Introduction

Significance:

The issue of identity has acquired an unprecedented significance in the contemporary academic world. Its historical genesis can be traced in the holocaust in Germany and the two World Wars. Although the resonances of this concern are faintly conspicuous in ancient and modern world but post-modernity has to grapple vigorously with the some given to the conflict, violence and political recognition of crisis in the wake of post-colonial resurgence and globalized pluralistic co-existence mobility as a way of life.

Post-modernism attempts to de-centre and re-interpret the whole structures of thought. It may be called the revolutionary phase in the present discourse. Due to this, to define and to find the solution of the complexes and crisis of philosophy, identity becomes a major issue. About the post-modern framing of identity, Ali Rattansi observes that 'this mode of analyzing identities in intrinsically connected to a decentring and de-essentializing of the subject and social. Decentring refers here in the first instance to the deflation of a rationalist/Cartesian pretension to unproblematic self-knowledge. It also involves a critique of the conception of a linear connection of subjects to the external world, in which reality is made transparent form a uniquely privileged vantage point through the application of rationality and empirical disciplines. De-essentialism is an intimately related manoeuvre, cutting the ground away from conceptions of subjects and social forms as reducible to a timeless, unchanging,
defining and determining element or ensemble of elements – 'human nature', for example, or in the case of the social, the logic of the market or mode of production. Altering is important here because subjects and the social, and thus both individual and collective identities, are seen not as essentially given, but as constantly under construction and transformation, a process in which differentiation from Others is a powerful constitutive force'.

The conceptualization of decentring, de-essentializing and altering is very important to frame the identity in the present thought. The perspective of other is becoming important to understand the phenomena of identity. The issue of Sikh identity is becoming significant in Sikh studies. It has taken a serious turn after the attack on Sri Harmandir Sahib and Sri Akal Takhat in June 1984. Sri Harmandir Sahib and Sri Akal Takhat are highly respected and sacred places for the Sikhs. Kirpal Dhillon writes that ‘operation Blue Star finally concluded on 6 June with the death of Sant Bhindranwale, Shabeg Singh and a few others in assault on the Akal Takht, where they had been living for several months. In the process, the building of the Akal Takht, the most sacred of the five Sikh thakat or centers of temporal power, was razed to the ground and its many holy relics destroyed. The sanctum sanctorum and the Harmandir too received numerous bullet marks’. 

This attack was operated by Indian army. In this attack, hundreds of innocent people were killed by the army. Immediately, ‘between 1986-7 Operation Woodrose

systematically terrorized the youth between the ages 16-20 driving many youngsters closer to the extremist point of view. In early 1988 the Woodrose method was given up for a less rigorous one. As an officer in uniform said in 1988: ‘we no longer harass people if they were forced to give food or shelter to terrorists. Instead we encourage them to talk to us and we try to win them over to our side. This change in our policy has helped us a lot. Now people are beginning to inform us about the whereabouts of these terrorists’.³

Due to these operations, the situation was very crucial for the Sikhs to survive. One side the Indian state was presenting the Sikhs as terrorists and on the other side; the Sikhs were facing the problems within their own community. It was the complex situation of the Sikhs to project their real image on the world canvass.

Again, after 9/11, the issue of identity became a serious challenge for the Sikhs. Rita Verma writes that ‘the post 9/11 backlash was pivotal in this community as it created more barriers for the youth in their schools as they became victims of racist slurs, threats and physical assault that were treated with apathy from teachers and administers. Students stopped going to school, changed their physical appearances, displayed ‘patriotic’ American sentiment to promote an appearance of belonging, became depressed and were even suicidal as a result of the 9/11 backlash. The sense of persecution and of being labeled ‘suspect’ in the eyes of the public was detrimental to the families and ensuing ‘fear’ for their safety in public spaces provoked many violent

memories from India that these families experienced during the Hindu-Sikh riots from 1984 to the mid-1990s'.

Consequently, world conditions forwarded a challenge for the Sikhs to define their identity. There faced many internal and external issues, which influence the image of the Sikh identity. The confusions about Sikh identity arose in the academic circles as well as in the political, social and cultural sphere. Rajiv A. Kapur writes that ‘for centuries, Sikh identity was diffused between Sahajdhari and Kesdhari Sikhs and overlapped with the Hindu community. Kesdhari Sikhs formed a distinct brotherhood of the Khalsa, but not all Khalsa considered themselves as distinct from the Hindus. Khalsa numbers were fluid and even among Khalsa members numerous divisions between various sects and particular religious adherence existed........Among Khalsa Sikhs there was a movement away from individual sect distinctions and towards the development of one common and distinct Sikh identity’.  

In academics, the issue of Sikh identity has been studied by the western scholars e.g. Trumpp, W.H. McLeod, Doris R. Jakobsh mainly. W.H. McLeod takes this question more seriously. However, he examines the problem from the historical angle. Harjot Oberoi, N.G. Barrier, Doris Jackbosh and some others carried the same tradition. On the other hand, Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha Daljeet Singh, G.S. Dhillon, J.S. Ahluwalia, J.S. Grewal and Gurbhagat Singh also try to treat this question in the Sikh perspective.

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Objectives:

The present study has four main objectives. These are:

1. To understand the nature of the Sikh identity.
2. To examine the religious paradigms of the Sikh identity.
3. To describe the historical paradigms of the Sikh identity.
4. To examine the mediations of the Sikh theory (the religious paradigms) and practices (the historical paradigms).

Methodology:

In this study, religio-historical discourse analysis approach is adopted. In the first step, we have tried to understand the concept of identity and found three main approaches. One group of thinkers takes attention upon the surrounding which emphasis on a human being and effects/affects/erodes/fades individual's identity. They conceive that the concepts of incommensurability, difference, diversity, hybridity, and confinement become the explanation of one's identity. Second group of scholars focuses upon race, feminism and marginality, which describe how the various concepts’ impact on co-operative identity. Third group constructs the concepts of objectification, myth, commitment, rituals and conversation. These concepts explain the religious identity of a person or group and how these concepts associate with religious identity.

In the second step, we have tried to explore the major works of the scholars of Sikh studies e.g. Bhai Gurdas, Sainapat, John Malcolm, Ernest Trumpp, Frederic Pincott, Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, M.A. Macauliffe, W.H. McLeod, Harjot Oberoi, Pashaura Singh, Daljeet Singh, J.S. Grewal, Gurbhagat Singh and J.S. Ahluwalia. We observed that, the
concepts of faith, commitment and institutions are important to understand the religious identity. We have examined that the issue of Sikh identity comes within three strands: faith in Guru/Waheguru/Akal Purkh, commitment with Guru/Waheguru and institutions of Sikh tradition.

In the third step, we have tried to understand the religious paradigms of the Sikh faith. Every religion has its own paradigms. In this study, we have examined that how the Sikh Gurus construct the religious paradigms and we have focused upon the conceptualizations of God, commitment and institutions in the Sikh faith.

In the fourth step, the study has focused upon the practices of the Sikhs. It has concentrated that how the Gurus have constructed the history. In the view of historical paradigms, we have examined the various institutions of the Sikhs. We have also tried to understand that how the Sikhs and their Gurus are committed to their lives for the Divine.

At last, it has examined to understand the mediations between Sikh theory and practice. In the identity perspective, it was much important to understand these linkages because practice of any community shows its reflexions of thought.

Chapter I

In this chapter, we have presented a relevant review of literature. The first chapter also describes the theory and concept of identity. This chapter has two parts. First part deals with the theoretical issues and second part examines the different studies, which linked with identity. It also describes that how the issue of identity became much
important in the present academic. In this chapter, we have major works, which are dealing the issue of Sikh identity.

Chapter II

This chapter deals with the Religious Paradigms of the Sikh Identity. Three main issues of Sikh identity; Sikh faith, commitment and institutions have been discussed. It is important to understand the different layers of identity and what are the conceptualizations in the Sikh vision toward faith, commitment and institutions. Akal Purkh (ਅਕਲ ਪੁਰਖ) is the highest spiritual realization of Ultimate Reality in the Sikh vision, which a Sikh can achieve through his faith. To do this, he/she has to commit his/her life to the spiritual passionate Guru, the Gur-Parmeshar. The Guru guides the whole-life phenomena to a Sikh. He blessed the sacred institutions such as Guruship, Dharamsala/Gurdwara and Sangat, which give the distinct shape to Sikh identity.

Guru creates Sangat, which is the community of truthful people. Sangat has a spirit to best serve the other. Other is not antagonistic in Sikh vision, which is appreciable mark of Sikh identity. In the Sikh theory, there is much respect for other. In Guru Granth Sahib, Siddha Gosti Bani creates the paradigms of inter/intra-faith dialogue.

Chapter III

The third chapter, Historical Paradigms of the Sikh Identity unfolds the important clues to understand that how the Sikh, and their Gurus created new paradigms in the practice. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Gurbani contains various spiritual and experienced personalities. A Sikh lives according to Guru and follows to Guru Granth Sahib. Every
day he/she starts his/her life within the recitation of Divine Nam and tries to spent day and night in the Divine commitment of Guru, who leads him/her toward spiritual life and realization.

To recite the Divine Nam, Guru made Sangat, which gathers around Guru and meditates. Sikh meditation is known to as Simran, which is practiced within Gurbani reading and singing. Gurbani in Guru Granth Sahib has composed in musical symmetry. Sikh Simran relates with the embracing of Waheguru all the time to worship Him. In Gurdwara, Sangat recite the Divine Nam and serve the food in Langar to the indigents. Ardas is the daily prayer of the Sikhs, which connects the Sikhs to their past and the source of their actualized vision. The structure of Ardas memorizes the traumas, martyrdoms, faith, devotions and sacrifices of the Sikhs in History.

The paradigms of Sikh institutions describe that Sri Harmandir Sahib and Sri Akal Takht are the models of Sikh institutions. Sri Harmandir Sahib is the center of Sikh spirituality, ideology, vision and its practice and the unique model of Sikh Gurdwara. The spirituality, structure, formation, archetype, philosophy and vision of Sri Harmandir Sahib show the distinct Sikh practice of Divine life. Sri Akal Takht in the front of Sri Harmandir Sahib is the symbol of Sikh religio-socio-political Sikh identity. Miri-Piri institution describes the vision of Sri Akal Takht. Through this institution, a Sikh becomes saint-soldier, which is the distinct practice of the Sikhs.

In the perspective of commitment, Khande ki pahul explains the highest commitment/devotion toward the Guru of a Sikh. A Sikh takes the initiation through
Khande ki pahul to become Khalsa in his super-consciousness. Here, the study defines that how the sacred symbols of Khalsa become the projections of Sikh identity.

Chapter IV

The connections between Sikh theory and practice are discussed in the last chapter, Sikh Identity: Mediations in Religious and Historical Paradigms. The Sikhs live their life according to Guru Granth Sahib, which describes their faith in Akal Purkh and splendor commitment toward Guru. The Sikh history is the practice of Sikh spirit/vision/ideology. In history, Sikhs made the best effort to keep the Divine words of their Gurus and Gurbani, and it is a perennial practice. A Sikh vows to imbibe Gurbani in daily routine and commits to conducting life in its guidance. A Sikh is in the highest quest of Guru’s love and serves his whole life.

Some historians and scholars have missed out in envisaging the significant connections of Sikh theory and practices. Questionable comments and versions have emerged from this inadequacy, as visible explicating in McLeod school of thought. A Sikh’s love, passion, ambition cannot be understood without the understanding of religiosity, which is in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Methodologically, the practices of a religious community can be understood only with the realizations of its spirituality. Religious experiences create countless indiscr...