CULTURAL DISCOURSE:
SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND RELIGION
Chapter - 2

Cultural Discourse : Social Structure and Religion

The cultural discourse of the text tries to understand the anthropological components of the village. This involves a description of the village social structure, its religious caste and kinship groups and their mutual interrelations. The role of Shahji’s Haveli as an important nodal point of these relations is also elucidated. Further an attempt is made to understand the religious discourse of the novel and the complex interplay between the institutional and popular religious beliefs taking into account both historical and contemporary interreligious relations and mutual influence.

2.1 Social Structure

2.1.1 Settlement pattern and social divisions

The long rows of green fields, circled by a depression caused by a seasonal stream (Cho), indicate the beginning of the village. The Cho circles the village with its fresh clear water before finally mingling in the river Chenab. After a long row of fields peppered by a large number of kutchha houses and a few houses of Sunnars is the Thalli Vand. This segment constitutes primarily the landmark haveli of the Shah's; the houses of their Shariks, janjghar, chiron ki gali, the old banyan tree and its well; Bebe Nikki and Vadda Lala's house with a small Thakurdwara within it; a few fields; some houses of Muslims who kept livestock and poultry and those ancilliarily linked to the haveli. The Thalli vand ended in a downward slope towards the little bazaar, constituting the shops of Jawinda and Moolah Halwai, Darshan Singh's cloth shop, Macchi Sultan's tandoor etc. A few steps from the left side of the bazaar was the Dharamshala, the right turning from the bazaar led to a kutchha road towards the fields, which also was marked by the kutia and its bathing spaces (Chabbaches), a masjid in the middle and a small madarsa. The left
of the haveli constituted the Dakhni Vand which was largely Muslim dominated specially with those working on lands. Mian Khan's Tabela, was its Centre point. The area facing the river Chenab was the Uttari Vand which was inhabited largely by the service castes. There was another cluster of houses between Uttari Vand and Dhul which constituted Sansion ki goth and Churon ki thathi. Around the village were scattered a number of old shady trees and wells, the most popular ones being the Arianwala, Jammiwali, Lesoronwala, Shirinwala and Bor wells.

The physical description of the village gives us a backdrop of its social structure, the traditional hierarchy of caste and of gradually emerging class conflicts. The village is essentially a Muslim dominated village with most of its populace seeking sustenance from land and activities allied to it. With the exception of a few middle and a smattering of large landowners, most of the Muslims work as tenants or are marginal and small farmers, indebted to the village moneylender. The Muslim Jats constitute the majority of the village. The other Muslim caste groups found in varying numbers are the Rajputs, Arains, Gujjars, Awans, Sheikhs, Sayyids and a few Mughals. The Pathans and Bilochi's become a part of the village scenario in terms of a social visit or for selling some wares.

Among the non-Muslims, it is the Khatri Shah and his economic dominance which keeps the grip on the village. The Khatri Shah is the biggest landowner of the area and also carries out mercantile activities and moneylending (for a detailed discussion see Economic Discourse). The other prominent non-Muslims were the Aroras who were lower in ritual grading than the Khatris. They were largely merchants, traders and petty shopkeepers. Tandon discusses this difference in ranking in terms of the Arora's lack of strict gradations for intermarriages between sub-castes, and a lenient tendency to exchange daughters i.e. 'marry a brother and sister to another brother and sister' (Tandon 1961:75). The Labanas were the hawkers and carriers largely in the hills.

Most of the service castes had a hereditary occupation forming part of the village Jajmani system. However, winds of change were gradually blowing into the countryside.
In their dealings with the non-Muslim Jajmans, at the top of the rank were placed the Brahmins. However, unlike the rest of India, Brahmins of Punjab according to Prakash Tandon were an:

Underprivileged class and exercised little or no influence on the community. Perhaps the Muslims had so discouraged temples and external worship that the Brahmins had no place left from where to exercise their authority. In towns like Gujrat, and more so you went further west of the Jhelum river, there were very few temples of any size... Our Brahmins were rarely erudite, in fact many of them were barely literate, possessing only a perfunctory knowledge of ritual and knowing just the necessary mantras by heart. As the occasions requiring their aid and knowledge were few, to earn their living they had developed a system of charity... Without erudition and because of their daily dependence on the other castes, there was a touch of mild derision towards the Brahmins. The very address 'Oh Pandita' or 'Oh Brahmana' had gentle sarcasm about it. They were never elders of the community, nor was their advice sought on mundane matters...

(Tandon 1961:76-77)

It was only the 'astrologer pandits' (Tandon 1961:77) and those recruited in the army who received respect from the community.

Among the service castes, Sunnars and Jhewars were largely Hindu. While Tarkhans, Lohars, Kumhars, Julahas, Macchis (whose women were dais), Chimba, Rangrez, Lilari, Teli, Penja, Mallah (boatman) Darzi were normally Muslims with a smattering of non-Muslims. Another important Muslim service caste linked to the Jajmani system were the Mirasis - musicians and minsters who performed on ritual occasions, rites de passage, kept trace of genealogical tables etc. The most important Muslim service caste was the Nai (barber). The Nai performed many ritual functions including being the messenger for ceremonies and go between

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1 Tarkhans and Lohars performed work which required a great deal of technical skill. The tarkhans took care of all the agricultural implements. Their tasks included, making and repairing ploughs, sugarpresses, household furniture, wood works of the persian wheels, carts, cart wheels, digging graves at funerals. Lohars made and repaired iron implements Kumhars supplied earthen jars attached to rims of the persian wheels and large dishes for sugarpresses, earthen vessels for domestic purposes.
for arranging marriages.

The scavengers were Muslims and known as Musali or Kutna, 'there were no Hindu untouchables in the West Punjab' and the work of 'sweepers, skin flayers and leather workers was done by Muslims. They were presumably untouchable Hindus who had at one time become Muslim to escape their lot... They had the right to worship in mosques and to mix at an uneasy distance with poor Muslims, but they were compelled to retain their unwelcome professions' (Tandon 1961:78). These included Chamars (Tanners), Macchis, Qassabs, Churas (Scavengers) etc. (See 6.4.3)

Making a historical analysis of socio-economic change of a village Vilyatpur in Jullundur district of Punjab. Kessinger discusses the way economic ties were structured:

The central role of agriculture strengthened the Sahota's dominance in the community. Because they controlled the land and its use, they were the focal point of village economic activity and organization... Each of these property holding groups were at the center of a network of dyadic relationship - with tenants, labourers, servants and artisans which taken together, integrated the community and formed the organization for most of its economic activity... The closest and perhaps most important ties were with the artisans and servants known as the sepidars. A family of sepidars was attached to a particular Sahota group, usually over an extended period of time, to whom the sepidars rendered their services in return for a fixed percentage of the semi-annual harvest' (Kessinger 1979:64,65-69).

2. The Chamars were largely assigned the role of tanners and leather workers they took the hides of all dead cattle and the flesh of all cloven footed animals, made and mended shoes, things for the cart and whips and other leather works. They were also the field labourers of the village. the Churas performed the scavenges work for the village, prepared the land for the crop during harvest worked on reaping and winnowing.

3. In the context of Vilyatpur, Kessinger discusses the system of payment for different caste groups. The Chiir, Chura, and Nai received one-fourth of a seer of every maund of grain at the time of harvest, and a small amount of gur every year. The Carpenter received half of a seer of every maund. While the Chamars received a high share as well. The full time Chamar worker received two and three quarter seers per maund per harvest, while the part timer received only one seer.
Banerjee has broadly classified the Kamins into two categories (Banerjee 1982:175) (a) Vadde Kamins: those whose labour was intimately connected with agriculture like (Tarkhans, Lohars, Chamars etc.), (b) Khangi Kamins (house menials): these included Churas, Dhobis, Nais etc. For most of the services rendered these Kamins were rewarded with wages which invariably took the 'form of a fixed share of the produce'. These payments were popularly known as 'sep'. A portion of the produce was set apart for the payment according to customary rules, which the Kamins were entitled to:

'as a matter of right and they were therefore, "no less than the agriculturists proper wholly dependent for their support upon the yield of the harvest". their wages however, greatly varied from place to place. Generally they received a somewhat lower rate in the extreme western districts across the Indus... On the other hand in the central and sub-montance districts Kamins were comparatively well paid. (Banerjee 1982:177-178).

The village Kamins too were not immune to changes which were affecting the traditional customary system such as introduction of cash payment, improvement in technology, commercialisation of agriculture, political awareness and migration of artisans to urban centres etc.

Also a part of the village set up were the vagrant criminal tribes which included Sansis, Pakhiwaris etc. Others on the margins of society were the Kanjars (prostitutes, dancing girls, petty criminals etc.) and the Kallals who dealt in the distilling and selling of illicit liquor, narcotics, opium etc. Many other caste groups participated in the social cultural, economic and religious life of the village. These included the gypsy tribes, the Nats and Baazigars (acrobats) Madaris (jugglers), Saperas (snake charmers etc.). The Mahtams or Behroopias, Rashdaris, Bhands, Naqqals etc served as actors and mimics, storytellers, jokers, buffoons etc. The wandering ministerels included fortune tellers, Faqirs, Jogis, Bairagis, Qualandaris and others who constituted a part of popular religion.
2.1.2 Biraderi

The basis of kinship and village solidarity and interaction was the biraderi that is 'the brotherhood of extended kin' (Gilmartin 1994:2). The term biraderi is a highly fluid concept and many scholars have discussed it in a variety of ways. Hamza Alavi, while taking note of its 'sliding semantic structure whose vertical axis is the principle of descent and the horizontal axis the principle of fraternal solidarity' (Alavi 1972:2) recognised Biraderi in its most basic meaning as a descent group: 'the biraderi, includes in principle all those between whom actual links of common descent can be traced in the paternal line regardless of the number of generations that have elapsed' (Alavi 1972:2: also c.f. Gilmartin 1994:). Hershman sees it essentially as 'patti or maximal lineage' (1981:35) which usage is also taken note of by Alavi (1972:3). Tandon draws attention to the flexibility with which the term 'biraderis literally meaning brotherhood's were used to refer to several disparate groupings: 'There was an overall Hindu Biraderi... a Khatri Biraderi, an Arora Biraderi and Biraderis of sub-castes and of each service caste, Hindu or Muslim. These Biraderis were loose and undefined, but in time of need they formed themselves into close knit groups. They gave you certain rights and expected certain duties' (1961:82). For Gilmartin also neither the boundaries of biraderi identity, nor patterns of leadership are fixed firmly by genealogy. 'They result, rather, from ongoing patterns of social transactions and contestation symbolised by ritualised exchanges' (1994:4). The factors that are especially important here are 'the level and nature of communication among households, "...memory, contact over geographical distances, degree of strictness of endogamy and most of all... an intricate gift exchange system" (Parwez Wakil c.f. Gilmartin) which in turn vary 'with social class, control over land, wealth, property, networks of political exchange and political structures' (Gilmartin 1994:3).

A fresh perspective to understand the nature of solidarity and exchange and interaction pattern in a Punjab village is provided by Kurin. He tries to understand the pattern of solidarity from the term 'bhra or pai' which 'invokes a category of persons who have a common identity. Yet the basis of that identity may be quite diverse' (1985:238). Thus, those from, 'the same clan
may be considered brothers for they share the same blood and turban (*pag*)...said to be "*pag da sag*". Those who are brothers through marital exchange are considered "*gag da sag*" or relatives of the skirt by virtue of marriage... Ties between fellow villagers are also taken to be brotherly... all...are "*pind da bhra*”, or brothers of the village' for they share the same 'substances - food, water, air of the same locale'. As against this 'unmarked' usage, the villagers may also articulate in more 'marked' terms certain relationships, such as 'sisters of the village', 'daughters of the village', etc... The relationship between a saint and his followers may also be placed in the kinship idiom of 'pir bhra'. Thus, the possibility is created for forming solidary 'brotherly' relationships with a variety of people in several distinct ways (Kurin 1984:38).

However, the actual working of biraderi and its organisation of corporate solidarity can be best understood through, 'the system of ritual prestations and counter prestations called "*vartan bhanji*" (Alavi 1972:8) which may be explained as 'dealing with relationships' (Hershman 1981:120). 'The prestations given in *vartan bhanji* are neondra or nyola' which may be in cash or kind and made on ceremonial occasions. The main features of vartan bhanji is 'the obligation to reciprocate', at a subsequent date the prestation received which remains till then a 'symbolic debt'. The 'reciprocation must be in excess of the outstanding "obligation" so that a fresh obligation is created in the reverse direction and the symbolic role of the "debtor" and "creditor" are reversed' (Alavi 1972:8). The reciprocal dealings are properly recorded in a ledger maintained by the families.

More directly linked with the biraderi is the elaborate procedure for termination of the relationship which is accomplished by a household wanting to end the relationship, 'by presenting to the household with whom it wishes to break relationships, an amount of neondra equal to the net amount which is owed by it on account of its previous dealings' (Alavi 1972:14). Alavi makes a distinction between *paksi vartan* (cooked, ripe, firm or permanent) in which an obligatory and continuing reciprocation takes place between kinsmen with rare exceptions, and *Kaachi Vartan* (raw, unripe weak or temporary) which is essentially a courtesy relationship largely between friends and neighbours with no binding obligations (Alavi 1972:13).
The biraderi was generally, 'led by elders of the group not formally elected but just the senior and most respected men' (Tandon 1961:82). Gilmartin too sees the recognition of leadership as symbolically, 'confirmed in ritual patterns of exchange rather than primarily by genealogical position. In some cases this solidarity is reinforced by the existence in the village of biraderi meeting places or daras' (Gilmartin 1994:3-4). While the biraderi's largely play a role with regard to social control, acceptance, alteration and rejection of customs, mediating in disputes, providing economic aid to the needy and decision making in intra-biraderi as well as in inter-biraderi or wider relations, their relative strength effectiveness and influence varies a great deal. In general, according to Alavi, the most cohesive and active in regulating social life of their members are the biraderi's of economically independent small holders who are crucially dependent on them for their security and economic and social well-being. On the other hand, the biraderi's of the 'economically dependent sections', such as sharecroppers and labourers are generally the weakest because of their economic dependence and related political subordination. The biraderi's of big landlords also tend to be not very strong because their members compete among themselves in the local politics for position of power and status. Moreover, in their dealings with their fellow villagers, 'their principal asset is not their own' number and solidarity of their biraderi, but their economic power, their retinue of retainers and economic dependents and their ability to bestow patronage...intimidate, even terrorise... to assert their power' (Alavi 1972:20-24).

Despite the undoubted structural significance of the biraderi ties and associated pakki vartan bhanji, the individual households and persons in the village have a variety of ties with each other that cut across the boundaries of religion, sect, caste, biraderi etc. and promote intergroup cooperation and community-wide linkages. These include bonds of personal affection, economic interdependence, shared interests, political intrigue etc., which may be expressed in frequent social visiting, mutual help in day-to-day activities and gift exchanges and more ceremonially 'kachi vartan bhanji'. The latter, though voluntary and terminable at will, may not in frequently prove life long. It is the complexity, variety, pervasiveness and strength of these ties which is highlighted, even celebrated and romanticised throughout the text.
2.1.3 The Haveli

2.1.3.1 A Centre of Power

Shahji's imposing haveli is the most important landmark of the village. The large carved wooden door was its distinguishing feature. On the left of the gate was the *tabela* (stables) which was the abode of the horses, buffaloes, cows and other animals of the haveli followed by houses of Muslims. The door opened into the *deodhi* - a kind of reception room, next to the *deodhi* was a huge room, followed by a well, which had a pulley arrangement to pull the water on the first floor. The back side of the ground floor was rather dingy and dark. It constituted the store room, namely the *'bhandarghar'* (meant for storing stocks of food, fodder) *'saradkhana'* etc. Below them were the *'Tadara'* or basement rooms. The right opening of the deodhi led to a huge *'aangan'* or compound. A narrow staircase opened to the first floor, which is the main section of the haveli.

The stairs led to another huge compound, which had a wooden structure, with ironbars enclosing the well for drawing up the water, in case of any problem of water, a niche was dug in to store the stocks brought by the Jeors (water carriers). The left side of the first floor was the kitchen, which was only partially enclosed, and had *chaklas* and *tandoors*, permanently set up. The kitchen led to the extreme left which was the *'pasaar'* the inner bedrooms. On the right side of the first floor was a huge *baithak*, followed by a small one and a store for keeping quilts, mattresses, durries etc. The bigger *baithak* had an entrance from the side of the stables. All these rooms opened into the *'Aangan'* or courtyard. The second floor was also characterised by a huge open terrace on the left, with a couple of rooms and a formal big baithak with coloured mirrors. The second floor was well lighted and sunny. The third floor was the *'Chabbara'* the open terrace with high wooden walls, which ensured privacy. The right side of the floor led to a narrow staircase opening to the small top most terrace or *'mounti'* which gave a ringside view of the village, the mountains and river Chenab.

Shahji's haveli constitutes the nerve centre of the village. The Shah and Shahni operating...
Shahni comes to terms with the unfulfilled aspects of her life, her alienation with the Shah and her inability to bear a child, which casts its shadow on her secure anthropological world. The awareness of this crisis hits her hard (P.26-27).

As she reached the deodhi the sight of the burning lamp in the crevice once again unsettled her. Trying to compose herself she sharply called out, 'Maa Bibi are you in your senses? You left the lamp burning in the daylight. This light after sunrise is an insult to the lamp. Have mercy Maharaj! Indeed the day is meaningless without the Sun and the night without the lamp'.

Shahni shares her anxiety with Shahji, and is surprised to know that he too has been troubled by the haunting Abrialwali (P.27-28).

........ Shahni heaved a sigh', Ji, where have those beautiful moments gone and the comforting benign shadows? Shahji today I felt really scared'. Shahji was quiet and gave her a silent look. 'Today, when it was dark, near the masjid turning, I saw the older one, in shimmering clothes and in reality her own body'. Shahji suddenly got up, 'just sort out your work in the kitchen and come inside Shahni'. Shahni filled the parat with besan, mixed it with hot ghee, adding a pinch of salt and ajwain. 'Kartaro add some water to the dough and light up the tandoor, I'll be back soon'. 'Shahni I thought you would feel anxious, that's why I didn't tell you. A few days back Gorza came to me in a dream'. Shahni started trembling with fear. 'Shahji, how did she look like in the dream? Did she say anything?' Shahji gave Shahni a look which could not be fathomed, as if he was in two minds - to share it with her or not. 'Marriage with her was like an unfulfilled desire for me. She had so little time with me. When she comes in my dreams, she only asks. "Shahji where is my child? In the family line what matters is who begot whom". Saying this she would laugh and disappear from view'. 'In this home there is everything that God could have bestowed on us but I have not been able to pass the test successfully'.

'Shahni, one cannot fight fate, if you would listen to me, why not arrange (my) marriage with a girl from Abrialwali's family with your own hands'. The realisation of what Shahji was saying completely shocked Shahni, controlling herself she said, 'you could consider adopting a son Shahji'. Understanding the tumultuous state of Shahni's mind and her pain, almost coaxingly he said, 'these decisions are in your hands, do as you feel like'. Hearing these words Shahni felt reassured and nodded her head, 'it's your sense of judgement, what am I worth anyway'. Shahji first started to say something, then smiled inwardly and kept quite. Shahni was again alert, 'Shahji why are you stopping yourself from saying something, which
has come to your lips'. "Shahni, after closing one's eyes, no one knows what happens. It will give me an immense sense of satisfaction if I have a son to continue the family line in this generation as well'. Shahni felt very uneasy and cried for the solace of Shahji's warm embrace to drown her tears, but all she could do was blankly look at her lord. Then she turned, reached the deodhi and again came back, 'you will have some besan tandoori'. Shahji nodded his head. Shahji kept on looking at her as she crossed the 'dehleg'. Her walk had such a purposefulness as if she was going to sort out the matter with the Creator. This daughter of the Alamgarhias, what she was outside she was inside. Shahni's mother was like a soft bark and father as hard and determined as an old Banyan tree.

The beginning of the novel thus, gradually creates an inner crisis for Shahni. She faces the dilemma of her failure as a woman and in the anthropological role as a wife, which seems to put to test her claim as Shahni. Shahji's insistence on an heir of his own, for the continuation of the family tree and his serious consideration of a second marriage to honour the wishes of Abrialwali leaves her being shattered and vulnerable. This failure for her is like a challenge which she has to face and to conquer if she has to survive in her anthropological and existential worlds. Thus, conceiving a child becomes almost imperative for Shahni. The whole household seems to cry out at Shahni's need. It is as if from her exalted state she has become an object of pity whose very survival is on test (P.29-30, 41).

As Shahni, Chachi Mehri and Maa Bibi came down to inspect the basement being readied on the occasion of Trinjan night spinning, the atmosphere, reflects a sense of hope which will change the destiny of the Shah's. The walls had been transformed with a hue of colours, red, green, pink, purple etc. Shahni felt happy, 'this is beautiful Maa bibi'. Chachi again scrutinised the wall, 'my goodness child! what peacocks and peahens, pigeons and the line of sparrows'. 'Look Chachi, the jasmine plant, the bull, the calf and the pair of the Sun and the Moon'. The emptiness within Shahni suddenly felt a gleam of hope. She heaved a sigh trying to drink in the pain. Chachi Mehri patted Shahni, 'my dear at this moment it appears that even before Trinjan is over your child can be seen playing around in the basement'. Shahni was lost in looking towards the doorway. Maa bibi told Chachi, 'I swear by God! while drawing these patterns. I never realised they represented Creation, somehow they just flowed from my hand. I hope Allah beli would listen to us'. 'Yes pray in His Haacoor! that we hear the lively screams of little children in this household'. 'Chachi, those whose family tree has Baba Farid as an ancestor will surely be blessed'. Shahni called out from the terrace, 'Maa bibi, just check if everything is okay with my spinning wheel'. Maa bibi again turned towards
Chachi Mehri, 'Chachi why not take Shahni to a Pir - Siana. Something is the matter with her. I usually see her wiping her eyes and she moves as if she has to cross a high hurdle'. Chachi kept on nodding placing her hand on her chin.

On the pilgrimage to Baba Farid's shrine, Chachi Mehri prays feverishly (P.41).

'Garib nawaz, your humble slave is coming to your durbar to seek your blessings. God almighty! Mehranwala, if you look at us beningly, this Shah household will reach new heights'. Even Nawab the sias does not miss out the seriousness of the situation, 'Nawab prayed to Allah, the purity of Shahji's earnings are reflected in him getting a bride like Shahni, the appearance of a Maharani and what devotion to God!

Rabyan the talented Arain girl with a flair for rhyming is introduced during the Trinjan night spinning session. She emerges as a favourite among the women, specially the women of the haveli, who recognise her accomplishments (P.35).

'Rabyan, why not sing something. Your rhyming is famous everywhere'. Shahni was captivated by Rabyan’s beauty. 'What a pure beauty born in the Arain household'. Rabyan looked fixedly at Shahni as if she was a statue, then composed a rhyme:

'The colourful spinning wheels,  
under the glow of the lamps,  
the fair skinned lasses are like specs of light.  
In the peak of the winter months, Shahni sits,  
early in the morning spinning her yarn'

'You are surely blessed by God, say something more child'.

'Shah is the master of the garden,  
watering it everyday.  
Shahni is the mistress of the house  
treating everyone as she may'.

Hearing this Shahni felt thrilled and took off her heavily carved necklace, handing it to Rabyan, 'take it girl,
Shahni is giving it with love. Keep it carefully for the day, you leave for your sasural. 'My goodness, it is so intricately carved. Rabyan your prince would have already started off on his horse. Shahni with her luck has made an auspicious beginning for you'.

Indeed Rabyan's participation in the Shah household, gradually develops a deeper bond. The first person whom Shahni encounters while coming out of her ritual bath at Jamiwala well after discovering her pregnancy is Rabyan. She with her intelligence and insight seems to guess the meaning behind Shahni's satisfied look (p. 73).

As Shahni and Chachi meet Rabyan, Fatch and Shiri, Rabyan offers to sing something for Shahni:

'The shades of life are so varied,  
those among whom the Sun resides,  
are blessed with brightness,  
Those among whom the, Moon resides,  
are blessed with sons'.

Shahni looked at Rabyan, who appeared to her as no ordinary girl but a saint. As if she had a clue to the past, present and future. The image of the glow in her dream came before her. 'God! bless you! get all the fortune you deserve. Yes! Rabyan child, whenever, you finish your work, come over, to the haveli'.

However, as Chachi and Shahni walk back they are profoundly aware of Rabyan's distinctive qualities and her intelligence which makes her out from the mould of a typical Arain girl.

Chachi said, affectionately, 'these Arain girls are blessed with such beauty that one is never tired of looking at them'. 'You are right Chachi, the younger Rabyan is blessed with a mind too. She reflects so much of brightness. I hope no one casts an evil eye on her. Her face is like a rose in full bloom'. 'All the credit has to be given to the mother who has produced them. As if the Arain Hanso has moulded them out of the pure water of the Himalayas'. 'Chachi do you know what Shahji says about Rabyan? He says that, "just a glimpse is enough to make a person want to look at her beauty again and again". 'This is hardly praise but eulogy'. 'Whatever, you may call it Chachi, but our Shah has a seasoned eye'.

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Rabyan's subtle presence in the household and Shah's awareness of it, sinks slowly into Shahni and seems to cast its shadow on her joy of being a mother (P.108-111).

‘Maa bibi, why hasn't Rabyan come today? Yesterday she sang Bulle Shah's Baramahsa so well, that the words came to life. 'You are right child, this Arain girl has been blessed by God. Such a melodious voice, which stirs up one's soul'. The sound of footsteps near the stairs. A salwar of multani Chint and a slightly dirty odhni. Complexion so milky, that a mere touch could defile it. Taking off the covering on her head, Rabyan arranged her hair. Then asked Shahni 'Should I massage your hair, I left the bowl of ghee at the ledge'. 'Hunsa Nain would be on her way, balli Rabyan, I prefer you rather sing'. Chachi snubbed her, 'let the girl learn to move about her limbs, and do some work. Girl, have you heard Kartaro's praise in her sasural. Her husband is so happy, at Kartaro running the house so efficiently'. Rabyan smiled slowly, went and stood behind Shahni and opened her plait. As she spread the oil in her hands and was about to massage it on Shahni's hair, who walks in but Shahji. Shahni covered her head: Rabyan stared intently, transformed into a statue. Shahji looked at Rabyan and began to laugh, said generously, 'instead of rhyming with words, what are you upto Rabyan child? Shahni do not make this bright girl do all this'. Shahji kept on admiring Rabyan, 'she has been blessed by God, may you live long. Shahni she is very talented as if, Saraswati resides in her'. Shahni gave Rabyan an affectionate look. The face of a blooming flower behind the veil of her duppatta. Chachi said sweetly, 'come on child, sing something'. 'Yes child let us hear some soothing notes'. Rabyan looked at Shahni, rearranged her odhni and began a Bulle Shah Kaifi:

'I will be radiant like the sun,
'pleasing my lover,
in my heart as deep as the sea,
I will create a wave of love pleasing my lover.
I will be engulfed by the clouds, bringing in pouring rain,
I am neither married nor a virgin,
but I will bring up the son,
I will sing something unusual everytime, pleasing my lover'.

'Main piara yaar manaangi'

'Shri Ram! Shri Ram! what a voice, tone, and kaifi'. As Shahni wiped her tears she noticed a certain brightness in Shahji's eyes. His personality seemed to reflect a strange freshness and inspiration', 'Rabyan, you sweet voiced one, Alia told me that you compose well. On my next trip to Sialkot I will show your compositions to Ustad Inayat Khan'. Rabyan felt thrilled. Biting her duppatta with her teeth, she blushed her fair cheeks turning red. Shahji nodded his head, 'Shahni respect the girl's singing give her something'.
Shahni straightened up her heavy pregnant form, a wave of sadness engulfing her happy state of mind. Going inside, she opened the huge wooden trunk. Shahji’s praise of Rabyan troubled her mind, ‘Oh! no what is this? I should not feel threatened by this little girl’. Shahni took out an intricately woven phulkari wrapped in a muslin cloth, ‘Rabyan child! wear this during winter’, Rabyan’s eyes brightened up, ‘how can I wear this Shahniji. It is something meant for weddings’. Chachi Mehri said kindly, ‘you are not far away from it’. As Shahni saw Shahji move towards the baithak, she called out, ‘ji listen to ‘sawan’ from Rabyan and then leave’.

’Sawan heralded its arrival, as rain drops touched the ground, it rained immensely, satiating the thirsty souls...

God, fulfilled all my wishes,
I declared my love for my beloved,
He acknowledged me,
Shah Inayat endorsed it all.
The period of bhadon is the time for reunion.
As I open the earthen pots,
I always see only your reflection in them...

As she sang, Rabyan’s voice began to tremble and eyes glistened with tears. Maa bibi’s heart too felt the pain of the words. She went near Rabyan and kissed her, ‘sadke jawan, these words come true to life as you sing’. Chachi affectionately interrupted, ‘enough, now don’t turn the head of our girl. She does not need praise but your blessings. Go Rabyan, offer your salaam to everyone’. Rabyan first stopped near Shahni, then lifted her hand towards Shahji. Her face reflecting a tumult of emotions and hand in salaam for a long time. Chachi looked at her, ‘stop it child, lower your hand, Shahji has received your salaam’. ‘Rabyan shyly covered her face with her hands. Shahji quiteley left for his baithak. Seeing all this Shahni sat on the manja and burst out laughing. Then without saying anything she was suddenly quiet and sad. Her eyes shut and her lifeless form slumped on the bed’.

Rabyan’s distinctiveness and Shahji’s appreciation gradually sinks into Shahni. Yet oblivious to Rabyan’s interest, she feels a certain inadequacy in her relationship towards her husband, which is reflected in his lack of appreciation of her as a woman. Somehow she can sense a certain freshness and spontaneity as he interacts with Rabyan. A feeling which has long
disappeared in the institutionalised relationship between Shah and Shahni. This awareness is shared by Shahni with Bindradai (P.307-308).

As Rabyan went downstairs, she quietly told Bindradai, 'your jeth gets so engrossed listening to her 'kaifi's as if she is showering petals? 'Jethani even your devar suffers from the same malaise. After all she is such a bright girl, and can read any pothi she lays her hands on. See what interesting stories Lali tells us, its all Rabyan's teachings'. Seeing Shahni's worried expression she reassured her, 'don't worry, these Arains have been blessed by God. While growing fruits and vegetables, they seem to blossom both inside and outside. Even their girls keep on mixing up 'chands' and 'tappas'. She is a class apart composing anything that occurs to her and bringing it to life, by her deep intoxicating voice'. 'Bindradai, tell my devar to arrange her marriage somewhere, after all she is no longer a child'.

Even Shahji gradually becomes aware of Rabyan's physical and emotional maturity (P.135).

After the sacred maulis were tied on the wrist of the mother and son, and Bhagwan panda had finished chanting the hymns, Shahji got up from his seat went down stairs, slowly wiping his eyes with the corner of his safa. As he reached the deodhi he saw Rabyan come in, 'such a beautiful face like a devputri'. 'Salaam Shahji'. 'Rabyan balli, go upstairs, so much of activity is going on'. 'Ji Shahji'. Rabyan's big eyes remained focused on Shahji's forehead. They did not flinch, move or blink. Shahji paused to look at this virginal kanjak. 'She is a child but not really any more'. As Rabyan climbed the steps it appeared to Shahji as if a fairy had come to bless them. 'On this occassion. May everything be auspicious'.

Thus, his moment of complete bliss between anthropological and existential roles is again troubled. Rabyan's strong presence and her impression on both Shahji and Kashi Shah is at times pleasing and at times disturbing as well as dangerous. For Shahji has begun to appreciate an aspect of Rabyan which relates to her mind. an appreciation of her mind and creative imagination (P.187-189).

Doda and Kokila were lost in singing:

'Thou are my leader, Allah baksh Peshwa
Thou are a beloved of God Allah Baksh Peshwa
Thou are protected by God Allah Baksh Peshwa
Mera Peshwa...'
Rabyan sitting on the ledge with Lali begins to hum along with them. As Shahni saw all this she smiled, 'what is this new concoction with which these two have come up with, it's not Bulle Shah's Kaifi?' 'Yes, Shahniji, it is not Bulle Shah's Kaifi but Gangoi Shah's' Chote Shah felt very happy to hear from, Rabyan, 'dear girl how did you come to know of it?' Chachi too praised her, 'my son, Rabyan is a talented girl, she can even recite the Quran -Sharif'. Chote Shah continued the query 'but how come you saw Gangoi Shah in person?' 'A year before last, I had gone to Dhonkal with Chacha, that's where I heard the Kaifi'. Shahji kept on staring at Rabyan as if transfixed. Draped in a thick cloth that concealed the purity of her body, she looked a unique creation of nature. As Shahji was about to speak, it was as if his heart was whispering to him, 'has someone seen Heer?' Chachi spoke up, 'you are a lucky girl, even been to Lakhandata's durbar. Child before Lali's mundan, we must go on a pilgrimage to Baba Farid's and then pay our respects at Sakhi Sarvar's hazoor'. Shahji said, 'Rabyan why not recite something'. As Shahji sat down with his brother on the manji, Shahni called out to Rabyan, 'balli, recite Shah Madar's Kaifi, which you did pretty well, yesterday'.

'Zinda Shah madar
Has anyone seen the living
Shah madar coming,
Madar ri madar,
Riding on his blue horse,
Wearing a green shawl,
Accompanied by his handsome retainers,
Has anyone seen him,
Riding on his blue horse'.

The words, completely absorbed Rabyan, and she was lost in its world. Both the brothers got up and patted Rabyan's head, 'God bless you!' It was as if Shahji was withdrawing his hand after crossing the river. As he was about to speak, he could sense a boat (hope), swaying in the girl's eyes. her animated eyes silenced him. He nodded his head - as her gaze sunk in - 'no! no!' Then walked towards the baithak. Shahni silently watched all this. It appeared to her as if the rivers had changed their course and the banks were collapsing.

Rabyan picked up Lali from the cot and placed him in Shahni's lap. Then, began to fold the Khes and the durries. Shahni suddenly threw Lali's noisy rattle aside and looked at Rabyan, the expressive face and enticing eyes. Then asked quietly, 'after how many days do you have a bath child?' 'Everyday Shahniji', Shahni stopped for a while then again looked at her quizically, 'so have you been acquainted with the facts
of life? Rabyan kept quite as if she had not understood. 'I am asking whether you have started experiencing the changing seasons?'

'Yes Shahniji.' When your body does not feel upto it, then you can miss coming here on those days'. Bindradai came in, she glared at Rabyan and said, 'this girl is always jumping about. Jethaniji does she really look like an Arain girl. You 'Sirmunni', learn to behave in the company of men with decorum'. Rabyan stood and smiled, 'your friends are here, go for a little while if you feel like'. As Rabyan moved out with Reshma and Channi, Bindradai said, 'look at these girls, they just shoot up. Both the sisters Fateh and Rabyan have attained a good height. Rabyan is good for us, but damn her mother, she is so beautiful. Making even a woman gape at her openly what to talk of the men. Lets hope Alia is able to arrange a good match for his daughters'. 'I have heard, he is heavily under debt'. 'One should never be as straight like you. Is Alia the only one debt ridden? So many houses are tied up in the account books of the Shahs. After all this is Shahukara, if the grandfather borrows, the burden is carried on to the grandson and even beyond that'.

This attraction is also subtly obvious to those around Rabyan as well. Goma warns Chachi Mehri in no uncertain terms about Rabyan (P.286-287).

..... As Fateh moved on, Goma said to Chachi, -This one is a lucky girl marrying the man she fell in love with. Only Rabyan is left, who swings about in the service of Lali Shah'. 'There is something so ethereal about her. Moreover, she is so intelligent with deep insights, that one is left admiring her'. 'Chachi if you ask me, surely there is a glow within her for someone. She flutters her eyes as if to tease her beloved'. Chachi Mehri stopped in her tracks, 'are you in your senses Goma? A girl pure as clear water, blessed by God. It is as if Saraswati resides in her. As she speaks, so much of brightness is generated on those listening to her'. Goma did not budge from her position, 'Chachi you are speaking as if she is no woman of flesh and blood. You may be hundred times more mature than me, but I can tell you one thing, it is craving for a body which motivates every being'. Hearing this Chachi felt stunned, 'stop it now, you go home, while I finish paying my respects at the Dharamsaha'. Goma did not give up what she was saying, she whispered in Chachi's ears, 'Don't mind, what I say Chachi, even God's chosen one's succumb to the attraction of power. Rabyan may play to her hearts content with Lali Shah and compose kafis and dohras, but she is no saint'. 'Your husbands, beatings have spoiled your sensibility. She is such an innocent maiden who is being discredited by your suspicious nature'. Goma did not turn or flinch then said bravely, 'I hope you don't have cataract in your eyes. Haven't you noticed when Rabyan casts an adoring glance on Shahji she becomes a blossoming flower'. 105
'Just get out of my sight'. 'I have said whatever, came to my mind, but just do not ignore it'. Chachi kept on walking but she felt drained of all energy. In deep thought she climbed the stairs of the Dharamshala. As she went to bow before God, an image of Rabyan and Shahji came before her, Chachi started to tremble. With folded hands she prayed feverishly, 'God! this relationship should never materialise. On one side a new mother and on the other a pure virgin. Don't play this game on us God. There should be no slur on the name of the Shah's'.

The girls are sitting together, teasing each other after the fixing up of Mithi's wedding. They talk about their wedding plans, likes and dislikes and the bridegrooms who would come to take them away. Even Rabyan is not spared (P.311).

Mithi held Channi's hand and spoke quietly. 'He has studied up to tenth standard, while I am a complete blank. I could only read thirty-five alphabets, then forgot all about it. Now I am very worried'. 'This is just like that the janj has reached the doorstep and the girl's ears are being pierced'. 'Rabyan, can you do some fast work on her'. Rabyan laughed. 'even if the Maulviji and Pandaji burn the midnight oil it is impossible'. 'Forget about it, when you come here, Rabyan will do the letter writing'. 'Rabyan is well read, she can easily tackle a tenth standard one. The whole night would pass in rhyming away'. Rabyan did not say anything, she just kept on looking, Reshma stopped her, 'Rabbi, you seem to be lost. Even you will be married soon, be patient'. 'If you ask me, Rabyan will find a house, bigger and roomier than the Shah's haveli. Should I say it? Her husband would also be...' Reshma hesitated. Rabyan placed her hand on Reshma's mouth, 'You will see me dead, if you speak anything more'. As Rabyan stood up to go, Reshma wandered, 'what did I say which hurt her so much?'

This growing attraction is troubling Shahji as well, and disturbing his peace of mind (P.321-322).

Chachi gave her command, 'child recite what you had composed during Ramzan'. Sitting under the stars, Rabyan herself became a wave of the Chenab:

Hai! re
Where should I turn my dachi?
Four directions
Four lamps.
How can I bear 
the four rays of brightness, 
the lamp 
of my beloved (Mahi) 
One lamp 
of my lord, 
One lamp, 
My heart. 
The eyes burn 
becoming a flame. 
How can I not 
be one with this glow? 
Wherever, I look, this flame burns, 
Wherever, I look, this flame rises 
My eyes, 
My heart, 
My mind and body, 
burn with passion.. 
Where do I turn my dachi?

The words creating a flutter in the hearts of all those listening. As Rabyan's trembling voice became quite, 
Kashi Shah's voice boomed, 'Wah! Wah! Rabbi may God bless with more brilliance and brightness'. The 
women pulled their duppattas over their foreheads. Chote Shah came nearer and patted Rabyan, 'Bibi rani, 
has been blessed by God. Her heart is as pure and clean as a sarovar'. Rabyan began to adjust her duppatta. 
Suddenly as she looked up - It was Shahji standing still, gazing intently in the darkness. 'Rabyan...' Shahni 
fumbled as she saw Shahji. Chachi looked up, 'Shahni, go with Shahji and give him food. And you 
Rabyan, serve hot rotis to your Abbu, if you don't feel like coming then sleep at home'. 'Fine Chachi'. 
Rabyan looked up and walked away, as if she had matured by another ten years. Rabyan's voice from Alia's 
Jhuggi even echoed till the river bed:

'My body is an empty space, 
It is in the corner of my mind that you reside,
I don't need to arrange 'Chaliha'
or pray on specific hours.
for lord you have manifested yourself within me.
Is this your way of testing my devotion?
Thus spoke Dahu Saamuho'.

Watching the two brothers lost in listening to the intoxicating voice, the thali before them untouched, made Shahni's heart sink. 'Oh! pir of life, Khwaja Khizr mere mortals don't have the power to make two banks of the river meet. Trying to seek another boat after reaching one end. No, the Pir of life, don't create this mirage before my man'.

Rabyan's deep attachment to Lali Shah, too draws Shahji close to her. At times his thoughts are preoccupied with Rabyan and the future. Yet he is afraid of admitting the real feelings which come to mind, even to himself (P.332).

As Shahji saw Rabyan and Lali go out, he closed his eyes. A strange vision came to him, that Rabyan had returned from the madarsa and entered the kitchen. Her head covered by a dupatta and her outstretched wrist adorned by a gold bangle, Shahji got up with a start. Kashi Shah spoke up breaking his reverie of thoughts, 'Bhrai Rabyan has now become mature. Tell Alia to find a match for her somewhere, near by. It will be difficult to part from her'. Shahji did not say anything, he got up and began to pat Shahbaz. Nawab saddled it, and Shahji quickly galloped away from the village. He glanced, once at Alia's Jhuggi, then turned the horse away from it. 'God! my Sain, it is you and not a mere mortal 'I' who controls my present'.

Rabyan's intelligence and insight and her vague kind of hold on Shahji, is recognised by both Shahni and Bindradai ji (P.320).

The cool breeze from the river, seemed to lull the children to sleep. After finishing with their kitchen work, the women came and sat down on the manjis. Shahni went towards Lali's bed side and called out. 'By the grace of God, the brothers have not returned yet'. Rabyan lifted her head and stared fixedly in the dark, as

5 Chaliha - Among the Muslims, the fortheth day after a death when faqirs are fed.
if hearing some movement. Then nodding her head said, 'they will reach soon'. Choti Shahni teased her, 'why do you have a special sixth sense that you can predict their movements'. Rabyan began to laugh slowly.

As Rabyan crosses the threshold of her anthropological world, carving a niche for herself in Shahji's and Lali's heart, the realisation of it sinks into Chachi and irritates Shahni. Also, Rabyan is the stern voice of discipline and authority in little Lali's life. When he was playfully inviting the women of the household to a feast of 'fodder' and not food, she rebuked him (P.364-365).

Rabyan came towards Lali and pulled his ears, then said angrily, 'this is how you speak to your elders. Go and apologise, to Chachi and Maa Bibi'. Lali jumped, touched the feet of the elderly women, then picked up the alphabet and touched Rabyan's feet as well. Rabyan again pulled his ears, 'how many times have I told you, one should never touch the feet of those who are younger, otherwise I will complain to Chachi'. Lali sat down and opened his 'kaida'. 'Rabbi sister is older than me, so what if I touched her feet'. Chachi scolded him, 'stop it, you keep on arguing all the time. If I have said once that you are not to touch Rabyan's feet, then be it'. Lali got irritated, 'then what do I do with Rabyan, Ram-Sat or Id-milan'. He quickly went and clung to Rabyan. Chachi again chided her, 'come on leave her alone, I will tell you, just offer your salaam'.

The fixing up of Rabyan's marriage by Alia, comes as a shock to Shahji, yet he is prepared to accept it as a deliverance of duty. However, when he sees it actually materialising with the prospect of Rabyan leaving for her own home, he wants to thwart the proposal as if wanting to hold on to time (P.368-369).

Carrying Lali, as Rabyan moved towards the small baithak, Shahji's eyes followed her for a long time. Then, he said slowly, to Kashi Shah, 'I met Alia at the Jalalpur adda. He was with Rangolwala Sultan'. Then he looked at his brother wanting to say something and yet unable to convey it instead heaved a deep sigh, 'it is all in the hands of God. Our Rabyan is one in a million, while the Sultan a seasoned, hardened brute. Seeing Alia with Sultan really put me off. He will surely come for advice. I am thinking...'. Kashi Ram waited, but Shahji did not complete the conversation. 'If Alia comes, bring him to the baithak'. As both the brothers finished their meal, Alia came to visit them. He immediately started on the topic. 'Shah Sahib, Sultan owns his own house and land. His first wife has been dead for a long time. I will feel relieved
of this burden when Rabyan reaches her destination. Fateh is happy in her own home. I am only concerned about Rabyan'.

Chote Shah said, 'our girl Rabyan, is not like the other girls. There is so much of brightness within her. Still you are her father, and can do as you like'. 'Yes, try for an alliance not forcibly but with maturity and clarity'. 'Rabyan is like our own daughter, we shall do all we can for her'. 'Shahji, I had thought of Sultan, since he is well provided'. Chote Shah stopped him abruptly with his hands, 'sure but look at his age. Alia, do this task with joy. Your daughter is like a pure pearl. Don't crush her desires and aspirations. It should not happen that her dreams are shattered after such a marriage. The girl will not say it, but feel terrible deep inside'. 'Ji Shah Sahib', Alia could not think of any answer, he got up, 'I will look around elsewhere, you must also be alert for a good match. See how Kartaro is happy in her new home'. Kashi Ram consoled him, 'don't worry Alia, there will be some good in this decision as well'.

Though the Shah brothers are able to sabotage plans for Rabyan’s marriage, yet somehow the real point of confrontation and coming to terms with reality eludes them. It is only for the Arain girl Rabyan to face the situation and confess her love (P.369-370).

Shahni gave both the brothers bowls of hot milk and closed the door of the baithak. Both the brothers were sitting quitely. As if Alia had left something unsaid. The glow of the lamp yet eluded clarity in the darkness. Outside the baithak, slow heaving sighs could be heard. Kashi Shah called out, 'who is there? Who is there?' Kashi Shah got up and opened the door, looking outside. 'It's you Rabyan beti, what is it? You haven't slept as yet. Do you have to say something?' Rabyan nodded her head, 'Ji'. 'Come inside, it is rather cold here'. As Rabyan crossed the threshold, it appeared as if she had crossed the confines of the world. First she looked tearfully at Shahji, then at Chote Shah and covered her eyes. Shaking her head vigorously she said, 'I will not go Shahji, I don't want to go anywhere'. 'We have told Alia to refuse Sultan's proposal, so don't worry'. Rabyan got up and bowed her head near Shahji's knees, 'I will die Shahji I cannot live without you'. 'Rabyan!' Shahji's trembling voice seemed to shake the walls. 'Lali is the son of the house. He is your brother and you are like the...' Rabyan cried hysterically, 'don't ever say this Shah Sahib, never. I have always regarded you...'

As if a deep storm had unfolded before Shahji's eyes. He glanced at his brother and placed a trembling hand on Rabyan's head, 'Rabyan don't keep anything in your heart. Speak out...Speak out. Kashi Ram ask her'. Rabyan trembled. She got up, wiped her eyes with her duppatta and said in a clear voice, 'Shah Sahib, you
reside in my heart as a 'Bhagat Murid' installs the image of his Sain (lover) Lord'. 'What is this Rabyan, how come this occurred to you? This is something strange and impossible'. Obvious to what Chote Shah was saying, as Shahji looked at Rabyan - the slightly dirty odhni and the determined face, even the glow of the lamp began to flicker.

2.1.3.3:

The triangle of Shah, Shahni and Rabyan is the most important thematic configuration of the text. It highlights specifically how the myth of the Sun and the Moon controls the destinies of humans. Shah, Shahni and Rabyan are three people who face a contradiction between their anthropological and existential situations. However, it is the young Arain girl Rabyan facing this dichotomy in terms of her dreams, aspirations, desires and her anthropological role, who tries to build a bridge between the two worlds. Since the burden of her anthropological position is not reinforced by institutionalised rigidity, she is able to make a wedge between the polar worlds and tries to seek a new space for herself. Thus, towards the end of the novel, the silent vibrations, feelings, emotions, being generated between the three come to the surface with Rabyan confessing her love for Shahji. With this major decision, she has created an entirely new situation for the three main characters Shah, Shahni and herself.

Rabyan is a unique and distinctive personality. She represents and expresses the composite cultural universe in which she is born. She eloquently recites and is well versed in sufi poetry, its content, form, imagery and symbolism. It is while living in this romantic world that she sees an articulation of her thoughts and dreams in her devotion to the Shah as being one of a lord and disciple. It is in pursuit of this idyllic relationship that Rabyan seeks a bridge between her anthropological and existential position.
2.2 Religion

2.2.1 Traditions and Institutional Religious Boundaries

In Punjab the four main religions Hinduism, Islam and Christianity belong to two major religious traditions Judaeo Christian and Indic. In the Judaeo Christian tradition, the emphasis is on exclusiveness of religious allegiance i.e. the adherence to one faith to the exclusion of all others, separation of believers from non-believers and linking of the affirmation of faith in the prophet and the key dogma as the precondition for achievement of salvation. The religion is seen as revealed through the prophet and revelation embodied in the teaching contained in the holy book. Bible in the case of Christianity and Quran in the case of Islam. The stress is not only on affirmation of belief in the only true faith but also in disaffirmation of allegiance to any other seen as either false or misguided or at the very least dated and superseded.

In the Indic tradition, there is little or no emphasis on exclusive affirmation in a particular God, Prophet or key dogma, though there may be one or more preferred or cherished God or set of beliefs. There is a greater emphasis on the plurality of options available both with regard to the choice of deities and the associated beliefs and teachings. There is a remarkable acceptance of worship of more than one deity without any requirement to renounce one in favour of the other. Though in Sikhism, the centrality of the holy book, Sri Guru Granth Sahib as physical embodiment of the Guru is recognised, the status of the Granth is not quite comparable to that of the Quran and Bible, nor the mediating role of the Sikh gurus is comparable to that of Jesus Christ or Prophet Mohammad. Sikhism despite its marked Islamic affinities has broadly similar pluralist inclusiveness as of other Indic faiths, in dialogue and debate with which it had its genesis and development.

Max Weber (1964:56-59) conceptualises the difference between the two religious
traditions in terms of a contrast between 'ethical' prophets represented 'with special clarity, by Zoraster and Mohammad' and 'exemplary' prophets like the Buddha. The former preaches as 'an instrument for the proclamation of a God and his will'... and 'demands, obedience as an ethical duty'. The latter 'may be an exemplary man who, by his personal example, demonstrates to others the way of religious salvation... says nothing about a divine mission or an ethical duty of obedience...' The appeal of the exemplary profit is to the self interest of the seeker to achieve salvation.

The largest plurality of Gods, beliefs, rituals and practices is present in Hinduism which consists of a number of Sampradayas having a number of sects and sub-sects. There is hardly any shared belief common to all. Infact there may only be a loose sort of unity and community of beliefs at the sampradaya level but hardly beyond. What is however, common among them is the rootedness in the Indic civilisation, a common religious vocabulary and a range of common religious problematics. In other words, the language of discourse and the issues debated are shared, although each may have its own separate religious identity and characteristically different standpoints in relation to important issues. Sometimes even intragroup variations may be as extensive as those among different groups. Further at the local and popular level a variety of local and popular Gods, Goddesses, ancestral figures, spirits and beings with powers both beneficial and malevolent have always co-existed with the higher Gods of Hindu tradition. The process which Mekim Marriot calls universalization and parochialisation and other forms of influences and interlinkages have always informed the rise and development of new traditions as well as transformation and change in the old ones. The interaction between this tradition and the varieties of sectarian traditions in Islam and Christianity both at the established institutional as well as popular levels further complicates the Indian Scenario. Most of the converts to Islam, and Christianity were from Indic religious traditions particularly Hindu or Buddhist, and they carried their pre-conversion beliefs, ideas, values and attitudes into their new faith with varying modifications. Such mixing with Islamic or Christian forms brought about indigenisation of these religions making them shed some of their foreignness to become civilisationally more Indian. In the circumstances, at the popular
level at least, the cross religious boundaries in belief, religious attitudes, practices, life-cycle and other attitudes became fuzzy and overlapping.

This has led to the important debate on the historical awareness of the identities and construction of religious boundaries between communities with Sumit Sarkar, Gayanendra, Pandey, Harjot Oberoi, Dipankar Gupta and others participating. Some of them, according to Gupta (1996:142), feel that social identities have only recently become tight-knit and they attribute the absence of Hindu-Muslim clashes to the fact that identities were fuzzy with uncertain boundary markers (Sarkar 1993:46, Pandey 1990:150) `consequently, inter community harmony and a relative absence of religious persecution characterised the good old days' (Gupta 1996:142). Gupta however, disagrees and asserts:

the problem then very simply is how to integrate the positive and negative legacies of our history without foregrounding our subjective disposition. If religious bigotry, viciously expressed is also accompanied by celebrated cases of religious tolerance, then the notion of 'fuzzy' identities is caught in a cleft. What is more, anthropologically the formulation that identities have unclear boundaries is quite preposterous. The discipline of anthropology is premised on the semioticized individual. This implies that identities have always characterised human kind, and also that these identities change with contexts. Transformations in the composition of identities are therefore, to be expected, but at each point of time there are definite markers that separate cultural constitutions (and of course images) from one another (Gupta 1996:143).

From an in depth analysis of the novel, it appears that, despite similarities in ideas beliefs, practices across religious boundaries, at popular level people have no confusion about their basic allegiance as Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs. The presence of a Masjid, Dargah, Thakurdwara, Kutia and Dharamshala proves this clarity (P.189-190)

....Anokhan started laughing, 'for Jat boys, their grains is like the money one earns. After all they are no Parachas - Aroras Chachi'. Shahni commented, 'Anokhan has said something very right. There is not much difference between their Parachas and our Aroras. No spending or eating well. Just piling up more dimes'. 'What does one get by piling so much? It is better to live well. Why bother about what will
happen after one is gone.' Girls those who say that changing ones religion also changes the inner constituents of a man are wrong. These Khojas-Parachas before embracing Islam were Aroras-Kirars, isn't it true?' 'Very right! Even the Gakkars embraced Islam, but their wedding rituals still continue with 'lawan-keras' and 'khara bithai'. For their main ceremonies both Qazis and Brahmins are present. Apart from circumcision, it is the same 'Jhand-mundan, maian, vaitna-neondra, janj, sehre-sarbale'. 'But why did this clan convert to Islam? Why did they bend their knees? Afterall the brave lad Hakikat died for his religion. He is still worshipped in the hearts of the people'. 'He was the son of the Puris of Sialkot. He had some tiff with the Maulviji at the madarsa. The Qazis got him imprisoned and started legal proceedings against him at Lahore. Who can bear their oppression. They got after the life of the poor boy and a death sentence was pronounced. 'Otherwise, who would want to corrupt one's faith while alive. But you know in our land of Pachnad good deeds and blessings both exist simultaneously. The prosperity of our lands and rivers, seems to lure Ghazis with their new weaponry rather frequently. Some move forward, fight and perish. While others bow their knees rather than face death. Embrace Islam. Villages upon villages and entire tappas would read the Kalma. That is how they get separated from their broader family group and tribe'... (P.190)

The call of the masjid for prayers five times a day, Shahni's rituals at the birth of Lali Shah in accordance with Hindu traditions, a number of pooja's and gifts given to the Brahmins, the visit of the Gosainji for katha etc., all express the clarity of respective identities. The donations sent by the Arora brothers from Canada of Rs.10/- for the Gurdwara too articulate this sharpness. The arguments and discussion among the women at the well about the weaknesses of both Hindu and Muslim men shows no confusion. So does the celebration of festivals of Lohri, Diwali, Dussherra and Id. However, in the religious world of Shah and Shahni there is no clear differentiation between what is Hindu and Sikh. The recitation of Sukmani Sahib, Rehras and other stanzas from the Guru Granth Sahib and various rituals and ceremonies of Hindus and Sikhs are simultaneously practiced.

The local people are also conscious of the gap between what they believe and practice and what they should in strict conformity with their institutionalised religion. They are willing to listen to the recognised spokesmen of their religion but their response varies, for example, the visit of the Arya pracharak, (P.255-257) and reaction to the emergence of Muslim League,
problems of Muslims etc. (See political Discourse). When in the broader political setting emphasis on separation, differentiation, purity of religious dogma increases then as Oberoi's account of the construction of religious boundaries in Punjab shows they do respond positively (Oberoi 1994). Influenced by outsiders through local elites, the local people begin to feel that they are not conforming to the true tenets of their religion and begin to see the need for purifying the local religion by giving up some customary practices. The outside elite, not understanding the local nuances, make the people feel as renegades and traitors to their religion. It is this change in local perceptions and relationships which pushes towards greater differentiation, and change in associated cultural traits. The movement which starts emphasises, selective aspects, mainly of a more bookish or scriptural form, presented as ideal or true religion to which people should conform fully. This change comes from the broader environment, from a higher institutional level, from an authoritative interpretation level, or from a political level of clash of political and economic interests. Discussing the factors leading to the partition of Punjab, what Talbot states about the role of Chisti revivalist pirs reinforces our argument.

The Chisti revivalist pirs were able to form a link between rural Sufism and urban orthodoxy. They used this to help bring about the momentary merging of the regions, urban and rural, religious and political traditions during the crucial final days of the Pakistan Movement (Talbot 1980:19-23).

However, in the novel, it is in this Mirasi 'Swang' (tableau) that the position of the three communities is articulated (P.314-318).

Shah Shaho, this humble servant addicted too opium among the intoxicants. It so happened one day that I over indulged myself a bit somewhat thoughtlessly and so started flying in the sky without ahorse. I was in no position to know whether I was alive or not alive. In this state of care free intoxication, I heard Jani Darvesh call out.

"Moolu Mirasi, I have been invivted to a feast to enjoy the splendour of Indarpuri, why don't you get ready and join me".
Badshaho! what kind of preparation does a Mirasi require? His only garment is a melodious voice, so I quickly followed.

Walking along we reached Tilla Gorakhnath. Someone called out, "Jaani Darvesh where are you off to?"

I asked Darvesh, "whose voice is it?" "Raja Bharbharis" "Maharaj, we are going to Indarsabha. Do you want to send any message to Indar Maharaj".

"No--No--don't mention my name if Indar sends his 'apsaras' after me, where shall I find a place to hide?".

"As you wish, but you have nothing to loose if one of them were to join you for a couple of months. At least it would have stirred up some life in you in this old age".

"Oh! not any more of all that, now there is very little left in me. So it will be an exercise in futility".

Darvesh said, "Maharaj if your will and stamina do not allow, it matters little to me". Keeping on flying, we two reached Kot Kamalia. We looked down. Lo and behold! it was a river of horses. I was tempted at the sight of so many horses and whispered in Darveshe's ear, 'lets pick up a horse each and reach Indarpuri in style'. 'Admist all this whispering, a firm voice of Shah Sikandar forbid us. "Beware, do not eye my horses. My army has to return to its homeland". 'Quiet', we signalled to each other and moved ahead. Darvesh said, "Moolu, see Shah Sikandar's spirit is still waiting to ride on its horse and reach back home".

Moving on we reached Kabul. A commanding voice again called out to us. "Travellers, are you from Hindustan and from which mahal?" Darvesh whispered in my ear, "it's Shah Durrani". "Hazoor we have started from Gujrat Mahal".

"Well done! why didn't you bring along the poet Isharat he would have listened to some of his verses".

'Swaying in the wind, we crossed the Hindukush. We kept on flying higher and higher. Our bodies feeling lighter than birds. Then when we opened our eyes - it was a treat what a scene!'

'Large orchards of red apples, trees of big ripe maltas, babugoshe, pears, bunches of juicy grapes and
Qandhari pomegranates. It was as if Quetta Chaman, Kashmir had reached the skies. 'Darvesh stopped me with his hand,

"Set your tahmad alright, the women should not raise any objection".

'Badshaho! hearing those words worried this Mirasi. Having no good clothes to wear, nor anything decorative, he just started walking behind Jaani Darvesh. 'Wherever, one glanced, it was a riot of colours, shamianas (tents) of pure pat (kind of cloth), intricate decorations, sounds of ghungharoos, music rehearsals, tabla, sarangi etc. All one wanted to say every time was wah! wah! wah!'

'Darvesh snubbed me again, 'quiet! this is Indar's akhara. Here one is not to praise the sights but only him'. Listen further, Maharaja Indar like a truly romantic hero was engrossed, with the women. Touching someone's necklace or anklets, taking one in his arms, placing another in his lap, kissing someone's hand and another's hair'.

'Now I describe Indarsabha, every Apsara a unique creation and all set to outdo each other. Draped in dresses of sheer silk, flowered with gold and silver brocade, it was difficult for one to distinguish between the body and the cloth adorned by pearls, diamonds, and other precious stones. Indar Raja was enjoying himself immersed in the intoxicating somras' and alluringly decorated, delicate bodies of Apsaras. The heart fluttered. This was it! Heaven, swarg, jannat or bahisht, whatever, the name. Maharaja noticed this Mirasi and said, 'we have come to know that the famous Miras' of Gujrat, Punjab is present in our darbar. Minister, he is a Khandani Mirasi and should be offered warm, generous, hospitality and respect due to him'.

'This Mirasi got up and paid respects at the darbar in the name of Allah. 'Allah sach, Nabibar haq, didar Allah Ka, sheft Hazarat Ki'.

The Mahamantri asked, 'what is the gotra of this Mirasi? Piplani, Sajjani, Chohani, Posala or Mir Mirasi'.

'Mir Mirasi Maharaj we are the disciples of the famous Guru Tan Hussain'.

Maharaja Indar nodded his head, 'I am familiar with your genealogy, your Miras would be always regarded in high esteem by me. So, how's everything in your village?'
'All well Maharaj. "How are the Shah's of the pind?"

'Like you in high spirits. "What about the Jat farmers'? 'As Jat farmers can be. "What about the tenants" 'Passing time somehow. "Why? They are getting water in time from us, aren't they?" 'Pardon me Maharaj, but now they use the water of the angrez sarkar. "But what happens to the water which we shower from heaven?"

'Maharaj that water gets transformed into pearls and reaches our palaces and mandirs'.

"Good! I am glad to hear it. Well what is this the angrez sarkar like?" 'Maharaj, these days it is at war. At first, against Turkey but now it has taken on others as well'.

'Hearing all this saddened Indar Maharaj; he clapped, "Begin singing". So started the same colourful performances, the same dance tambas. I whispered to Jaani Darvesh. 'All the Apsaras are sticking around with Maharaja Indar. Let's not expose ourselves to hopeless temptation. Since we are here, why not call on Allah mian?'

'Maharaj Indar intuitively knew what was in our mind. He gave a command, "Pratihari, see them off at Allah mian's doorstep. Yes, offer him our Salaam as well and ask about his well being on our behalf".

'A thought crossed this Mirasi's mind. It is surely possible that since the arrival of the new Lat in Hindustan, the relations between Parmpita Parmeshwar and Allah have become particularly mannerly, like between newly connected co-parents-in-law'.

'We came out of Indar's darbar and began walking on and on. All the flowers, fruit and greenery were left behind. Nothing but desolation in sight. We were worried. Jaani Darvesh said, "wherever we glimpse the houries, that will surely be Allah ta'la's kingdom". As we walked further we saw a masjid. Adjacent to it was a small well with a pulley and a rope and a bucket hanging from a nail. The guard stopped, "go ahead, this is the place where you wanted to reach". We moved forward, and saw an old man sitting on a sickly manji and smoking his hookah. His eyes anointed with soorma made of an eagle's egg. We went near him and said, "Sir, we have come from the land of Punjab to meet Allah".

"Welcome!" 'we will be highly obliged if you could introduce him to us". The old man said, "well - I am known by that name, It is I who..." This Mirasi could not help it and said, 'Oh my Rubb! On one side
is Maharaj Indar's Indarpuri, the instruments, music, jewellery, colours of life, and on the other your barren kingdom. What a contrast! King of kings, despite the strength of your manliness and the strength of your spiritual prowess, why such a pitiable condition here?' "Look son, don't get hassled unnecessarily. A little while back all the belongings of this place were got confiscated by Bulaki Shah". 'My Allah! it's impossible to believe, someone attaching your property! Parvardigar, these are the insignia of the Jat farmers. My master, why did you let them do this to you?'. "Moolu son! Bulaki Shah had a false case and equally fictitious legal documents. But to fight a case in the court, money had to be borrowed from the Shah. So we allowed the confiscation to take place. Son, don't feel sad! One day surely a way out will be found from all this too. Indar Maharaj's quam keeps its wealth so close to its chest, that it does not allow it to touch our boundaries even" Jaani Darvesh, advised him "Garib parvar, why not create new boundaries for your own subjects".

2.2.2 Popular Religion

In Punjab though the three religions, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism remained separate in their identities they kept contesting with each other for followers, as well as power and influence. Apart from the assemblage of beliefs, rituals and customary religions practices that converts from one religion to another carried with them, the social interaction between the followers of different religions gave rise to a good deal of religious and cultural borrowing, mixing and amalgamation which is strikingly evident in myths, legends, beliefs and practices at the popular religious level in Punjab as distinct from the wider, formal institutional or textual level. Though popular forms of each religion carry certain distinctive markers of their own institutional religious identity, there is a great deal that is common and cuts across religious boundaries. This makes the popular religion as an important mediating link across communities and a key to understand the composite culture of Punjab. However, the borrowed or carried over elements while hardly posing any problem at the pragmatic level may not strictly conform to the prevailing textual or institutional prescriptions and so carry the seeds of intra-religious contestation particularly between elite reformers and common people; which has characterised the various religious reform movements in Punjab from 19th century onward (See Oberoi, 1994; Jones. 1976).
This category 'popular' religion is however, by no means unproblematic. In much of the recent literature on the history of religions, according to Uberti, 'this concept has come under close scrutiny some have even suggested that it be abandoned altogether', the plea being, 'nothing useful is attained by dichotomizing the religious experience of a society into elite and popular, or for that matter, universal/local; great/little/diffused, because in real life there are no two-tiered models of religion' (Oberoi 1994:139-140).

In our view, while it may be true that social distribution of various dimensions of religious practice mostly does not lend itself to clear cut dichotomous demarcation, but the above dichotomies do point to some important contextual aspects of adaptation and change in religious discourse and practice relevant to doctrinal as well as related intra-religious power struggles. So, these contrasting terms continue to be used sometimes as dichotomous pairs, sometimes with only one term stated and the other term(s) implied but left unstated. The same applies to the term popular religion which may figure in several more or less interchangeable contexts: popular/elite, local/universal, or supralocal, popular, institutional, formal or scriptual, or in some other combinations of these or similar terms.

Referring to the popular religion in nineteenth century Punjab as an 'enchanted' universe (in Weberian terms) replete with miracle saints, cultic practices, spirit possession, magic, Oberoi delineates its four distinctive features. First to begin with everyday life within it was marked by an absence of scriptures and other such religious codes. Second, participation was restricted to common people who lived in rural tracts in this sense we could call it a village religion. Third, the focus of religiousity was not on analysis but on pragmatic results, whereas, scriptural religion seeks to manipulate reality to the advantage of its constituents. (Individuals who may have had an interest in the bigger questions of life could of course have tried to connect with any of the universal religions beyond their locality). Finally popular religion had its own cultural agents (Oberoi 1994: 141-144).

He attempts to relate the persistence of this pattern to such facts of the economy and
demography of the Punjab as: (a) an essentially rural economy and predominantly rural population, with three modestly large cities and a number of smaller towns controlling most of the long-distance trade consisting mainly of luxury goods; (b) dependence of the rhythm of life for the vast majority on the agricultural calendar and its seasonal fluctuation; (c) an ever present threat of drought, famine and associated miseries including diseases and deaths linked to undernourishment; (d) attempts by the people to grapple with the vagaries of epidemic diseases like plague, cholera and smallpox and other mysteries of nature.

Gill whose main interest in the narrative structures of popular Punjabi legends rather than popular religion makes use of such conceptual dichotomies as profane/spiritual, anthropological/cosmological while discussing the cosmology of Heer Waris (Gill 1989, Chapter 4:130-165). With regard to the Heer legends he says:

The narrative structure operates at two levels of mediatory prospections: The anthropological level and the cosmological level. At the anthropological level, we encounter the cultural infrastructure of brother’s jealousies, the disputes about ancestral property. The whole kinship system of the mediaeval Punjab, the feudal social and economic structure with its intrigues and exploitations. At the cosmological level we encounter the same dramatis personae circumventing the realities of profane life with the sanctions of divine authority where all physical, social and economic factors pass through the sieve of spiritual crystallisation. Even religion which is the main undercurrent of the whole narrative is subjected to these pulls in different directions. On the one hand, we have the religious parameters which almost coincide with the anthropological cultural scheme of things, and on the other, we are reminded of the higher, more sanctified refined references to the fundamental truths which surpass and transgress all thresholds of space and time... though these two parameters are in contradistinction with each other, one cannot operate without the presence of the other... This text deals with an empirical reality which must be understood within a conceptual framework that mediates between the two planes of anthropological and cosmological spatial translocation (Gill 1989:154)

While Gill does refer to the discrepancies between some of the fundamental Islamic principles and their circumvention by the Kazi and others to suit the village social structures, his main interest is centred on the contrast between anthropological (culturally linked religious
and social belief and practices) and cosmological (fundamental truth beyond all thresholds of space and time). For us, the main value of this quotation and the one given below is that the two together bring out clearly the complexity of their inter-relationship and tactical use by individual and groups to defend their points of view, interests and passionate commitments:

Heer's disputation with the Kazi... is also of the same order. The Kazi seems to have reduced religion to the most ordinary rules of village life. Heer does not challenge his arguments... She argues with the same logic. She reminds the Kazi that she cannot be married against her own will. This is the most fundamental principle of Islam. And, the witnesses the Kazi calls have to testify of her having accepted the contract... This is simple anthropological logic. When... no reason moves the obdurate Kazi, Heer invokes the Prophet himself and the universal principles of truth and love. Cosmology in the case of Heer is the last resort but once she as decided to force the resolution, there is no going back. The Kazi, the parents, the brothers can do whatever, they like... she understands the compulsions of the household and the family but neither anthropological nor cosmological counter arguments can weaken her resolve. She will physically submit to their will but she will never mentally accept their verdict. And when all is lost,' she invokes the Panj Pirs, the five divine sages, to protect her in body and spirit... (Gill 1989:157-158).

Thus, Heer's arguments shift from anthropological to cosmological logic and as a last resort, she invokes the anthropological relationship of patronage of Panj Pirs at the cosmological plane.

Harvinder Singh's analysis of the cult of a popular deity, Gugga in the Malwa region of the Punjab, makes use of the binary contrast, high folk. Noting that the folk religion is an expression of the same conceptual structures which underlies the high religion, he stresses the former 'crude' 'pragmatic' 'more inclusive' and 'open structured' nature, which 'often negates and violates the sectarian boundaries of high religion' (Singh 1986:43). While the Gods of high religion, 'are related with the order of the cosmos and with abstract goals like salvation or immortality'...(1986:192), the folk deities are 'earthly' and 'represent both concrete realities and threatening ambiguities of life and are the projections of collective dreams, fears and hopes' (1986:194). For Singh, the ability to perform extraordinary acts of power or miracles (karamat)

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is crucial for recognition of a person (an ancestor or folk hero etc.) as a deity. This power is 'ambiguous' 'incomprehensive' and 'unpredictable' and despite being, 'all encompassing remains generally confined to the specific domain of the deity, such as curing of snake bites, removal of infertility, or granting of some other boon'. the power being double edged, 'it can confer benefits as well as punish depending on the disposition of the deity' (1986:183-185).

On the basis of his knowledge of the folk religion of Malwa and Punjab generally, Singh (1986:43-45) identifies four types of dieties: 'ancestors, ancestor-cum-dieties, hero-cum-deities and deities proper'. The ancestors as real or class ancestors look after the welfare of their descendants while the 'ancestor-cum-deities' take care of their own descendants as well as others. 'The folk hero cum deities', usually have no known links with any specific group but have recognised links with the localities where their shrines are located. They are venerated by the people of the locality concerned or a wider area depending on their reputation for power. The dieties proper are common to all and usually known for performing certain functions for their devotees such as curing skin disease, or removing barrenness. Also they have the generalised power to confer boons and inflict punishments. As the power of a deity waxes and wanes, so does the number of its followers and spatial spread of its influence, status as deity may also correspondingly change, with a deity changing into a mere ancestor or vice-versa.

2.2.2.1 Sufism and Pir cults

Straddling the popular institutional dichotomy and yet forming part of the popular religious milieu in important respects were also famous and not so famous Sufi saints, who figured prominently in the Punjab countryside and urban centres, and who despite their Islamic affiliation generally attracted followers of diverse religious backgrounds. The four important Sufi orders that held sway in Punjab were the Qadri, the Naqshbandi, the Suhrawardy and the Chishti. From among, the medieval saints who are believed to have played a crucial role in West Punjab's conversion to Islam and have continued to keep a Charismatic hold on the people included, 'Baba Farid Ganj-i-Shakkar of Pakpattan, Sheikh Bahwal Haq Zakariya of
Multan, Sayyid Jalaluddin Bokari of Ucch and others' (Gilmartin 1988:40). Discounting stories of mass conversion by saints, both Gilmartin and Richard Eaton (1984:341-348, c.f. Gilmartin 1988: 40-41) find more credible their probable symbolic role. Though their explanatory approaches differ, with Eaton stressing ecological and political adaptation as against Gilmartin's emphasis on interaction between the local tribal structures and the Islamic tradition. Contending that the pattern of conversion was an outcome of a simultaneous adaptation by pastoralists in Western Punjab, 'to a spreading agricultural way of life' as well as 'to the political and religious hegemony of imperial Muslim states', Eaton highlights the role of Sufi shrines not only as 'symbolic cultural outposts of the power of Islam and the Muslim state', but also as 'sites of access to transcendent spiritual authority' that 'gradually, and perhaps insensibly' drew the 'tribes into the states political and religious orbit'. On the other hand, Gilmartin points to the service that 'nearly all the major shrines... in some degree' rendered, as 'hinges that flexed in two directions'. One, towards representation 'as symbols of the distant, yet transcendent, cultural authority of the Muslim state', the other serving to embody, 'diverse local cultural identities, whose variety reflected both the diversity of ecological, social and kinship organisation in Punjab and the diversity in the spiritual needs of the people' (1988:41).

As in the case of the popular deities discussed above, the shrines of Sufi saints also showed a great variety in terms of their historical developments, reputation for power and area of influence, associated religious practices and instrumental needs served. Both (Gilmartin 1988:41-42 and Ian Talbot 1988:22) take note of this but emphasise the shared Islamic religious conception underpinning the shrines. Yet most of these... shrines drew on a common conception of God's transendence and of his distant relationship with man' and 'the popular belief that the saints, through their spiritual excellence, had secured after death places close to God and, thus, were in a position to intercede for others' (Gilmartin 1988:42). So through the saints, their shrines, and descendants, who generally acted as hereditary custodians, Sajjda nashins of the shrines, came to have a special spiritual power or barakat which becomes the basis of the dominant, pir-murid relationship of spiritual mediation and religious discipleship.
The supplicant at the shrine as murid or disciple took an oath of obedience (bayat) and made regular offerings to the sajjda nashin as pir who in return provided mediated spiritual access or barakat (Gilmartin 1988:42, Talbot 1988:22).

Oberoi, while accepting the value of these Islamic interpretations for understanding some aspects of Muslim religiosity, finds them ‘inadequate to fully explain popular devotion towards Sufi pirs in Punjab’ which ‘encompassed very large numbers of Sikh and Hindu devotees who did not essentially subscribe to the Islamic concept of Muslim holymen mediating between man and God’. And he further opines, ‘part of the answer to popular faith in saints like Sarvar, even among their Muslim followers, may be found in cognitive frameworks of illness and healing’ (1994:154-155). Oberoi, for whom the Sakhi Sarvar shrine formed, ‘part of a region wide, multifaceted cultural system’, sums up his analysis of the Sarvar shrine and by implication his view of Pirs generally as follows:

People who worshipped their pir or undertook pilgrimages to his shrine did so for many reasons to harness spiritual powers, to cure physical ailments and psychological problems, to learn about Islam, to resolve interpersonal conflicts, and to dramatize their needs. In the process of all this they confirmed... the cultural logic of their social world. It was a world in which members of different religious communities and people of diverse backgrounds easily collaborated in order to face the uncertainties and afflictions of human life, their medium being the framework of popular religion (1994:160).

Another important guide to understand the popular appeal of sufi saints is the work of Susan Bayly (1989) on Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society. Her richly detailed historical analysis, (1989:69-77, 89-101, 106-120, 143-147) strongly underlines the overlapping and interpretation of the major religious tradition, elite as well as folk or popular, as they developed in mutual interaction and adaptation in the South Indian setting from the 17th Century onwards. The blurring of categories, Hindu, Muslims and Christian, in terms of religious beliefs, myths and legends, and in patterns of devotions, rituals and ceremonies associated with different deities, saints, heroes and other cult figures seems to have been more pronounced than in Oberoi’s description of North India. Bayly at first ties the different South Indian Pir
cults into a strictly Islamic typology of Sufi saints and shrines and shows that the former are not just 'parochial' or 'regional' but parts of the broader Islamic landscape. Further she indicates that the cults exemplify the complex and multi-faceted links between the 'high Islam' and 'folk' or popular tradition of Muslim beliefs as she explains which constitute, 'opposing levels of religious experience', only most superficially (Bayly, 1989:104, 106-115).

Secondly, she marshals evidence to show how varying complexes of elements drawn from Shaivite, Vaishnavite and Tamil Amman or goddess traditions (Bayly, 1989:91-92) have come to be built into cult tradition, investing the Pir with attributes of Hindu divine power (1989:115-116).

Bayly takes note of a wide spectrum of pirs (1989:76) with one end representing learned institutional Sufi's belonging to established Sufi orders or tariqas and the other by the disparate unaffiliated or non-tariqa individuals called qalandars. The latter include, 'intinerant praise singers, amulet sellers and divines, as well as settled anchorites who achieve renown by walking on fire, enduring fasts...eating glass' etc. The latter are particularly, the naked Mazdhubs, 'have often been treated with disdain by the representatives of 'high' Islam'. Yet

...... any Sufi might come to be revered as a Pir or cult saint, a focus for pilgrimage or veneration and a source of miraculous healing barkat. Even when they might appear to have overturned every 'orthodox' Islamic propriety the faqir and the qalandar were still part of a single continuum which linked all Muslim mystics and which formed a bridge between the traditions which we now associate with formal theistic Hinduism and those which are seen as being part of a separate Muslim culture. As a result the authenticity of their powers was widely conceded even by elite learned Muslims who found their practices alarming and disruptive. Such beings were valued because of their capacity ... to make direct and immediate contact with the divine. Their power to attract devotees and disciples makes them the most dynamic element in South Indian religious culture (Bayly 1989: 76-77).

As my discussion of popular religion aims to highlight the cultural synthesis as reflected in the text, I will limit myself to detailed direct references as well as indirect ones to popular religion in the text. Accordingly, I also refrain from discussing two important deities
of popular religion, Gugga Pir and Sithala Devi, and perhaps some others. For me the task is to comprehend the manner in which the people conceptualise, create and integrate themselves with the world of faith. Baba Farid and his patronage constitutes the pulse of the novel. As a patron saint of the Shah family, it is the blessings of Baba Farid which save it from decline and miraculously facilitate the birth of a child, thus ensuring the continuity of the family and the maintenance of the glory of the Shah Household.

In the beginning of the novel, the Shah household is full of anxiety at Shahni's inability to conceive a child. This failure seems to put a question mark on the future of the family and Shahni's marriage. The women of the household are concerned at Shahni's plight, yet not unduly worried, for the household has always been blessed by Baba Farid (P.29).

Maa Bibi said to Chachi, 'I swear by God Chachi! I did not consciously plan these beautiful pictures, they have got completed by themselves. Allah beli will surely listen to our prayers'. 'Do pray in his hazoor. May little children play in this house too'. 'Chachi, those whose lineage has Baba Farid as an ancestor why will they not be blessed and be fulfilled'.

The day after Lohri, Chachi Mehri and Shahni set out on a pilgrimage to Baba Farid's shrine to seek the boon of a child. As she begins the journey, Shahni recites Baba Farid's 'bani' (P.41).

Prayer done in the first part of the night is like the flower,
Prayer continued in the night the fruit thereof.
These blessings of the lord descend upon those who keep vigil in prayer,
The lord's blessings out of his hand forced may not be,
Some may not get those even though awake,
On some he may confer those, shaking them out of slumber (S.G.G.S., G.S. Talib (trans.) 1990:2763).

As she sang, Shahni's throat felt tight and she was overcome with emotion. 'Dhan Baba, teri bani, dhan baba teri satya'. A heavy burden seemed to have lifted from her heart and she bursts into tears.
The visit to the shrine generates a feeling of hope and a sense of confidence. As if their woes had reached Baba Farid and evoked his benign grace. As Chachi remembers (P.51).

...Chachi wiped her nose. 'It is because of this, that I feel so strongly for my child. Hopefully Baba Farid's blessings would beget her a child. I could feel, the happy days, ahead at Baba Farid's durbar'. 'Chachi, how true! If I get a chance, I'll love to offer myself at his durbar'. 'Listen Maabibi when we reached his than it was really crowded. After the Kunja bharai as the parshad was distributed, my child's outstretched palm received it first. Baba Farid is a true saint, a man of miracles'. 'Next time you go on horseback to Gujrat, take me along. Even I'll pay my respects at the barra durbar'. 'If you really wish to go, then why don't we straight reach Pakpattan'.

The blessings of Baba Farid prove true to form when Shahni conceives. Later, as they were both having their morning bath in the river, Chachi senses Shahni's condition and gently stops her from over exerting herself in swimming (P.72).

'That's enough child! now bow, and seek the blessings of the pir-fakirs'. Shahni understood that Chachi had come to know. She closed her eyes in concentration and remembered Baba Farid. 'It is only through your merciful grace baba. Otherwise, how could this barren land have greened. May your benign grace be with us ever. Let this day conclude happily'.

The final culmination of Baba Farid's blessings comes about with the birth of Lali Shah (p.130-131).

The blessings of Baba Farid,
Congratulations everyone,
Allah beli has bestowed his good wishes on the grandsons of Charat Singh and Bhag Singh,
May the tree of their life continue to grow for generations,
May this branch of Sahib Singh acquire more prosperity and wealth.

Baba Farid's blessings are also bestowed on Fakira Lohar who is blessed with a son. The boy is a birader of Lali Shah for he is a boon of Baba Farid and also a Handa (P.143-144).
By evening the sound of congratulations resounded at Fakira Lohar's as Husaina gave birth to a son... Chachi Mehri was busy churning the milk, she called out from there, 'Child, quickly go and congratulate the family. He is not only the son of the neighbours but by God's grace, Lali Shah's birader'. 'Fakira had asked for a boon from Baba Farid to make him a Handa. May God bless them. They have lost four children one after the other'. 'Shahji has already gone and congratulated them'. As she saw Shahji, Beebo Mirasan began her ghere and got a handsome reward. As usual Shahji's, offerings made Fakira's day. These included five sers of shakkar, a half maund of rice, and a pot of ghee. Now Fakira can generously treat people to khand-chawal! 'Child, place something on the boys palm. On one hand he will be a companion to Lali and on the other a sharik, a Handa by his name'. Leaving Lali with Maa bibi, Shahni went into the 'pasar' and opened her box. Picked up a couple of pieces of cloth, and with the shagun of, 'giri-chuara' reached Fakira's place. Fakira's mother held the little grandson in her lap. The child wore small earrings and his head was shaved. Shahni caressed the boys head, and offered her shagun (p.143).

Karbari first kept on laughing while looking at Shahni; then began her usual abuses. 'I spit on you, child of a pig. Shahni is offering 'takkas' and you refuse to open your palm. Come mother, eat, grab it and keep it. If the reproductive power of the takkas of the Shah's takes roots here, this house will only see prosperity. You will become a real Handa, yes, truly real'. Shahni did 'sirvana' of the boy and gave the auspicious shagun to Beebo who began to tease Karbari, 'look Shahni, the Nai has scrubbed off the whole mane and no shakkar or shecmi for us. On such a joyous day Maa Karbari has nothing to offer but abuses'. 'Shahni, does a dadi ever chide the new born, 'you scoundrel, don't think by getting your ears pierced you are no longer a Muslim. May no harm befall you, now you are a Handa Muslim. Be brave like the manly Ghazis, otherwise I will spit on you.' Shahni doubled with laughter, opened the boy's hand and spat on his palm. 'our good fortune, with the blessings of Baba Farid, may you live long' (P.144).

Sheikh Farid was a very important patron saint of Punjab. Born in 1188 AD near Multan, in the Pargana town of Khotwal, he took his spiritual guidance from Khwaja, Qutubuddin Mohammed Bhektiyar - Ushi-ji-kak. After passing his test as a true disciple, Sheikh Farid moved to Hansi to continue and spread his teachings. On the death of Khawaja Qutubuddin, Sheikh Farid succeeded him and took the charge in Delhi. However, his wandering restless mind and missionary zeal took him to Ajodhan, 80 km from Sahiwal in the Punjab, also known as Pak Pattan where he firmly established himself. Sheikh Farid was able to strike a chord among the people for, 'his God was neither a theological myth nor a logical abstract of unity,
but an all embracing personality present in his ethical intellectual and aesthetic experience and furnishing the inspiration for creating an ideal realm of values in a distressed and struggling world. He sought to reach the Creator through his Creation and identified religion with service to humanity' (Kazmi 1975:30). May God give you 'dard' were his blessings to his disciples. Along with his teachings it were his miracles which drew a heavy following. The one which was most popular earned him the title Ganj-i-Shakkar (treasure house of sweets). A number of stories have been related about it. In the most well known miracle, Shaikh Farid acquired within him the miraculous power to turn whatever he put into his mouth (earth and stones) into sugar.

With time his shrine at Pak Pattan became particularly famous and drew a large number of devotees from all walks of life. People were attracted by the myth, power, and miracles of Baba Farid⁶. 'The locational advantage' of the shrine too spread its fame.

For Ajodhan was situated on the merchant caravan route linking Multan, the border city, with Delhi and other parts of the Delhi Sultanate. The merchants nobles and soldiers travelling from and to Delhi paid visits to the Dargah and invoked the saints help and blessings for success as well as safety from dacoits, illness and wild animals (Siddiqui, 1989:14).

The most popular myth associated with the structures of the dargah was regarding the door of paradise about which Wade writes (c.f. Siddiqui 1989:16).

There are two doors to this apartment (in which the Sheikh lies buried) one to the north and one to the east. The one to the east, called the 'door of paradise' is never opened except on the fifth day of the sacred Muharram when a number of pilgrims, both Hindus and Muslims, come to visit the shrine, believing that all who pass through this doorway are saved from the fire of perdition. The doorway is about two feet wide and cannot be entered without stooping, and the apartment itself is not capable of containing thirty

⁶Baba Farid it is felt played an important role in the conversion of many high and low Hindu castes conversion to Islam. These included the Khokhars in the region around Ajodhan, Sial Rajputs, a number of fishermen particularly jallhora and a number of other low castes (Siddiqui, 1989 : 16-17)
people crowded together. Yet such is the care which the saint takes of his votaries on the occasions, that no accident or loss of life has ever been known to occur. A superlative heaven is open to those who are first to enter the tomb on the day mentioned. The rush for precedence may therefore, be better imagined than described. The crowd of pilgrims is said to be immense and as they egress from the sacred doorway, after having rubbed their foreheads on the foot of the saints grave, the air resounds with the cries of Farid! Farid.

A most important personality who holds the pulse of life of the people is the legendary, Sakhi Sarvar, also known as Lakhandata - the giver of lakhs, Lalanwala or he of the rubies and Rohianwala - he of the hills. His followers too referred to themselves with different names, Sarvaria, Sewak Sultani, Hindu Sultani, Naghia, Sarvar Sakhi, Sarvar Sagar (P.123-130).

Jahandadji by the grace of God, did both of you come straight here or stopped somewhere'. 'It is indeed God's grace, we first paid our respects at the darbar of Lakhandata Sakhi Sarvar'. 'If one reaches the darbar of Sakhi Sarvar it is a sublime blessing'. 'Yes, it was a good occasion, Sahib Khan had asked for a boon which also showered some luck on me'. 'Shah Sahib, one gets real peace of mind there. May the darbar of Sakhi Sarvar prosper'. 'What an unusual sight. On one side the resting place of Garib nawaz Sakhi Sarvar on the other Baba Nanak. Badshaho, the spinning wheel of Sakhi Sarvar's mother Ayesha begum really gives peace to the eyes. Nearby is a Thakurdwara with one side taken up by a Bhairon ka Mandir'. Kashi Shah nodded, 'If one has not seen with one's own eyes, it is difficult to believe. It just proves only one thing that religious communal divisions are all a creation of man. Rabrasool is only one'. Something occurred to Karamillahiji, 'Badshaho! on this side punj pir (five pirs) on the other punj Pandavas (five Pandavas). On this side punj aulias on the other punj piaras'. Maaya Singh too was fascinated by the number five, 'Barkhurdar, this country of Punjab has some kind of collaboration with God. Ask me why? Even God has created five rivers in our Punjab. What to talk of the land which has been blessed by nature with the number five... the land of famous pirs, aulias, murids and shahids.

'Shah Sahib, there is another important story about the place. Sakhi Sarvar had three attendants Kulang, Kahin and Sheikh. The descendants of all three appear at the durbar. It has been said that Sakhi Sarvar had taken a vow that the number of these branches was not to exceed beyond one thousand six hundred
and fifty at one time".  Badshaho this is rabbi intelligence.  'Jahandadji, send Nawab home to bring the churma wali kujji (offerings) from Lakhandata's durbar.  When it was brought, he handed it to Chote Shah, 'please distribute it among everyone.  May garib nawaz protect us all'.  Everyone took the offering of choorma, saying, 'Lakhandata it is all your grace'.

The soothing presence of Pir Sakhi Sarvar is invoked to bring peace to troubled minds and to reassure oneself about the world.  This scene is specially articulated between Wadwa Singh's wife Nacchatar Kaur and Kashi Shah (P.89-92).

Nacchatar Kaur covered her head and pleaded: 'Devara, I feel like jumping in the well when I reach home.  Give me such a mantra which brings back my peace of mind, the jealousy of the other women has ruined my balance'.  Kashi Shah closed his eyes and bowed before garib nawaz, 'Oh! garib parvar, give relief to this innocent one's tormented heart'.  He opened his eyes, took out a pinch from the box, touched Nacchatar Kaur's nose with dried rose petals and handed it to her.  'Bharjai now you are under the shade of the Zahir pir, you will feel no sorrow, anguish or pain.  Baggo, go and leave her home'.  Nacchatar Kaur folded her hands, 'Devara from now on you are my guru pir, I came here like a trembling fish out of water.  These rose petals have brought so much peace to my troubled mind.  I accept his offerings with gratitude'.

When Buta recognises the mother in her, Buddha Kanjari is quick to thank Sakhi Sarvar (P.167).

Buddha turned towards Chote Shah, 'my lap is full of riches.  Shah Sahib, imagine anyone seeing in a Kanjari, rather innocently the reflection of his mother.  These are all the blessings of Lakhandata Sakhi Sarvar'.

In fact those who have been to Sakhi Sarvar's darbar are truly blessed (P.88).

As Chachi said, 'you are really a lucky one, having been to Lakhandata's durbar.  Child, after Lali's

7 Number fixed at Kulang 750, Kahin 600, Sheikh 200 offering made are divided into 1650 shares.

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mundan, the first thing we are to do is to bow our heads at Baba Farid's durbar and then reach Sakhi Sarvar's hazoor'.

There are a large number of legends about Sakhi Sarvar, I have taken up the one discussed by Oberoi (1994:149). It unfolds in the following manner.

Sayyid Zainulabidin, a resident of Baghdad, migrated to India in 1126 C.E. and settled at Shahkot in the district of Jhang. Here he married the daughter of a village headman from the Khokhar tribe. From this marriage he had a son, Sayyid Ahmad, later known as Sakhi Sarvar. Being ill-treated by the family, Sayyid Ahmad left for Baghdad where he received the gift of prophecy from three illustrious saints. Subsequently he returned to India to live at Dhaunkal in Gujranwala district. From there he went to Multan, where he married the daughter of a governor. In his life of wandering he next visited Lahore, where he trained himself in secular knowledge, and from thence to Shahkot where he settled. In due course he became famous for his power to work miracles, which attracted a large following. Envious of his fame, the family decided to kill him. Sakhi Sarvar discovered these plans and left for Nagaha in Dera Ghazi Khan district. But his kinsmen pursued him there and ultimately killed him in 1174. The saint was buried there, and subsequently a shrine was built on the spot.

The rise and persistence of Sakhi Sarvar's fame was related to the miracles associated with him. These included how, after Sakhi Sarvar struck the ground with his staff a well came into being and the well near Dhaunkal became famous for the cure of leprosy. The others included ordering a bull to be milked in Gujranwala district, killing a lion with a mere slipper, reviving a dead horse, curing a camel with a broken leg, reviving the dead child of Dani Jatti etc. Thus the supernatural powers possessed by Sakhi Sarvar could cure any illness or affliction, blindness, impotence, fever, or boils. 'His curative and thaumaturgic abilities continued... even after his death' (Oberoi 1994:150). All these combined to 'foster a syncretist cult around him' (Oberoi 1994:150).

The point of reference and confluence for the popularity of Sakhi Sarvar is his last resting place, Nagaha in Dera Ghazi Khan, which with its unique features appeals to both Hindus and Muslims. Infact, the 'cultural space of the shrine, its architectural fusion, and the icons it
enshrined contained elements from the "great" religious traditions of Punjab, enabling it to generate popular devotion (Oberoi 1994:151). Apart from its general appeal, with time the Khanaqah at Nigaha became popular and 'specialised in dealing with psychosocial problems of spirit possession' (Oberoi 1994:150, 156).

The shrine became the meeting point for an annual baisakhi fair which drew pilgrims from great distances. Groups of pilgrims were 'called sang and their halting points Chauki'. At times they, 'were conducted by Bharais (bards) who acted as professional guides' (Oberoi 1994:152-153). The other annual fairs held in honour of Sakhi Sarvar were at Dhaunkal in Gujranwala, held annually during the summer months, Jahandamela at Peshawar held every November to commemorate Sakhi Sarvar’s death, Kadmon Ka Mela at Lahore generally held in February. Similar gatherings on 'a lesser scale' took place at locl shrines to commemorate his memory (Oberoi 1994:154).

Indeed a visit to a Pir is part of a soothing healing process (P.30).

Maa bibi turned towards Chachi, 'take Shahni to a pir siana. I don't know what is the matter! For the past few days Shahni has been moving about with a lost look and I often catch her wiping her tears. She walks heaving heavy sighs, as if she has to cross a big hurdle'.

Along the path of Sakhi Sarvar, there are numerous other saints who are part of the cultural universe and people have specified expectations from them (P.41).

Sheikh Sadda's minars were visible from the horizons of Adalatgarh. As Nawab bowed, Chachi spoke up, 'Ask for a boon? 'If my wish is fulfilled I will light a lamp at Sheikh Sadda's durbar'. Shahni pulled the harness and stopped the horse, and got down. She bowed, at the entrance of the Khanaqah, kept some money for the oil and moved towards Adalatgarh.

Sheikh Sadda is an important saint of popular folklore who is specifically connected with women and children (Titus, 1959:147-148). According to the legend he was an Arabic scholar.
with occult powers, who used certain verses of the Quran for magical purposes through which he brought the jinn under his control. He lost his life due to his obsession with a princess and his attempts to win her over. Consequently he is believed to haunt women and bring harm to the children.

Titus states:

Women become "possessed", as they believe by Sheikh Saddu through the performance known as baithak, where dressed in men's clothes they gather and sit the whole night listening to the music that is supposed to induce the possession of the Sheikh's spirit. In this state of ecstasy they are able to reveal the Sheikhs advice as to how to attain their desires, or those of their friends. A ceremony called 'Bakra-i-Shaikh Saddu' is performed to protect the women from his menace' (1959:148).

Women specially require these aids to get back the attentions of their husbands or to restore a satisfying physical relationship etc. (P.285).

"Jethani your devar has become so obsessed with God and spirituality, that I have lost all that I shared with him". Shahni's heart missed a beat. 'Are you in your senses? I hope you have not fought with my devar'.

'I swear by the gurus, if I lie to you. My elder bharjai had taken me to Mia mast last winter. He gave me a potion to turn him back. But my heart could not agree to such a deceit. My lord is like a devata. I could not let myself play games with this sant for my pleasures.'

Another saint who is mentioned a number of times in the text is Shah Daula (P.361) the wali (guardian saint) of Gujrat. His shrine, Garhi Shah Daula, lies on the eastern side of Gujrat town. The followers of Shah Daula cult are distinguished by their unique features. No lands are attached to their shrine and its pirs are wholly dependant on the alms and offerings of the followers. Shah Daula's fame is largely related to the Chuhas or rat children who are:

an institution in the Punjab. They are micro-cephalous beings devoid of all power of speech, idiots, and unable to protect themselves from danger of filthy habits, but entirely without sensual instincts. They are given names but are usually known by the names of their attendants whose voices they recognise and
whose signs they understand. The popular idea is that these unfortunate ones have been blessed by the saint Shah Daula Daryai of Gujrat, and that though they are repulsive objects no contempt of them must be shown or the saint will make a Chuha of the next child born to one who despises one of his proteges (Rose 1970:634).

The earlier belief linked to Shah Daula's shrine's prosperity was Shah Daula's ability to procure the birth of children, the first one being a 'chuha' who had to be offered at Shah Daula's shrine. Later with time the miracle continued in a modified form. A visit and prayer at the shrine could procure a child. The parents had to in return present the child or make offerings at the shrine. If they failed to do so then retribution took place and the spirit of the saint ensured, the birth of a chuha the next time; this process continued till the promise was fulfilled (Rose 1970:630).

The wali of Multan Sheikh Shamsuddin Tabrizi is also a point of reverence, admiration and respect (p.361)

'Shahji, Sheikh Shamsuddin Tabrizi's Khanaqah is very famous in Multan. As Shahdaula is the wali of Gujrat, Shams Tabrizi is the wali of Multan'. Kashi Shah began the story, 'Pir Shamsuddin Tabrizi was murdered alive'. 'He was murdered and remained alive. Isn't it interesting?' 'He walked away carrying his skin along. It is said that in the land of Multan, even the Sun listens to the command of Shams Tabrizi. A mela of the saint is also held at Sheikhupura Bhera. Sick people, specially get incisions done from the barbers on their bodies, so as to bleed and be cured'. Karam Illahji added, 'there are a lot of shamsis in Sialkot as well'.

The famous Shah Latif is remembered fondly (P.327-328).

Fatehaliji said 'The language is a bit tough, Kashiram, try to explain it simply. 'When I look for the head I can't find the body, when I look for the body I can't find the head. The hands, wrists, fingers too have been cut apart and strewn somewhere. Those who go to attend the wedding of the virgin girl with the Sain, too are killed on the way' 'Wah! subhanallah! what a graphic description of the virgin girl's marriage'. 'Shah Sain we offer our salaam to your name'. Kashi Ran got emotional, 'Choudhryji Shah Latif was
no ordinary mortal. He was in the line of grand old men like Baba Farid. His sayings are like drops of pearls. Every other metal would pale before them'.

Towards the end of the novel a significant importance is given to a quissa of Mian Mir and Chajju Bhagat (P.372. See Political Discourse). Mian Mir was a famous saint of Medieval Punjab whose mausoleum was built in Lahore by Dara Shikoh. He greatly revered the saint of Gilan the Pir Dastgir. 'In piety, virtue, beneficence and learning he had no equal in the country in the age in which he lived' (Ali 1993:47). Mian Mir's famous disciple was Mulla Shah, who in turn guided Dara Shikoh. 'Thus Mian Mir's fame carried on for generations in folktales, quissas and myth' (Rose 1970:616).

Last of all is the general reverence and belief in the powers and healing touch of the Punj Pir bestowed on Punjab. 'Who these Punj Pirs are is a matter of which each worshipper decides according to his taste' (Rose 1970:572). Moreover, 'the identity of the five' keeps changing from place to place' (Saiyed 1989:243). These holy personages could be the five pandavs, or the five holy personages of Shiaism, or a selection of muslim saints as Khwaja Khizr, Sayyid Jalal, Zakaria, Lal Shahbaz and Farid Shakkarganj. In the Centre and West of the province the five may be Hindu and Muslim objects of worship and included Sithala Devi, Guru Khwaja, Gugga Pir etc. Therefore, when 'a man describes himself as a Punj piara, implies generally that he is indifferent to the saints whom he worships and probably a man of the lower orders' (Rose 1970:572). A large mela in honour of the Punj Pirs is held in Shahpur district every year.

2.2.2.2 Nature linked deities

In the context of nature, the focus right in the beginning of the novel is on Khwaja Khizr the God of water - the giver of water of immortality. It is as if the entire universe is constructed around this key figure (P.17).
A full moon night, the children are looking down from the top most terrace of Shahji's haveli. Allah Rakha, the boatman is bringing Shahji's canoe to the shore. 'Even in the whirlpools, Pir Khwaja Khizr's remains afloat. Nobody can see it, nevertheless, it is there’. 'Show it to me too, my Vira' said, Channi pulling her brother's shirt from behind. 'Does it never sink?' 'Bow before him Channa! Khwaja Khizr is the Pir of life. The one who creates whirlpools in the rivers and himself takes the boats across to safety'. Channi closed her eyes and folded her hands towards the river.

Even the famous Heera Sansi does not miss out on the significance of Khawaja Khizr while crossing the river, loaded with his loot (P.117).

Sensing danger Alia swallowed hard, 'you are the Sardar of darkness your wish is my command'. As the dachi was loaded, the boat tilted on one side. Alia took out the goodies and placed them on the floor, balancing the weight. Sansi invoked the blessings of Khwaja Khizr, 'come on, the rivers are ruled by the Pir of life, Khwaja Khizr. Remember the name of Khwaja Khizr and this boat will cross any whirlpool. All will be well by the grace of Khwaja Khizr'. Reaching the middle of the course, Alia opened his mouth, 'Even these tasks require the blessings of God, Sansi Ustad. It rained so heavily today and now just a few drops. Even these will stop once we reach across'.

Even an emotionally upset Shahni appeals to Khwaja Khizr in her moment of turmoil (P.322).

Watching the two brothers lost in listening to the intoxicating voice of Rabyan, their thalis lying before them untouched made Shahni's heart sinks 'oh! pir of life Khwaja Khizr, mere mortals don't have the power to make two banks of the river meet. Trying to seek another boat after reaching one end. No--no the, Pir of life don't create this mirage before my man'.

Khwaja Khizr is also known as Khwaja Khasa, Durminda, Durmindo, Jinda Pir, Bir Batal etc. A lot of legends are associated with Khawja Khizr, some present him as 'Balyabn Maikan a contemporary of Faridun B.C. 800 and claim that he lived in the time of Musa; others identifying him with a nephew of Abraham who guided Moses and Israel in their passage to the Red sea' (Rose 1977 : P. 562). The most popular legend perhaps is one that depicts him as a
general of Alexander who discovered the water of immortality, along with his brother Mihtar. 

Khawaja Khizr is revered by both Hindus and Muslims, but he is a particular favourite of Jhinwars, Mallahs and those dependant on water. His popularity mainly centres on his links with water:

(a) He is firstly connected to the vagaries and mysteries of power and force of water. He is 'propitiated' when a boat is launched and about to sail, or when the river is low, or threatens to flood and wash away the land. When a village is in danger from a river the headman offers it a rupee and coconut. He stands in the water and if it rises high enough to take the water out of his hand, it is believed that the river will recede. Sometimes seven handfuls of boiled wheat and sugar are thrown into the stream or a male buffalo, ram or horse (with its saddle) is cast in with its right ear bored' (Rose 1977:563). Giving an example of Montgomery district, Rose shows the manner in which vows and sacrifices are made to rivers. While the Muslims offer wheat, porridge mixed with gur, the Hindus offer Churmma, a portion of which is thrown in the river. The Hindus consume a part of the offering themselves while the Muslims distribute it among the poor. In Dera Ghazi Khan, Hindu water carriers sacrifice a goat or sheep to Khizr every second or third year in the rainy season. Again, generally at every harvest, Hindu and Muslim water-carriers cook 5 1/4 seer of porridge and go to a well, throw small portions of it thrice into the water and distribute the rest among children, Hindus on a Sunday, Muslims on a Thursday. As a popular saying underlining his sanctity goes, a person standing at a well is told: 'Hun tu si Khawaja Khizr de utte khalote ho, hun such bolna'. Now you are standing on Khawaja Khizr, so speak the truth.

(b) Fertility - Khwaja Khizr is also associated with fertility and begetting the desired heir. For procuring sons, Hindus place lamps made of dough on a well platform and light them every night. The novel also refers to his association with the well of life. Shahni turned on her side and woke up. 'Wah guru! wah guru. The pure darkness before dawn'. As if the earth is drawing out fresh exuberance from the well of life' (P.23)
(c) Fixing of prices - Lastly it is felt that Khwaja Khizr haunts the bazaars every morning and fixes prices for the day. Finally related to immortality he is known as satran piran da pir (pir of seventy rivers) (Rose 1970:562-565).

The other important forces of nature - Sun, Moon, Earth, sacred trees are deeply revered and constitute an integral part of the cosmological universe of the people (Discussed in detail in the Section (1.1). 'The power of the Sun holds its own in folklore, legends, myths, superstitions (P.27).

As Shahni apologises, 'a lighted lamp after sunrise in an insult'. 'Have mercy Maharaj. Indeed, a day is incomplete without the Sun and the night without a lamp.

In the morning a stopover at the Berionwala well is part of Shahni's morning routine for (P.25):

At the Berionwala well, the Brahmin girl Usha offered a tilak to Sooraj Bhagwan. Shahni closed her eyes and paid obeisance, 'it is your grace which has harmonious integrated the day and the night. Creator of the mystery of this universe, I bow before you' (P.25).

Shahni once again offers her respects and recognises the invincible Sun on her journey to Baba Farid's shrine (P.41) 'your radiance' is most powerful in the whole universe Maharaj'.

The omnipresent role of the Sun is acknowledged by everyone (P.283-284).

Intense heat of June, too much heat. Behold the great power of Dhammdev, it has warmed the earth to its ears. Before Sankranth the potters began to send earthen pots to people's houses. The women tied mohlis on the pure freshly made pots. Made arrangements for sending jaggery, flour and reoris to the Brahmins. 'Jai Dhammdev! your rays have generated powerful heat. Cool your eye devata, find relief in water and give relief. We offer full earthen pots at your feet. Bring peace to mankind with raindrops'.
2.2.2.3 Deified Martyrs/Ancestors

A number of heroes having attained martyrdom with violent deaths are also part of the folklore. They usually have recognised special links with certain localities or kin groups, such as clans and lineages, but some like Fakir Suri below have a much wider reputation and area of influence (P.334).

Munshi Jlamdin got into the field, 'you must have heard of Fakir Suri, Shah Sahib! This is a tale of old times. The enemies beheaded Fakir Suri in the battlefield and that brave man, held his head in his hands and stood up. No sooner they saw it, the enemies lost the battle...'

The worship of ancestors and the respect shown to them finds mentions directly and indirectly throughout the text, particularly with reference to Hindu Shradh ceremonies. It is also the foundation for cosmological, anthropological and existencial universe. The two aspects of this worship, one centred on Jathera (the clan ancestor) and, the other on Khera (the village ancestor) and their transformations from one to the other, or to a higher level deity have already been discussed.

2.2.2.4 Spirits and Magic

The belief in spirits, magic and similar metaphysical forces runs across the novel (P.168-170).

'Run every one! The piron ka bakra...... piron ka bakra. He will take you all away with his horns'. Carrying their little brothers and sisters the little one's scampered home. Rahma musali's twin boys came running in completely dazed. 'One white haired boy came out of the Fhathe-Churel well and disappeared into the refuge dump! We saw it with our own eyes'. 'Run'. Everyone's children rushed to the safe security of their grandmothers, mothers and aunts. 'Come on, what has happened that you are running like mad?' Bebe, Kanna saw a white haired child coming out of the well'. 'Hai oui Rabba', Bebe Sharbati quickly covered her head and bowed. 'This is my appeal to you. My appeal at the dust of your dargah
Baba Balashah have mercy; Batra Kanna's mother yelled out, 'listen little ones, don't go near the refuge dump. A jinn has been seen during daylight, may God bless us all'. Little Sukhni's son coughed and threw out the milk. Putting away the utensil, she placed the little boy in her lap, and began caressing his back, 'Go away, shoo, shoo, this horrible cough'. Dadi who was having her food called out, 'why are you making the little one cry? Give him your breast to suckle'. As Dadi placed another piece of roti in her mouth, Sukhni cried out 'Hai granny, do anything you can, my son is about to pass away'. Dadi got up, looked at the boy in the mother's lap, his eyes turned upwards. Then she began to beat her breasts, 'Hai rabba, do not take away this little sapling from our house, have mercy'. Sukhi's painful yelling gathered together everyone. Old Jamilo came down from the kotha (terrace) next door and stood at the entrance of the house and began murmuring.

'Kali chari, Kali chari
Kat kat dehi ko khaye
Pani bahaiye samudra ka bhut
Churel bhasm ho jaye
Kali chari ... Kali chari

As the boy opened his eyes, the mother and grandmother began to cry. Bebe Jamilo caressed the boys head:

'Red horse
Red suit
Red plume
Red mark'

When the boy began to suckle again, his granny's prayer fully guestured to take on herself all his misfortunes, she profusely thanked God, 'Sadke Rabba you have given him back'. Jamilo took the proffered dime, tied it at the end of the duppatta and comforted them saying, 'Yes, got him pardoned allright, our dear child. Don't forget to keep a piece of iron, a lemon and leaves of neem tree under his pillow'. 'Sure Bebe'. Then they quietly asked, 'Jamilo, whose spirit shadow was it?' Jamilo, after mentally remembering Pir-murshids, said in a low voice, 'that is the one, that white haired boy of the Awans. He was deceived and killed by his maternal uncle. His spirit frequently meanders around this village. Every year it comes out of the well and disappears in the refuge dump. Last year he hid himself in Hussaina's inner room and cast his shadow on Sultan. I rebuked and threatened a lot. But he did not budge. Finally
Tibbiwala Malwana had to be called to separate him from Sultan. Attempted to overpower him too. Tibbiwala burnt chillis and rebuked, "now you are part of the earth. Your journey of life is over. Forget about this place. Turn your face away. Speak whatever, you have to say and for whom". "The bhut said, "that scum Mussali, attacked me, not on the chest but in the back. I will take revenge". The Tibbiwala Maulana shouted, "I will turn your back into the chest, get away, get away". The bhut got scared and disappeared while the baba made sure that he was paid his two annas to the penny. While leaving Jamilo had some advice to give, 'make sure to offer churma in the name of Baba Lal. All the seven blessings of the Pir-Paigambars, don't get miserly about a trifling, four or eight annas'.

There is a great belief and fear in the power of the malevolent dead to harm those around them. These spirits are both male and female and are discussed below:

(a) Pret - the soul of a dead man according to some beliefs wanders around for about twelve months pending a suitable adjustment in the other world.
(b) Bhut - a general category for all those souls who are unable to achieve salvation (mukti) or some other suitable adjustment. A bhut's purpose remains to possess his old associates and kinsmen, creating in them emotional disturbances and malignant diseases.
(c) Jinn - largely a Muslim term for bhut like beings. Jins are believed to be made of fire and possess beautiful women.
(d) Gyab - ghost of a man who has died without the birth of a male issue.
(e) Deo - spirits mostly prevalent in water bodies.
(f) Khavis - called the souls of learned Muslim Sayyids which persistently haunt houses or women.

A number of forms of female spirits are also recognised:

(a) Bhutni - the female counterpart of bhut.
(b) Churel - largely believed to be the soul of a sterile woman. (Rose 1970:206) mentions two important classes of churels (1) ghosts of women dying while pregnant or on the day of child birth, (2) ghosts of women dying within forty days of child birth.
(c) Kachil - soul of a woman who dies during child birth.

(d) Puth-Pairi - a ghost with a horrible form and the feet turned backward.

(e) Nuris or fairies - They only attack women on moonlit nights, however, they are protective towards children. They are supposed to be largely Muslim and also called Shahpuri.

Generally the possession by spirits is handled by sianas who can exorcise them. The possession is known as shadow or 'xaya'. These sianas belong to different religions and attempt to cure the people of spirits by prescribed rituals, charms (mantar) and magic hathhula or jadutona. Rose has discussed a number of ways adopted by the village folk to rid themselves of evil spirits, a few examples of which are given below (Rose 1970:205). Malevolent deities are appeased by building them new shrines or by making offerings at old ones. Very often the grain offered is placed the night before on the sufferers head. This is called ORRA, a more elaborate form of this ritual is called Langri or Nagdi. The Bhuts are propitiated by the offerings of a basket of food, fruit and flowers, which is passed around the patient's head and then carried out after dark and placed on the road leading to the house or village to appease their anger. The sickness seizes anyone who tampers with the basket (Rose 1970:205).

The most important ritual regarding women and also from the point of view of the text relates to the dead first wife who is still called shaukan. At the time of the wedding, milk, oil, spices are poured on her grave. The "saukan mora" or rival wife's image (a small plate of silver worn around the neck) is put on by the new wife at marriage and worn till death. All presents given by the husband to the new wife are first touched on it with the prayer that the deceased will accept them and permit her slave to wear her cast offs' (Rose 1970:202).

In the beginning of the novel, Shahni wakes up in the morning and, as she begins her routine for the day, she has to grapple with the haunting image of Shahji's dead first wife Abrialwali (P.25).
Suddenly Shahji's feet felt unsteady. 'Oh! it was her, none other but Abrialwali wearing her red wedding subbar (Shawl), the wedding suit lined with golden thread and a sparkling gold nose ring'. A sudden fear gripped Shahni's heart. 'Today after so many years, Waheguru... Waheguru...' Shahni bowed her head and folded her hands in respect. 'My guardian your rightful claim as mistress of the Shah household goes, beyond life and death. I am just your humble slave'... She encounters the same image again: She opened her hair and rinsed it, and addressing her in her heart, she said, 'Sister, let your gaze always be benign. As for me never did I try to forget or tarnish your name and memory'.

Similarly even Shahji is not spared an encounter with his dead first wife (P.28).

'When she comes in my dream, she only asks, "Shahji where is my child. In the family line what matters is who begot whom". Saying this she laughs and disappears from view'.

Chachi Mehri who is childless too recalls rather pensively an encounter that she had with her dead lover Shah Ganpat's shadow, while she was looking down into the courtyard of the house from the balcony (P.48).

'The old days flashed before me as if they were really back. What did I see? My dashing Shah was standing on the deori as my own son. the same beautiful dress, the same curly hair, and the face as if of my own son' (P.48).

2.2.2.5 Jogis

An important constituent of popular belief and folklore in the Punjab were the Jogis. The jogi establishments at Tilla in Jehlum district and Jakhbar in Gurdaspur district were premier establishments for centuries (Goswamy and Grewal, 1967:6). The jogis of Kanphata sect 'wear large mudras in their ears and carry on their persons the sacred symbols of the faith: the seli, consisting of a string of black wooden thread, a bead and the nad, a little whistle made of horn; and the rudraksh mala'. (Grewal and Goswamy 1967:4). Notwithstanding their different affiliations and diversity in personality and power, Jogis constituted an important part of the landscape, folklore, myths, quissas and literature of Punjab.
Discussing the texts, read and recited at the dera of jogis of Jakhbar, Grewal and Goswamy assert that the ‘names of Goraknath and Machhandarnath are hallowed names at the dera; the legend brings in profuse references to Raja Gopichand and Bhatririhi, to Puran Bhagat and Raja Rasalu’ (1967:5). The assimilation of Jogis in the cultural fabric of Punjab is again an important construct in Waris Shah’s Heer. ‘Waris Shah is familiar with many of their practices: concentration on Shiva with closed eyes, suspension of the breath, celibacy, visiting places of pilgrimage going to the Siddh Mela in the Western Punjab, begging food from door to door, their idea of sunya and anhad, their ideal of detachment, their faith in miracles, their idea of obedience to the Guru, and their belief in nine Naths...' (Grewal 1984: 117-118).

However, from the point of view of popular faith, the most important thing is the manner in which:

Waris Shah tends to assimilate the Jogis with the sufis. Like the path of the sufis, jog is a very difficult path. Like the sufi it is necessary for the jogi to practice sabr, zikr, and ibadat. The jogis like the sufi should remember Allah all the time. The jogi has to cleanse his heart, like the sufi. The jogis of Waris Shah also believe that God is within man. The counterpart of the hamah-u-ast of the sufis is the sarab-mai Bhagwan of the jogis. The jogi is Allah wala. The term faqqaar is applicable to both the jogi and the sufi. Naturally, Waris Shah can bracket the Siddha and the Wali (Grewal 1984:118).

The world of the Jogis, as the text shows, was much admired, and revered (P.249):

Child, your devar has been in the company of Sialkotia Jogi Rammal. With a mere glance, he can predict rain, a sand storm or dark cloud. ‘Chachi, I have heard, that the Rathbena jogis can stop a storm by placing a sword amidst the ripe crop.

2.2.2.6:

The religious discourse of the text thus highlights the deep historical and social structural roots of the composite culture of Punjab, its richness and diversity, its religious co-existence and
selective mixing and borrowing combining motifs and symbols of different religious and cultural traditions. The historical development of the different institutional religious traditions and the complex integration of the popular into the institutional and vice-versa makes it extremely difficult to disentangle the institutional and popular as well as authentic inner developments and foreign accretions, although the people are quite clear about their primary religious affiliation and identity as Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Christians etc. However, the growing concern for the purity and distinctive identity of different religious traditions promoted by the reform movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries stimulated the need for distinguishing the authentic from the borrowed and institutional from the popular and treating the latter as superstition deserving to be discarded. This created various intrareligious and interreligious controversies and even communal tensions particularly in the urban areas. However, the villagers, as the novel depicts, kept clear of these controversies. They continued to follow their established traditions without actually challenging the reformers.

References:


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