Introduction
"In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic—in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out."

- Karl Marx

The eighteenth century was pregnant with possibilities to herald a flowering of the popular culture in Punjab. On the one hand, the Punjabi Sufis from Baba Farid Ganj-i-Shakar in thirteenth century onwards to Bullhe Shah in the eighteenth had saturated the Punjabi countryside through the popular sufi khanqahs, annual pilgrimages which also doubled up as popular performing arenas where the qissakars, varkars, dhadhis and others had popularized narratives having Sufi undertones and a distinctively Punjabi flavour. Displacing both the Persian as well as Braj, Punjabi language was emerging as a carrier of this sensibility which included, the Sikh writings also. The victorious eighteenth century Sikh struggle and its relatively egalitarian agenda were celebrated with Guru Gobind Singh accorded the status of its progenitor. The scholarly works composed in braj or sadhukari were not published until the late nineteenth century whereas many adaptations were orally transmitted in Punjabi countryside.

The alternative ways of being a Sikh were articulated in the Bhagat Ratnavali Bansavalinama, and Sau Sakhi, texts that effectively counter the formal, exclusivist notions contained in the Rahitnamas. Interestingly this shared universe of the high culture of the masters and the popular culture of laity comes to full bloom in the nineteenth century. Sufi and the qissa poetry in the eighteenth century raise the profile of ashiqs as implicitly heralding a new world through their tragic ends.(fn) Sayyad Hasham Shah takes this tendency further by explicitly stating that these ashiqs are shahidsFN also. Women are also bestowed noble status of a shahid in the cause of ishq. For him these Sufi romances are a challenge to the prevalence of sectarian boundaries as well as kinship relations. The social mobility, ushering into peace, economic progress and the cultural vibrancy witnessed in the reign of Ranjit Singh provides us the background to the thriving folk-popular cultural production during this period. This is a major reason that many writers produced these works celebrating the distinction of Punjab as against
the Turkish or Afghan influence. One such writer Qadiryar considers Maharaja Ranjit Singh the descendant of Puran and Rasalu, the legendary Punjabi figures and also differentiates the Punjabi ethos from his co-religionists, 'the apostate Turks'. This celebration of Punjabi identity with its legends seamlessly fusing into historical phenomenon operates with the politico-ideological sensibility to highlight the shared cultural universe. Shah Mohammad’s classic Jangnama Singhan Te Farangian regarding the Anglo-Sikh war elevates the import of this confrontation to a civilizational pedestal where British are representatives of a money-lending, crooked strain and the Punjabis which are otherwise Hindus and Muslims but their honour and prestige is safeguarded by the Lahore Darbar. For him the Khalsa army is the vehicle on which the Punjabi civilizational future depends. To prove his point Shah Mohammad joined the armed battle on the side of the Khalsa army which continued to enjoy wide respect amongst the masses despite its occasional indiscipline. However its assorted commanders were regarded as popular heroes and their steadfast loyalty to Ranjit Singh and valour displayed in battlefield is honoured by almost all the varkars, jangnama writers and qissakars.

The Lahore Darbar mediated the principles of the Sikh movement with the wider Punjabi populace in the early nineteenth century mainly through the carefully cultivated notion of state-in-person where Ranjit Singh stood above the routine of administration. This process of transforming into a Punjabi maharaja was on display in the popular culture realm employing three elements culled from the shared repertoire of the popular cultural agents. The Sikh struggle of eighteenth century enjoyed a wide acceptance in Punjab thus facilitating the rise of Khalsa was entwined with the ascendance of ashiq to the level of shahid. As a result, the persona of Ranjit Singh provided the site to fuse these tendencies. He was portrayed as an ideal ashiq (his romance with Moran); blessed warrior (shahid) and Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh. These abstract principles were activated into the social arena through his persona.

That this portrayal was not an isolated occurrence but a much wider process of intermingling of the Sikh lore (sikhi) with the Punjabi cultural universe was underway is also demonstrated by the prevalence of "Heer" narrative in Punjab. The hegemony enjoyed by Heer is so widespread that even a baptized Khalsa, Vir Singh Bal in the first quarter of nineteenth century also propagates his version of
Sikhism through Heer Ranjha wherein Veer Singh is Heer longing for Ranjha i.e. Guru Gobind Singh. Sayyad Fazal Shah in mid-nineteenth century and Man Singh Kalidas Gujranwalia in the last quarter of nineteenth century employ this narrative to articulate Islam and Vedanta, respectively thus demonstrating the relevance of this popular narrative throughout the century. Kaveeshars and qissakars respected Heer as embodying wisdom and to compose Heer was considered to be a hallmark of a poet worth his salt. Hindu, Muslim and Sikh writers address Guru Gobind Singh as pir which clearly shows that his popular persona was not that of anti-Islam. A nineteenth century Punjabi woman poet Piro calls herself the Heer of the guru.

After Ranjit Singh’s death in 1839 the Khalsa army with its panchayat system carried forward the agenda of Punjabi identity. Saturated with the ethos generated by worthy examples like Akali Phula Singh, the next phase is dominated by Sham Singh Attaraiwala, Bhai Maharaj Singh, Baba Bir Singh Naurangabadi, Khuda Singh and others who were instrumental in keeping alive the anti-British sentiment in Punjab in the mid nineteenth century. The defeated and demobilized soldiers of Khalsa army were a constant reminder of the sovereignty once enjoyed by the Punjabis. It is our contention that they provide us the bare architecture of anti-British sentiment in Punjab countryside and inspired the succeeding generations of Punjabi anti-colonial activists. The founder of the Kuka movement, Baba Ram Singh was also a sepoy in the Khalsa army in a regiment commanded by Prince Naunihal Singh and his initial followers had a fare sprinkling of Sikh soldiery. All these features taken together demonstrate that their Khalsa identity was anti-British in its sentiment and embodied the shared Punjabi ethos. Kuka movement was forcibly repressed by the government along with the sustained opposition by the entrenched Sikh elite. Their pro-government stance and casteist bias against the Kukas shows the persistence of this tendency throughout the Sikh movement in this period. Kuka vision of Sikh identity is evident from this incident: When the granthis of the Gurudwara Kesgarh Sahib refused to offer prayers on behalf of Baba Ram Singh and his followers on account of their being apostates, Baba Ram Singh replied, "You should appreciate our methods if you are a true Sikh. You violate the ethics of Guru Gobind Singh by indulging in meat, eating, drinking, lying, immoral activities and female infanticide. So the Kukas refuse to acknowledge you as Sikhs."
The above-mentioned phenomena are given a short shrift in various works whereas we feel that there is a case for significant continuities as well. Along with rehabilitating themselves with the colonial state in the wake of 1857 the respective religious elite gradually veered towards exclusivist, pro-British empire and status-oriented religious identities. On the other hand, the Nirmala, Udasi and Sewapanthi monastic orders of Sikhism were engrossed in opaque exegetical exercises in their respective establishments or *deras*. Although marginal to the everyday concerns of Punjabis, institutionally they were deeply entrenched through *deras, dharmshalas pathshalas*, etc and continued to be a source of knowledge for the Punjabis. The sewapanthis had the khatri merchants as their social basis in the western Punjab, the udasis managed the Sikh religious establishments and the nirmalas were especially privileged in the Malwa region under the Phulkiyan principalities. Minor orders like the Diwanas or Heeradasias, etc were also active in this period. For the purposes of this study we have not attempted any discussion of their doctrinal differences or on classifying them into categories but on their presence in popular arena is not altogether shorn of conflicts within and without.

The mention of the Gulabdasi sampradaya is instructive in this context. It weaves together many significant strands central to this study in order to highlight the potentialities in the popular domain and its dialogic character with the elite domain. Born Gulab Singh in Amritsar district, a jatt Sikh joined the Khalsa army at a young age. However, his quest for knowledge took him to an Udasi monk and then to the Sufis and other scholars. Widely respected for his intelligence and depth of knowledge, Gulab Singh, now christened Gulab Das, established his own dera in Lahore at a relatively young age. Gulab Das developed a trenchant criticism of rituals, caste hierarchy, *karma* etc, with human being as the central principle in his epicurean universe articulated in his doctrinal work, the *Gulab Gita*. His fame led to a flourishing stream of patrons and disciples. A *tawaif* Piro, jilted by a sadhu's betrayal was now living in Lahore under the strict eyes of Ilahi Bakhsh, a commander of the Khalsa army. Piro used to compose Sufi lyrics, fell in love with Sadhu Gualab Das. When their affair gained momentum, Ilahi Bakhsh's soldiers challenged Gulab Das's disciples and they could be separated only through the intervention of the maharaja who let Piro live with Gulab Das and asked him to shift his dera from Lahore. Resentful, Gulab Das came over to village
Chaththianwala, now in Qasur district. Both Piro and Gulab Das lived together in his *dera* with other disciples. They wrote some joint compositions; Piro sang and danced these verses. Incidentally Gulab Das is perhaps the only writer to express delight at the victory of British against Lahore Darbar and its army. With the passage of time his scholarshin and rational attitude made his *deras* excel in these branches. Two young disciples with pronounced opposition to empty rituals, superstitions and idolatry came to the main headquarters at Chaththianwala. They were shocked by the presence of a woman in the *dera*. Uneasy with this arrangement, they started raising their voice in opposition to such practices. Ditta Ram and Jawahar Mall quit the Gulabdsi *dera* in disgust. Piro died in 1872 and Gulab Das followed in 1873 asking his disciples to bury him in the same place where Piro lay. Meanwhile, Dittaram and Jawahar Mall became Khalsa Sikhs and came to be known as Bhai Ditt Singh and Bhai Jawahar Singh who participated in the public debates against the Arya Samajis and significantly both were the founders of the Lahore Singh Sabha (Harjot Oberoi, Tat Khalsa episteme). This shows the popular roots of a modern, rational outlook. On the other hand, the other Gulabdasi disciples were also known for their erudition and felicity over complicated doctrinal issues. Applying the surname *aarif*, many of his disciples especially Kishan Singh Aarif, Pal Singh Aarif and perhaps Daya Singh Aarif are celebrated for their literary output. Kishan Singh Aarif was a bookseller in Amritsar; his wife Chet Kaur was also a poet and following the example of Piro -Gulabdas, Kishan Singh Aarif and Chet Kaur also penned a joint *siharfi*; following the Gulabdasi tradition he refers to female lover as an inseparable element of divine persona and abuses the detractors of Gulab Das.

The ideological constitution of various sampraday and their leaders and its eventual institutional spread; their key disciples and their interface with its specific features yields a rich understanding of this period. These texts unravel the various levels at which the discourse was launched with differentiated degrees of popular elements as well as the classicity aspired to. For instance, the Udasi exegetical school was not scholarly oriented whereas the Nirmalas were well-trained in the Indian tradition. The intellectual biography of Gyani Gyan Singh is immensely significant in this context and partially mirrors that of Sadhu Gulab Das. It is not insignificant that Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha ridicules, denigrates and
misrepresents both of these figures in his classic encyclopedia of Sikhism, Gur Shabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh, stamped with Singh Sabha scholarship.

We can state with enough evidence that the origin of the Singh Sabha movement amongst the oft-stated condition is in avid contest with at least three contesting visions: the Khalsa political ethics of the Kukas and the others; the egalitarian intellectual strain of the Gulabdasis and the institutional spread and discursive depth of the voluminous Nirmala and Udasi scholarship with its own agents. Harjot Oberoi's ingenious observation that there are no sources to record the peasant's voice is patently wrong and in consonance with Richard G. Fox who asserts about the absence of any tradition commemorating anti-Mughal struggle in Punjab countryside. My concern is not to demonstrate any simplistic continuation of the Khalsa tradition but to mention the reconstitution of sikhī at the defining moments from Ranjit Singh to Bhagat Singh in the 1930's. These traditions continued through selection and omission by the participants, contesting as well as assimilating the Singh Sabha thrust and launched their own moral vision and ethical agendas through the institutional political domain in the Punjab as exemplified by 1907 agitation, Ghadar movement and lastly through the Akali agitation in 1920's.

The Dhadhis and Kaveeshars provide us with precisely the peasant voice and vision. A primitive count puts their number at 750 during 1725-1975. Starting with Jog Singh's Heer in early-nineteenth century the Kaveeshari tradition matures with the legendary Bhagwan Singh transcreating the classic Punjabi qissas - Heer Ranjha, Mirza-Sahiban, Sohni-Mahiwal etc. into the Malwai dialect as well as sensibility. This process is significant in delineating the routes adopted for popular cultural production, in avid contrast to the classicism of the master Sufis, qissakars, varkars and the philosophic sophistication of various sampraday and exegetical schools which emanated from individual or institutional nucleus. The Kaveeshari principle starts from the diffused, dispersed utterances of the rural folk in variegated spaces such as the village fields, the everyday village gatherings to marriage parties, local fares and the bigger fares.

Kaveeshari constituted a universe having many nodal points: its adopted and invented metres; chosen forms or narrative genres; disciples and their geographical breadth; performing arena; the descriptive principles of their compositions;
inventing new metres- all these characteristics impart this endeavour its heuristic distinction. Evolving in the eighteenth century, it matures in the course of the nineteenth century and continues till the 1960’s as a major vehicle of the rural cultural universe. Coupled with this the Kaveeshars enjoyed a rapport and prestige with the rural populace who came to them to get their advice or guidance on matters both mundane and spiritual. They were well versed in the Sikh lore, the Islamic tradition and the Vedantic Hindu thought. Most significantly, perhaps they were the sieve through which two-way traffic between urban public sphere and the village gathering was conducted. Their published works, called the chiththas, were published in impressive numbers consisting diverse genre like the pattals, sehras, prasangs, qissas, sakas, jhagras, bilases, granths and miscellaneous writings. We intend to exhaustively deal with these texts, to read them in contrast to the tracts, newspapers, journals, handbills etc brought out by the Singh Sabha movement in order to arrive at a wholesome understanding of the Sikh identity as a constituting element of the wider Punjabi identity.

The onset of the overt political activity in the Punjab in the 1900s gradually opened the space for popular cultural production to respond to their surroundings. The legendary Punjabi Kaveeshars of twentieth century Babu Rajab Ali, Maghi Singh Gill, Sadhu Sada Ram, Sadhu Daya Singh Aarif and others show the extent and depth of this tendency. Weaving local narratives; recording mundane happenings; writing in the popular idioms; performing in the village akharas carried the political attitudes far and across. Dhadhis like Sohan Singh Seetal and Gyani Kartar Singh Kalaswalia also excelled in fusing the Khalsa tradition with the popular domain. The formal, ritual-bound Khalsa identity propagated by the Singh Sabha movement sought to negate the anti-British sentiment. Rather, loyalty towards the government was actively nurtured in their activities. However, the events leading unto Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919 brought the simmering discontent to the surface. Chief Khalsa Diwan and the Singh Sabha were opaque to these currents to such an extent that it showed contempt for their notion of Sikhism as early as in 1916 when some radical Sikh activists got together to publish 'Akali'. Master Sunder Singh Lyallpuri said to Gyani Hira Singh ‘Dard’, "the Sikh leadership, aristocracy, and Gurudwara mahants have blemished Sikhism. They have raised servitude and loyalty to the British state to
the level of religion. Now is the time when we should join the battle and take the bull by the horns."

The Akali movement gathered momentum in the 1920s with the Gurudwara reform movement with Babbar Akali movement in the doaba region and Riyasati Praja Mandal movement in the Malwa region bringing the Punjabi Sikh peasantry onto a united platform mounting the Sikh identity on different principles than those offered by Singh Sabha. In this period we witness the linking of the Sikh lore with the general tendency towards the socialist consciousness mediated through the anti-imperial national liberation movement. The publication of 'Kirti' by Bhai Santokh Singh Dhardeo and assisted by Bhagat Singh shows the maturity of this undertaking. Finally we see the publication of Phulwari by Gyani Hira Singh Dard. Consciously rejecting the narrow exclusivist Sikh identity, Dard unequivocally calls for installing the Punjabi folk-romantic, heroic legendary icons- with Heer leading the way -to usher in a new era. Central Punjabi Sabha -with Punjabi language as the instrument stitching disparate sectarian boundaries -was the platform to launch an alternative vision of a shared Punjabiyat. It started organizing hugely successful poetic symposiums in major cities. Folk metres were employed by Punjabi writers who wrote about political issues, social reforms and egalitarian social order. Remarkably, the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were actively involved in furthering this agenda.

Thus we see that the end of 1920s reconstituted the Sikh identity through a political praxis. This is also the period when the popular - rural segment makes its presence felt in the mainstream Sikh domain. Simultaneously, a Sikh identity based on the correct social practice is forged in the urban-institutional arena. The cultural geographical divisions are transcended by the political movements in the Punjab countryside. Starting from various streams informed by a socialist idealism and tempered by its experience in the national liberation movement, this period witnessed the modern Sikh identity.

The thesis would contain five chapters. First introductory chapter Historiographical Issues in Sikh Studies would include a detailed discussion of. W. H. McLeod and Harjot S. Oberoi's works would be extensively dealt with. An alternative historiographical mapping of the Sikh movement would also be
attempted along with a discussion of new sources which contain an alternative notion of Sikh identity.

Second chapter titled as Lahore Darbar, Punjabi Maharaja and the Sikh Identity would discuss the Sufi works, *qissas*, *vars*, *jangnamas* and other texts and documents relating with the Punjabi society in the first half of nineteenth century. Hasham Shah, Qadiryar and Shah Mohahmmad’s works will be comprehensively analyzed. The characterization of Maharaja Ranjit Singh; popular regard accorded to the Khalsa army and its commanders; the status ascribed to Guru Gobind Singh; the prevailing centrality of heer narrative and celebration of a distinctive Punjabi identity by the poets belonging to different sectarian identities and its impact on the contemporary Sikh identity would be discussed.

Chapter 3 titled Sikh Identity and Contesting Institutions in the post-annexation scenario would focus on the major exegetical schools- Udasis, Nirmalas, Sewapanthis-along with other minor traditions and their respective social compositions. Nirankaris and Namdhari movements and their articulation of Sikh identity would be discussed. Gyani Gyan Singh and Sadhu Gulab Das would be extensively mentioned to show the negotiations between the elite and the popular domain. The general trend in this period of crystallizing religious boundaries would be discussed with special emphasis on the limits to the Singh Sabha movement by bringing new evidence to light.

Chapter 4 titled as Kaveeshars, Qissakars and the Reconstitution of Sikh Identity would highlight the distinctive nature of Kaveeshari tradition and the strategic location of Kaveeshars in the Punjab countryside. Kaveeshari as an institution saturating the rural landscape; its range expansion and depth; its descriptive principles foregrounding the everyday life of the populace; their Vedantic, Sufi and Sikh learning; performing arenas and their social ideological universe would be explored in this chapter. Comprehensively dealing with reconstitution of Sikh identity in the works of Maghi Singh Gill, Babu Rajab Ali, Sadhu Daya Singh Aarif and Sadhu Sada Ram amongst other Kaveeshars of the same period is attempted for they are acknowledged masters of the genre; enjoyed a vast networks of disciples; were prolific writers and performed widely; and were hugely popular. They were the chief architects of the rural- cultural sensibility of
the Malwa region in the first half of the twentieth century Punjab. This chapter would also consider the popular cultural output regarding the Ghadar movement, Akali movement, Babbar Akali movement, Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh.

Chapter 6 titled 'Sikhi' and the Question of Inclusivist Punjabi Identity would focus on the political attitudes of the Sikhs in the early twentieth century and challenging the Singh Sabha discourse in the mainstream institutional arena. The emergence of the radical Akalis with special emphasis on Gyani Hira Singh Dard and his contribution towards forging new institutions would be discussed. Akali movement's role in uniting the rural Sikh peasantry by transcending parochial boundaries on one hand and activating an alternative notion of being a Sikh on the other would be discussed in this chapter.