cremation grounds and some even have their own religious places. Mainstream religions often refuse to cede management responsibility of the religious places to the low caste people as the Talhan (Jalandhar district) conflict in 2003 demonstrated (‘Protecting Religion’, 2007). This type of alienation urged Dalits (which migrate from one faith to another) to establish their own community organisations and separate religious places even in abroad (Jodhka, 2009: 84).
Moreover, casteism in Punjab thus remains very strong and appears to be one of the major factors for the growth of dera culture. Except for the big historical gurudwaras, which are open to all devotees, the gurudwaras in rural areas are dominated by particular castes, and Dalits and low caste people mostly avoid visiting these religious institutions. In earlier times, gurudwaras based on certain castes were established and gradually some people moved away from Sikhism (which is not supposed to have castes differentiation) and became followers of large number of sects. Now it is said that more than 70 per cent of the disciples in these sects are from dalit and low caste population of the state (Mahmadpur, 2007: 1).

The search for the sacred in the mind of common people is another reason. In the contemporary times people are passing through so many complexities and tensions in society that they have become totally helpless in a given socio-political scenario. In this situation, the deras and the babas capture people in webs of illusion offering tempting solutions to such complexities.

Another reason for the mushroom growth of deras in the state is that many of these have launched various developmental works in their respective areas. Most of these have started missionary tasks linked to free or low-priced education and health facilities, because of which they got enhanced social recognition. They have opened schools, colleges, hospitals and other institutions based on charity. Though all such assets are shown as belonging to the dera and dedicated to the welfare of the downtrodden, questions emerge over the names under which all this property is registered. If it is registered in the name of a charitable society, then who is the head of that? Such forms of economic power make a guru renowned as ‘Swami so-and-so’,
‘Bhagwan so-and-so’, ‘Baba so-and-so’ or ‘Sant so-and-so’ (Shourie, 1987: 1). The deras celebrate various anniversaries in the form of fairs. The saint’s day provides a theatre in which the saint appears as a sacred central figure, an icon of devotion. His behaviour and knowledge sets an example to the followers (Veer, 2000: 36). These celebrations serve to recharge the devotees, so they help to gather new persons into the fold and publicise the teachings of their guru in their localities. High officials and political leaders are invited to such functions to increase the guru’s profile and to have access to the political system.

As reported in The Indian Express (24 May 2007: 5), a Sikh scholar, Darshan Singh, was of the view that the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and the people who manage it mainly after the 1950s are responsible in leading to flourishing of dera culture in Punjab. In the same article, Balkar Singh, another Sikh scholar, closely associated with the longest-serving SGPC president, the late Gurcharan Singh Tohra, says that derawad, the tendency to promote deras, flourished because the SGPC became a mere administrative body, and so did the Akal Takht. When these two institutions became highly politicised, the people of Punjab turned to deras. It was reported that there are about 9000 deras in Punjab which command a substantial following among all sections of the society (Singh and Singh, 2007: 7). Among Dalits, Jodhka (2009: 84) writes, Ad Dharmis and Chamars are ‘predominant numerically’, which led them to establish more than 250 deras and gurudwaras in the name of Guru Ravi Das in Punjab. Lal and Sekhon (2005: 151) list Ahmadiyya Community (Qadian), Neel-dhari Sampradaya (Naushera Majjah Singh), Bawa Lal Sampradaya (Dhianpur), Salvation Army (Gurdaspur), Naam-dhari Sampradaya (Bhaini Sahib), Dera Jaimal
Singh (Beas), Grib Dassi Sampradaya (Talwandi), Dera Sacha Sauda (Salabatpur), Rada Sahib Sampradaya (Jarag), Sant Darbara Singh Trust (Lopon), Nirmal Dera (Rampura), Divya Jyoti Jagriti Sansthan (Noormahal), Ravi Dass Dera (Vallan), Dera Nirmal Kutya (Kishangarh) as the chief religious sects (followed by all sections of society) prevailing nowadays in Punjab.

The Relationship between Religion and Politics

High officials, politicians, filmstars and industrialists all endorse their favoured gurus and, having got the respectable sanction from society, the masses simply emulate their role. The existence of such connections is many times accepted by governmental institutions too. For example, The Tribune (3 July 2003: 1) reported that the Punjab State Forest Action Plan was chalked out to increase the area under forest to 15 per cent within 15 years with the help of babas in Punjab. On the other hand, Jag Baani – a local Punjabi newspaper (5 July 2002: 7) reported that the Punjab government is giving preference in building roads and other amenities for religious places. The Tribune (27 July 2002: 11) reported that even the former Union Minister (presently Member of Parliament from Gurdaspur constituency) Shri Vinod Khanna once urged the need to boost spiritual tourism in Punjab.

On the other hand, politicisation of religious groups is not only inevitable; it becomes functional as sects acquire a bargaining capacity and are able to enhance their strength vis-à-vis other religious groups. Religion has degenerated into the politics of religion; the politics of religion has turned into the politics of money (Shourie, 1987: 127). Once religion starts getting politicised, it is difficult to stop the process, because politics acquires a stake in
religion to ensure political support and power. The danger lies in scenarios where religious leaders indulge in political interventions and use their followers for their own purposes and selfish agenda, including blatant profiteering from the devotees.

The Indian state recognises the existence of various religious groups and offers them special safeguards in Article 26 of the Constitution of 1950 (Bakshi, 1997: 49). The religious institutions include temples, mosques, churches, maths and monasteries (Massey, 1999: 40).

In India’s parliamentary democracy today, there is much emphasis on vote catching through religious manipulation. This makes it almost inevitable that the various religious groups are pandered to at the time of elections. Direct or indirect interference in politics by deras is often practised. Increasing political clout is reflected when deference is shown to dera chiefs by all political parties before Assembly or Parliamentary elections (‘Sikhism and Deras’, 2009).

There is a fierce competition among different deras to increase their followers and to seek more access to the political system and political patronage. Many times, such competitions build up tensions. The situation becomes prone to riots and the civil administration shows notable meekness to pacify the tussles, as was evident from the remonstrations and angry exchanges the Talhan (Jalandhar) incident in Punjab provoked (‘Protecting Religion’, 2007). Referring to violent incidents, Chhabra (2009: 46) observes that ‘[d]era-related violence has ceased to surprise people in Punjab’.

In Punjab, there is a close relationship of politics with religion. The politicians are eager to get blessings from the headmen of sects,
especially at the time of elections. The deras from time to time instruct, openly or latently, their followers to cast their votes for a particular candidate or party. It is inevitable that the various political parties, especially the ruling party at the time, claim to take responsibility for safeguarding religious sects and thus seek to ensure their support in elections. For example, Dera Sacha Sauda (a Sirsa-based sect in Haryana) has influence over large neighbouring areas of Punjab. This sect has a regional headquarter in the Punjab at Salabatpura in district Bathinda. Its followers are named *premis* (lovers) after taking *Jaam-e-Insaan* (spiritual nectar). This sect has a political wing as a peculiar feature of its organisation. The sect came into limelight when it supported the Congress party during the Punjab Assembly Elections in February 2007 and helped it win an unprecedented 37 out of 65 seats in the Malwa region. This area had hitherto been an Akali stronghold and the Akali Dal promptly blamed the dera for the defeat of some of its candidates. But the Congress Party lost power and SAD-BJP formed a new government in the state in 2007. And after forming government, they lost little time in taking umbrage at the public posturing of the Sirsa-based dera and asserted, in the name of all Sikhs, that the Dera Sacha Sauda chief had hurt their religious sentiments. This resulted in many conflicts on the name of religion and caste. Various Sikh organisations pleaded to the state government to take appropriate punitive action against the Dera Sacha Sauda. A call for the social boycott of all followers of the dera was issued (Meeta and Rajivlochan, 2007: 1909).

In this predicament, the Dera Sacha Sauda had to approach the Punjab and Haryana High Court with a Public Interest Litigation requesting the Court to intervene and direct the state government to provide protection to the lives and properties of the dera followers (Meeta and Rajivlochan, 2007: 1909). The whole, political leaders used sects to
influence and inflate their vote banks and claim political significance (Grewal, 2007: 64).

The present research deals with the study of four multi religious sects in Gurdaspur district of the Punjab state, viz. The Ahmadiyya Sect, The Neel-dhari Sect, The Bawa Lal Sect and The Salvation Army Sect which are offshoots of Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and Christian religions respectively. Our attempt is to explore their historical establishment in the region and to empirically analyse their socio-political relevance in contemporary social set-up along with a comparative study of various aspects of the studied sects.

**REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Review of the literature shares with the readers the results of other studies that are similar or closely related to the present study. Though there is no such work done by any other researcher which directly relates to our work, but a few works need special mention.

Ahmad, Ghulam (n.d.) in his work *Jesus in India* refutes some misconceptions both of Muslims and Christians, concerning the phenomenon of Jesus and his return to earthly existence. Gulam Ahmad replaces such theories with his own interpretation of the Bible and the Quran. Jesus did undergo torture on the Cross. However, due to number of factors, Jesus survived the ordeal. Jesus fell into a state of coma, which was mistaken for death and he was placed in the sepulchre. After two days Jesus came to his senses and left the tomb. The wounds on the hands and feet were cured by a remarkably therapeutic ointment – *Marham-I-Isa*. As a consequence, Jesus was able to travel, and with a small retinue he went east in search of the lost tribes of the Israelites. Eventually this quest took him all the way
to Kashmir, where he found the descendents of Israelites, the Pathans. After a life devoted to religious activity in India, Jesus died at the ripe old age of 120 near Srinagar. This doctrine presents a mythical, if not fantastic account of Jesus' life; and the evidence which Ghulam Ahmad advances to support his theory is dubious at best.

Besant, Annie (1966) in her work *Seven Great Religions* writes that the general principles are that each religion is looked at in the light of occult knowledge, both as regards its history and its teachings. Each religion is treated as coming from the one great brotherhood, which is the steward and custodian of spiritual knowledge. Each is treated as an expression, by some member or messenger of that brotherhood, of the eternal spiritual truths, an expression suited to the needs of the time at which it was made, and of the dawning civilisation that it was intended to mould and to guide in its evolution. Each religion has its own mission in the world, is suited to the nations to whom it is given. An attempt is also made to distinguish the essential from the non-essential in each religion, and to treat chiefly the former. For every religion in the course of time suffers from accretions due to ignorance not to wisdom, to blindness not to vision.

Damle, Y.B.’s (1982) work *Caste, Religion and Politics in India* emphasises that Indian society has gone for a deliberate change of the social structure with a view to realise the goals enshrined in the constitution like equality, social justice, rationality, prosperity and secularism etc. He further says that legitimacy of caste had undergone a change in terms of the erosion of its ideological basis. The entry of power – secular, economic and political – has certainly produced a change in the structure of caste. Even the caste ethos has undergone change in terms of exposure to new ideologies. There is interplay between politics and caste and politics and religion and in fact the
continuing relationship and the intertwining of the forces of tradition and modernity. The politicisation of various groups and communities like the Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Christians has been partly responsible for perpetuating the differences between these groups and has, at the same time brought them together for the purpose of acquiring gains from the political processes.

Gupta, Kanti Prasanna Sen’s (1971) work *The Christian Missionaries in Bengal 1793-1833* analyses the 18th century socio-religious background of England against which it seeks to explain the growth of the missionary activities. It was Methodist Revival Movement in England, which gave rise to the outburst of missionary enthusiasm. Then he describes about missionaries at work, their attitude towards the object, and the methods used to achieve their objects and methods of for the same namely preaching, translation and education; and the reaction of the people. He also mentioned about the converts, their social background, behaviour after conversion and people’s reaction towards conversions and the converts.

Massey, James (1999) in his study *Minorities in a Democracy: The Indian Experience* offers the ideas on the status and rights of the minorities in a democracy and his personal experiences with the problems of the minorities and their solution in India. His academic presentations of laws and authentic narration of facts, both merit serious attention. He describes formation of minorities both at the global as well as at national levels. Constitutional provisions, National Commission for Minorities, Universal Declaration of Human Rights-1948, Covenant on Civil and Political Rights-1966, Declaration on the Rights of persons belonging to national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities-1992, National Commission for

Judge, Paramjit S. and Gurpreet Bal (2009) in their joint work *Mapping Dalits: Contemporary Reality and Future Prospects in Punjab* explore patterns of social mobility of dalits on the basis of empirical investigations from Majha and Doaba regions of Punjab. Education, empowerment, emigration and entrepreneurship are the dimensions examined in the present study. The study maps the changing character of dalits. Among dalits in Punjab, only the Ad-dharmis have been able to transform their social and economic conditions. This is so because of their association with Ad-dharm movement led by Mangoo Ram in 1920s. The level of formal education, immigration and mobility is much higher amongst them than other sections of dalit castes. Urban dalits have also changed their conditions by transforming into political empowerment at the local level. Regardless of empowerment, the dalits are still predominantly favouring caste endogamy.

Kaur, Satinder (2011) in her work *Punjabi Lok Dharam Ate Majhe De Santaa De Dere* (Punjabi) has explained the deras. About Sikh religion, she writes that there are deras who assume Guru Granth Sahib as guru along with other type of deras whose faith is Sikh principles but project dera head as guru. As far as Hindu religion is concerned, Vaishnav and Ramanandi deras are found in Punjab. In the Balmik deras, only marginal people go there. Besides the above deras, there is also reference of Akharas and deras of Nihang Singhs. The author further illustrates that the deras have increasing control over the psyche of the general public because due to tensions, lots of
people resort to deras. There is competition to attract the followers of other deras so as to increase the following. Offerings paid by the dera followers provide luxurious lifestyle to the dera heads.

Oberoi, Harjot’s (1995) classic work *The Construction of religious boundaries* emphasises that Sikh religious boundaries were constructed in the 19th century by an amalgam of factors such as new social grammar written and carried out by Sikh ideologues through printing press and institutions of learning, *Rahitnama* and *Gurbilas* tradition in Sikhism. Many among the guru lineages established *deras* or sacred establishments to impart religious instructions, dispense charity and take care of the holy relics in the family’s possession. Members of client families visit their guru patrons to seek blessings and advice. The pluralist framework of the Sikh faith in the nineteenth century allowed its adherents to belong to any one of the traditions: Udasi, Nirmala, Khalsa, Nanak-panthi, Ram Raia, Nihang, Kalu Panthi, Ram Dasi, Nirankari, Kuka and Sarvaria. Most of the Sikhs moved in and out of multiple identities, defining themselves at one moment as residence of this village, at another as members of that cult; at one moment as part of this lineage, at another as part of that caste; and at yet another moment as belonging to a sacred tradition.

Pai, D.A. (1987) in his monograph *Religious Sects of the Hindus* vol. 40 explains the models of devotees of various religious cults of Hinduism, past and present, together with their paraphernalia in the form of dress, rosaries, sect marks, etc. by means of illustrations. Hinduism with its wonderful mythology and occultism is symbolic in its expression, and those who do not understand the symbology of the various Gods cannot be expected to appreciate the depth of religious emotions underlying the ritualistic forms of worship. The founders of the various religious creeds of the Hindus lived their lives according
to their religious convictions, and variety to forms of devotional fervour becomes explicable only when we know the correct facts about the lives of the various saints or the Gurus. The author has been able to present a vivid historical background of various religious sects of the Hindus.

Philip, A.J. (2004) in his article “Netas, Godmen and Lucky Charms” published in The Tribune explains that superstition is the bedrock on which the whole society seems to be built. By treating 13 as lucky and deliberately choosing it for important events is his life, Vajpayee has been behaving like a layman. Last time, an elaborate puja preceded his trek to file his nomination papers. As it transpires, astrological considerations weighed with the Congress too when it chose April 5 for the filing of Rahul Gandhi’s nomination papers. Sometimes a godman presents the ring to the politician while he gives only vibhuti (ash) to ordinary follower. Former Bihar Chief Minister Jagannath Mishra wore ten rings, but that has not prevented his perpetual downslide in politics. Jayalalithaa added more ‘a’ to her name. Officials propitiate godman in the belief that it is the surest way to please a new Chief Minister. In the 16th century, the Rajputs could have aborted Babur’s plan of building his empire in India if they did not delay the attack for astrological considerations. Thus superstitious beliefs effect the political activities.

Puri, Harish K. and Paramjit S. Judge (2000) in their edited work Social and Political Movements enable us to understand the dynamics of the way a society produces its cultural and political orientations; structures of domination and patterns of resistance. Regional movements are more or less confined to a definite area and emerge due to the local conditions. Such movements are diverse and have conditions rooted in the local history and culture. In India, where
socio-cultural diversity is marked by caste and religion, the region acquires a significant place in any analysis of a social and political process. Accordingly, social and political movements in Punjab have distinct features and traditions. At the time of annexation by the British, Punjab’s population was comprised of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. The British period saw the coming of the Christian missionaries in Punjab. Conversion to Christianity led to the revitalisation of the three communities: Singh Sabha movement, the Ahmadiya movement, Kuka movement etc. The complexity involved in the 1920’s could be estimated by the fact that religion, caste and sect seem to be merging with each other on the fundamental issues of identity and share in political power.

Robinson, Rowena’s (2004) edited work Sociology of Religion in India explains that sectarianism is the very feature of democracy in these days. The study is divided into four sections. The first section deals with religion, society and identity. The second section deals with sects, cults and shrines. Religious conversion is covered in the third section and the last section provides a comparative perspective drawn from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Trinidad and Tobago and the USA. The vision of national integration in India has come under great strain in present times with the growth of religious sectarianism and fundamentalism. One of the articles emphasises the prospect of better life chances offered by Christianity to the oppressed caste groups that prompted them to opt for the new creed.

Rose, Arnold M. and Caroline B. Rose (1965) explain in their work Minority Problems that major determinants of a minority group is that its members consider themselves to be minority group. The members feel that they are the objects of prejudice and discrimination and that they need to combine in order to protest and to feel safe and
comfortable. The members feel that they have inherited cultural values – the expression of which requires that they continue to associate with each other. The former attitude creates a sense of group identification while the latter creates a community. Newspapers and magazines of the group are established especially to maintain group identification. Other institutions grow up around the church and the area of residence: schools, recreational associations, social club, community houses, community welfare organisations, youth groups. Thus they are unconsciously as well as consciously drawn closer to their group, which has shared a number of common experiences.

Shakir, Moin (1989) in his edited work Religion, State and Politics in India explains that position the Indian state has taken illustrates the fact that it operates within the conceptualization of dominant values and beliefs held by the society. The attitude that the minorities are themselves responsible for social reforms actually reinforces the division in the polity, and locks the state in a definite context. In order to make a political claim, cultural identities are often created. For the majority community it is a response to increasing demands by other groups, or a reaction to the perception that minorities are statistically over-represented in certain areas, even if the numbers are small in the overall social structure. The minorities have become an object of the fears, paranoia, prejudices and social grievances of the majority.

Sharma, S.L. (2014) in his article “Spiritual Saviours or Merchants of God?” writes that recent years have witnessed high visibility of (un)holy god men throughout the world. The controversies with these gurus are often practice. These gurus have been patronized by the contemporary governments. Compared to the foreign cults (alleged,
sometimes, for large scale destructive misdemeanours), the Indian
cults are involved in their lavish life styles and their commercial and
political indulgences. These saints are smart and well-grounded in the
common teachings of major religions. They have the uncanny ability
to connect with the masses as well as the elites cutting across
religious and caste barriers. These spiritual figures and political
leaders develop a symbiotic relationship due to democratic polity. For
reasons behind the large number of followings, the writer quotes
psychoanalyst like Freud, Ernest Becker, Emile Durkheim and
sociologist like Max Weber and explains that human imperfection
attribute to the sense of insecurity and stress. People find defence
mechanism in religious practices against guilt feelings. By quoting
Ronki Ram (a political scientist), the writer explains that these
*deras* also provide emancipatory social transformation for the *dalits.* The
followers are fascinated by charismatic religious leader because guru
occupies a central place in India’s glorious religious tradition. In
order to avoid the nefarious activities of the sects, governmental
efforts with advice of the judiciary along with the meaningful quality
education is need of the hour.

Shourie, Arun’s (1987) work *Religion in Politics* throws light on the
grievances around which followers were being mobilised having been
declared as religions. Politics is for religion and religion is for
politics is the main feature in practice. Religion has degenerated into
the politics of religion, the politics of religion into the politics of
money. The author raises many questions like how do people become
Swami / Bhagwan / Baba or Sant etc. among different religions? How
do they deliver block votes? What is the mark of a man of God, the
office he occupies or the service he renders? So deep rooted concept is
the role of politics in every sphere.
Singh, N.K. (2003) in his edited work *Religious Concept of Sin* examines that sin is so interwoven in human life that men can well foresee their daily weakness of sin, guilt, anguish, fear, repentance, longing for pardon and hope of purification. Man is asking for forgiveness because to do so, he belongs to his existential condition. According to Christian concept, the first man Adam, committed a sin in paradise, called original sin and the blame has continued to attach to succeeding generations of the entire human race, so that all human beings are held to be sinners. According to Islam, the man has been created and sent to the world for the purpose of being tested. He has been granted freedom in both word and deed. That is necessary to ensure that his moral worth is reliably evaluated. According to Sikhism, every sinner has a future, if only the path indicated in the *Gurubani* is properly followed. Perfection would not be perfection if there were no imperfection. Sin is a step towards the perfection. It may be instrumental to the realisation of the God.

Vajpeyi, Dhirendra and Yogendra K. Malik (1989) in their edited work *Religious and Ethnic Minority Politics in South Asia* narrate that South Asia is the birthplace of the world’s two religions – Hinduism and Buddhism, and has a large number of followers of Islam and Christianity. In India and Sri Lanka the ruling elite decided to adopt a non-sectarian, secular approach to define the role of religion in politics. On the other hand, Pakistan and Bangladesh adopted a sectarian and non-secular approach. The Pakistan government’s declaration that Ahmadiyya are not Muslims, and sunnis as majority sect of Islam in Pakistan, to proclaim shias as another religious minority in the country are part of this dilemma. Thus it seems that in South Asia, both the non-secular model (Pakistan, Bangladesh), and
secular model (India, Sri Lanka) have failed to solve the issue related to religion and politics. The contributors of different chapters are of the view that in search of policy options, the South Asian leaders may have to draw upon the experience of other multi-religious societies.

Vasudev, Shefalee (2003) in her article ‘A date with God’ published in India Today describes that religious places, meditation centres, ashrams of various religious orders attract a large number of people, many of them young professionals. They have a sense of loss lingers in their eyes. They want a spiritual balm to rethink their position in relationship, jobs and society as the whole. It is as if there is a resurgence of these new seekers of spirituality, they are united by one goal as peace of mind, joy, higher consciousness, personal transformation, karmayoga, self pills after personal crisis. Service to humanity is popular doctrine of these satsang groups and distribution of literature as well. Thousands gather every Sunday to chant and pray and to sing bhajans with delirious devotion.

Veer, Peter Van Der (2000) in his work Religious Nationalism talks about the historical construction of Hindu and Muslim identities in India and specially the transformation of these identities in the colonial and post-colonial periods in the context of the rise of nationalism. He argues that religious identity is constructed in ritual discourse and practice. Religious nationalism articulates discourse of the religious community and discourse on the nation. To study religious aspects of Indian nationalism like movements, discourses, ritual practices, the study shifts from the political scientist’s study of political parties and voting behaviour to the anthropologist’s study.
Vora, Rajiv (2003) in his article ‘Science and Spirituality’ published in *World Affairs* reflects on the common sources of inspiration for both the *yogi* and the scientist, within the eternal paradigm. The author also discusses the Gandhian search for truth and its definition of real human needs, so relevant to our current predicament. Throughout the discussion two things have come up very prominently —the question of spirituality and the question of development – material development, in science, and the contradictions and the convergences of both. The author is of the view that if spirituality has a field independent of the complete life, then that spirituality is not spirituality. Spirituality must be reflected in our economic, political, cultural, intellectual and ethical life.

Webster, John C.B. (1976) in his writing *The Christian Community and Change in Nineteenth Century North India* has analysed about social history of the Christian people living in Punjab and United Provinces from the beginning of the 19th century up to the outbreak of the First World War. His work analysed three things i.e. the Christian of the 19th century Punjab and United Province were a community; this Christian community interacted with other communities in the Punjab and the United Provinces; and such interaction brought about numerous changes both within and beyond the Christian community. In the process he has made analysis in terms of three developments: demographic change, the establishment of community boundaries and the gradual integration of a small number of widely dispersed Christian people coming from different kinds of backgrounds and belonging to separate denominational groups into a recognisable Indian community.
Weeraperuma, Susunaga’s (1996) book *Major Religions of India* throws light on major religious movements that originated in the subcontinent of India – Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. This work is primarily concerned with the human implications of certain religious concepts, beliefs and practices. After some of the basic ideas and beliefs of each religion, the author has proceeded to discuss their psychological significance today. Discussing the *Bhakti-Marg* (path of devotion) he surprises to understand as to how one can fall in love with someone who is an abstraction, namely God. The Godlessness of Jainism and Buddhism has saved them from the fanciful flights of imagination in which the Hindu *Bhaktas* indulge with unbounded zeal. In the chapter on Sikhism, however, the author is baffled by certain irrationalities. Sikhism, the youngest religion of India, started as an offshoot of the medieval Vaishnava mysticism of *Bhakti Marga*, but soon developed a theology of its own which is a sort of hybrid growth of Vaishnavism and Islam. It retained the *Bhakti Marga*, but eschewed the concept of gods and deities and totally rejected idol-worship.

**Objectives of the Study**

The following are the objectives of the research, i.e.

1) To explain the origin of sects in Punjab.

2) To make an overview of the Political Sociology of religious sects in Punjab.

3) To examine the rise of the studied sects i.e. The Ahmadiyya Sect, The Neel-dhari Sect, The Bawa Lal Sect and The Salvation Army Sect as an offshoot of the mainstream religions i.e. Islam, Sikh, Hindu and Christian respectively.

4) To explain the socio-economic profile of the followers of these sects.
5) To study the structure and ideology of these sects.
6) To explain the images of these sects in social set-up.
7) To explain the religious and sectarian practices in these institutions.
8) To examine the dynamics of relationship of the sects and political process in the state.

**Hypothesis**

A pilot study was conducted by visiting the studied sects’ headquarters to find the viability of the study. On the basis of the pilot study, the following hypotheses are framed keeping in view the objectives of the study:

The Ahmadiyya Sect, The Neel-dhari Sect, The Bawa Lal Sect and The Salvation Army Sect are major religious sects found in different areas in Gurdaspur district (Punjab). These have been flourishing due to congenial socio-political circumstances in the state. Due to their influence these legions are striving for denominational status. They, because of their centralised structural functioning, identical techniques, literature, contacts, charitable institutions, have socio-political impact in the region. On the other hand, they face competition and identity crisis within as well as outside the sect boundaries.

Besides this, the following hypotheses are framed to study the various aspects of the sects.

\( H_{01} \): The fulfillment of aspirations is independent of the nature of sect that the respondents join.
H_{02}: The liking of being a kind of a follower is independent of the kind of sect.

**Methodology**

The present study is based on both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include field survey, observation and interview method. A comprehensive questionnaire was prepared to collect information with face to face interview with the respondents. The secondary sources include published material including literature published by the studied sects, books, newspapers, periodicals etc.

- Though the universe of the study is Punjab but the major focus is Gurdaspur district as it is one of the oldest regions from religious, historical and political point of view.
- The sampling unit of the study was the individuals belonging to Ahmadiyya, Neel-dhari, Bawa Lal and The Salvation Army sects.
- The sect leaders of each sect were personally contacted to identify the areas/villages where the sect had large number of followers.
- On the basis of this, the areas/villages were personally visited to collect primary information after meeting with the followers.

The following places were visited for the purpose of survey.

**Areas visited for the Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Sect</th>
<th>Places in Gurdaspur District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Ahmadiyya</td>
<td>Qadian, Nangal Baghban, Kahlwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Neel-dhari</td>
<td>Naushehra Majha Singh, Chuhar Chack, Miankot, Kalanaur, Batala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Bawa Lal</td>
<td>Batala, Dhianpur, Khehra Sultan, Rauwaal, Mohlowali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The Salvation Army</td>
<td>Pakho ke Tahl Sahib, Khushalpur, Pakkiwan, Lopa, Khasawali, Ramnagar, Gurdaspur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The sample size of the study was of three hundred and eighty respondents belonging to above-mentioned four sects. Ninety-five respondents were randomly selected from each sect for the study.
Purposive Sampling technique was adopted for the study. The studied places were personally visited by the researcher through reference of the respondents, i.e. snowball method was used in the study to contact the respondents of the sects.
Along with the interviews, field observations were also conducted for the study.

Data Analysis
The data was analysed by using various statistical techniques such as percentage method, Chi square test, etc.

Chi square technique is used to test the statistical significance of the observed association in a cross-tabulation. It assists us in determining whether a systematic association exists between the two variables. This technique is used in the study to examine the association between the given two variables. The following formula is used to calculate the value of chi square:

\[ \chi^2 = \sum \left( \frac{(O_{ij} - E_{ij})^2}{E_{ij}} \right) \]

Where ‘O’ is observed frequency of the table;
‘E’ is expected frequency of the table
E is calculated as under:

\[
E = \frac{\text{Row Total (RT)} \times \text{Column Total (CT)}}{\text{Grand Total (N)}}
\]

\[v = (r-1) (c-1)\] where ‘\(v\)’ is degree of freedom;

‘\(r\)’ stands for total number of rows
‘\(c\)’ stands for total number of columns

Hypotheses were duly tested. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) v 17.0 has been used for the analysis and testing hypothesis.

CHAPTERS

1. **Introduction**
   This chapter introduces the study with the theoretical concepts of the study. It throws light about the origin of various sects, factors leading to their evolution, need for joining the sects by the masses. It contains introduction, review of literature, research objectives and Methodology adopted for the study.

2. **Religion Wise Explanation of Four Sects**
   This chapter deals with religion wise explanation of the four sects working in Gurdaspur district of Punjab. The chapter sheds light on historical background, origin, growth, establishment, ideology, functioning etc. of the studied sects. The chapter is divided into four segments. First part deals with the Ahmadiyya sect, second with the Neel-dhari sect, third with the Bawa Lal sect and fourth with The Salvation Army sect.

3. **Socio-Economic Profile of the followers of Four Sects**
   This chapter explains socio-economic profile of the followers of these sects. The information about the respondents is divided into four segments. Firstly, it takes into account the demographic variable such as age and gender. Secondly, it
examines social profile of the respondents such as religion, caste (and caste category). Thirdly, it deals with the household profile of the respondents which includes type of the family, place of living and education. Finally, it discusses about ownership profile of the respondents i.e. occupation and income.

4. **Perceptions of the Followers: A Study of Four Sects**

The chapter analyses the empirical data which is based on the interview schedules. On the basis of certain issues, the empirical data of the sects is shown in the tables displaying frequencies and percentage. There are four segments of this chapter. First part deals with the Ahmadiyya sect, second with the Neel-dhari sect, third with the Bawa Lal sect and fourth with The Salvation Army sect.

5. **Perceptions of the Followers of Four Sects: A Comparative Analysis**

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to scrutinize the sect based viewpoints of the respondents belonging to the said four sects. A comparative analysis of the perceptions of the followers has been made to find out their views on various issues related to their respective faiths/deras.

6. **Conclusion**

This chapter contains the conclusion of the study based on the theoretical as well as empirical aspects of the study.

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1 A small stanza of a Punjabi folk song, spoken by maternal female relatives a day before marriage indicates this. In this stanza, a woman tells her fellow relative that she neither reads Gurmukhi (Punjabi) script nor has she gone to any dera to learn: ‘Na main melne padi Gurmukhi na baithi san dere’ (‘Friend! Neither I have read the Gurmukhi script nor joined a dera’).