Most definitions of religion are advanced from the point of view of some particular religious creed and as a result fail to isolate the more universal essence of religion proper. Objectively religion involves the recurring performance of certain human activities and thus belongs to the realm of external phenomena; it is part of the hidden experience of psychic life. The problem of defining precisely the scope of religion is complicated by the fact that the more primitive the culture under consideration, the more pronounced the tendency of the religious sphere to absorb objects and activities which according to modern ways of thinking have no relation to religion.

Infact religion is an institution which instils a particular philosophy of life in an individual. An individual's outlook towards himself, kinsmen, his faith, economic and social aspirations are coloured by the religious doctrine he has received. Similarly, individual outlook towards society and fellow beings is influenced by religious faith. Although all religions advocate humanity and development of humanism and brotherhood yet their customs and practices differ.

The term sect is used in the sociology of religion to designate a particular kind of religious group. It is part of
a typology of religious grouping which has been found useful in the study of religious movements and bodies. All sects display a considerable degree of totalism in dominating the lives of their members. Ideological domination is usually supplemented and supported on the social level by measures which set the group apart, such as endogamy, limitations on the forms of participation with outsiders, refusal to take part in significant common societal activities, peculiar habits of eating and abstinence, and with some groups even peculiarities of dress. Related to these social forms of segregation is the notion of the sect members as comprising the “elect” some kind of religious elite. Sects are opposition groups, and they arise in opposition to the accommodation of “churches” or developing denominations in rejection of some other aspects of their milieu or in some combination of the two. The correspondence and interpenetration of religious and social interests has often been found associated with the origin and formation of sects. It has often been observed in the sociological literature that the sect is a lower class protest phenomenon (O’Dea Thomas F, 1968 in Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences).

Namdhari sect has all the characteristics specified in the Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences e.g. considerable degree of totalism, endogamy, peculiar food habits, dress, religious
elite, non-accommodated religious protest group, interpenetration of religious and social interests. Namdhari sect displays considerable degree of totalism in dominating the lives of its members, endogamous restrictions, peculiar dress and food habits and belief in religious elite (living Guru). In addition Namdhari sect came into existence in the form of non-accommodated religious protest group. The correspondence of religious and social interests has been associated with the origin of Namdhari sect.

Namdhari sect was born out a wedlock between Hinduism and Sikhism. But once it had taken birth it began to develop a personality of its own and in due course grew into a faith which had resemblance to both Hinduism and Sikhism yet had features which bore no resemblance to either (Singh, Khushwant, 1966).

Religion as a basis of ethnicity needs no argument. It is evident in all societies where there are diverse religious groups or even sects of the same religion. Therefore the social participation and group identification are quite strong in a religious group at regional level and even stronger at the sectarian and endogamous group level (Punekar, 1974). "In identity maintenance one has to assess the nature of the possible threat which close contact with an alien group implies in modern pluralistic society, where
contact is intense and unavoidable certain minor symbolic emblematic measures remain vitally necessary to maintain psychological distance from those outside one's group" (Kaur, 1986). In this chapter an attempt has been made to find out, whether Namdharis and locals have entered into the societal network of religious institutions of each other or abstained from it.

The Namdharis or Kukas constitute a distinct sect of Sikhism and have their own Gurudwaras. Their Gurudwaras are not ostentatious, and their worship is devoid of the elements of idolatory (rich canopies and covering over the Granth, waving of censors etc.) Which have become common practice in orthodox Sikh circles. Every Namdhari is expected to visit Gurudwara daily. Before going to Gurudwara, a Namdhari should wake up at about 3 O'clock in the morning. He should go out for a walk. Having been to the toilet, he should wash his hands seven times with either sand or ash or earth (clay). He should clean his teeth with a branch of Kikar or Neem tree. He should take some exercise also. He should take his bath either with well water or in a holy tank or a canal. He should take a complete bath daily, Purn Ishnan i.e. washing from head to foot. After taking his bath, a Namdhari should change his clothes every day, He should wear white clothes and tie a white "Sheeda pug" i.e. turban tied in a straight
manner. Thereafter he should sit on a silky or woolen white sheet to meditate. Then he should attend the congregation at the Gurudwara and listen to the Asa Di Var i.e. the hymns composed by Guru Nanak. While sitting in the congregation he should meditate with the help of a necklace of knots made in a white woolen beads and i.e. 108 bead woolen rosary. After the service at the Gurudwara is over, everyone is free to do his professional duties. In the evening again a Namdhari should say his evening prayer.

Namdharis had their own distinctive Gurudwara at Mandi and they were quite particular in visiting it. It was noted that approximately 59 per cent Namdhari respondents went to their Gurudwara occasionally (once a week) and 29.46 per cent of them visited it quite regularly. It was found that the Namdharis who had visited their Gurudwara frequently were less educated, in the upper age group and physically segregated from locals. In comparison to higher caste Namdharis, lower caste Namdharis visited their local Gurudwara more frequently. More than 90 per cent of the Namdhari respondents maintained that in addition to Mandi they had visited Gurudwaras at other places too e.g. Bhani Sahib (Ludhiana), Sirsa (Haryana), Delhi, Jiwanagar (Haryana), Chandigarh, Sundernagar (H.P.) and Amritsar.

As mentioned earlier, Namdharis believe in the
institution of Guru and give due respect to him. Whatever the Guru says they religiously adhere to him. Keeping in view the importance of Guru, enquiry was made to find out how frequently Namdharis visited their Guru. Approximately 90 per cent of the Namdharī respondents visited the Guru on very special occasions and rest visited him regularly (once in month). It was found that Namdharīs of lower castes, lower income group, less educated, upper age group visited the Guru more frequently than others.

Every Namdharī is supposed to pay regularly religious donations (Cess) to their Guru/Gurudwara. Nevertheless to find out the empirical reality, respondents were specifically asked how much Cess (religious donation) they were paying to their Guru/Gurudwara. With the exception of two, in addition to eleven respondents who did not respond, rest of the respondents were regularly paying Cess from Rs. 10/- to 1/10th of their income. However it was found that significant majority of the respondents were paying Cess in the range of Rs. 10/- to Rs.100/-. The cross tabulation of the data reveals that respondents with higher class and caste background were paying more Cess.
Table No. 7.1: Percentage distribution of Namdharis according to the amount paid as Cess to their Guru

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of Cess</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs. 10/- to Rs. 50/-</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>53.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs. 51/- to Rs. 100/-</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than Rs. 100/-</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2% of the Income</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/10 of the Income</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Namdharis believe in a living human being as their Guru. Therefore they are not supposed to build up place of worship at home but perform all their religious activities in Gurudwara only. However, approximately in 27 per cent of the Namdhari households, informal place of worship was found in the shape of religious photographs of Gurus and Hindu Gods Goddesses. On the other hand in each and every local household, quite a formal place of worship had been built up to perform different kind of religious activities. The local population was worshipping not only Hindu Gods and Goddesses but their local deities important among them was Shaligram.

Among Namdharis, no ceremony is complete without a prayer. Before going on journey or opening a shop or
occupying a new house, a short prayer is recited. This particular prayer is an important part of all activities of the Namdharis and popularly known as 'Ardas'. Ardas is a petition asking for what one desires from God. Namdharis say Ardas on all occasions i.e. religious, social as well as political. It is congregational in-character and is free from ritualism. There is no priestly class amongst them and anybody can lead the prayer provided he knows it. While saying Ardas, the Namdharis face their Guru if he is present there; otherwise they face the person who leads the prayer. With exception of only six, all Namdharis respondents had contended that they were saying Ardas before starting new venture.

The relative speed of assimilation depends upon internal integration of an ethnic group. In order to maintain its individuality and separateness, the members of an ethnic group abstain themselves from the activities of the host society. Obviously, internal integration within the group reinforces the ethnic identity but at the cost of "eventual assimilation". To what an extent Namdharis abstain themselves from the religious activities of the host population, a set of questions were asked to the respondents.

With the exception of only eleven, it was found that a majority of the Namdharis had visited the local temples.
However, there were very few individual cases who had visited the temples frequently. Some of the Namdhari respondents believed in local Gods Goddesses and 55 per cent of them had visited them too. On the other hand it was found that a very few locals on rarest occasions had visited Namdhari Gurudwara at Mandi.

The tabulation of the data revealed that respondents with higher caste and class background had more faith in the religious institutions of the host society. Neighbourhood too facilitated greater interaction and contributed positively towards assimilation on religious front.

Keeping in view the religious differences it is quite likely that Namdharis and locals may not be interacting quite actively in their religious congregations and festivals. Empirically, it was found that except for few individual cases, religious or festival participation was quite formal from both sides. The religious or festival invitations were generally forwarded through community organizations (i.e. Namdhari Sangat, Namdhari Vidyak Jatha, Sanatan Dharm Sabha, Arya Samaj etc.) and not at the individual level. Therefore, participation from both sides is at organizational level only. The locals were however quite
critical about Namdhari participation in their religious
congregations and festivals. The local respondents maintained
that bulk of the Namdhari population attended their religious
congregations and festivals quite superficially and
humiliated them by not accepting their "PARSAD" and
"CHARNAMRAT" (Religious offerings). On the other hand
Namdharis were complaining against the non-participation of
locals on their religious occasions.

In addition to religious and festival congregations,
local fairs also give an opportunity for greater interaction.
The two main fairs (Shivratri and Navratras) are celebrated
at Mandi every year. It was found that with the exception of
only one, all Namdhari respondents were participating in the
local fairs. However, a majority of the respondents
(approximately 80 per cent) had participated in the Shivratri
fair only. The findings of the study revealed that higher
caste and class background, young age and numerically local
dominated neighbourhood had facilitated Namdhari
participation in the local fairs of Mandi. The nature of
participation in the local fairs was quite formal on the part
of Namdharis. Namdharis are enjoined to eat strictly
vegetarian food, therefore, generally they avoid eating
during local fairs. However, a few Namdharis establish shops
and other commercial establishments in the Shivratri fair of
Mandi. Further, it was noted that none of the locals or Namdharis had picked up or discarded any of their festivals in the recent past.

Regarding the religious differences between the two communities, Namdharis maintain that in comparison to locals their religion is rational (without superstitions), more sacred, pure and complete Sanatani. In addition to this Namdharis believe in the institution of living Guru whereas locals believe in "MURTI PUJA" (Idol worship). On the other hand, locals claim that in comparison to Namdharis their religion is flexible, liberal and humanitarian. The locals too find the difference in beliefs between the two religions i.e. Namdharis believe in a living human being as their Guru whereas locals worship Hindu Gods-Goddesses and local deities.

Taking into consideration the above discussion, it can be concluded that "peaceful exploratory" contact is going on at religious front. The two groups are participating in the religious institutions of each other but mainly at organizational level. However, in comparison to locals, Namdharis participation is more in the religious institutions of the host society but not at the cost of their internal integration. The numerically local dominated neighbourhood, high caste and class background have facilitated greater
Religious interaction between the two groups.

Religion and Polity are the two basic institutions which were responsible for the birth of Namdhari sect. Hence it becomes difficult to discuss them separately. Both during its inception and later development, the aim and objectives of the Namdhari sect were launching a religious, social and political movement rolled into one.

The teachings of the Namdhari Guru showed that their long-term objective was to prepare the people for self defence. To avoid the influence of the Britishers, the followers of this sect were advised to keep themselves away from the institutions introduced by the Britishers. They were advised not to accept service in the British government institutions, not to send children to government schools, not to seek justice from the courts of Law but to settle disputes by reference to Panchayats, boycott foreign goods, not to use government postal services, and non-cooperation with all that was British.

Under the leadership of Namdhari Guru, religion was the foundation and corner stone of the fight against the political injustice and Christian dominance of the English rule. Looking at the doctrine of the Namdhari sect, one finds that in the beginning its object was the reformation of Sikh
religion but gradually it assumed a political character. It is impossible to separate Namdhari movement from political objectives. A secret line of communication and contacts of Namdharis with Russia, Kashmir and Nepal could not have been forged without political objects. Further, the underground political objective of Namdhari sect is exposed by the fact that chosen Kuka volunteers were given training in the art of bearing arms at night around Bhaini Sahib. Political indoctrination was carried on through a network of subas, naibsubas, jathedars and granthis. This could not be merely a part of religious activity.

Overtly religious and social aspects of Namdhari sect were of basic importance. However, political philosophy covertly regulated their social life. The inter-relationship of morality and politics was an old canon of the Sikh political philosophy. This canon was brought to a new life and vigour by the Namdharis by arousing a spirit of fanatical national fervour.

The political life of the Namdharis is still regulated by their religious head Guru and other religious institutions i.e. Suba and Caste Panchayat. The Namdharis still believe and adhere to the institution of "Guru" (hereditary Chief) and recognise "Subaji" (territorial head) assisted by the "Caste Panchayat" (Council of elders) for looking after the
group affairs and maintaining group solidarity (See Chapter III). The Namdhari Gurus advocated boycott of formal judicial system and asked its followers to settle their disputes in the Caste Panchayat. The Guru, Subaji and Caste Panchayat play an important role in order to settle the various issues. Nevertheless to find out the empirical reality, the Namdhari respondents were specifically asked to indicate whom did they approach in case of dispute (criminal or civil) involving Namdharis. It was interesting to note that more than 83 per cent Namdhari respondents had been approaching the caste Panchayat in case of dispute. The rest who did not approach the caste Panchayat had been settling down their disputes through a mediator. The respondents who had been approaching the Caste Panchayat in case of dispute were mostly older in age, belonged to lower Caste and class background and were concentrated in localities numerically dominated by Namdharis.

To probe further, Namdhari respondents were asked to indicate the person they approached in case of dispute (criminal or civil) involving Namdharis and locals. The data revealed that approximately 72 per cent Namdhari respondents approached the mediator, 6.25 per cent gave no response and rest of the respondents had been going to the court. The respondents who had been approaching the mediator in case of
dispute involving Namdhari and locals were mostly younger in age, had higher educational qualifications and were concentrated in localities numerically dominated by the locals. Further at caste level in contrast to lower caste Namdhari, higher percentage of high caste Namdhari respondents had been approaching the mediator in case of dispute involving Namdhari and locals.

The Namdhari are in the process of being absorbed in the national stream if we look at their participation in the formal political organization. How far have they been able to integrate in the national political system can be gauged with the help of their political awareness. The political awareness can be better gauged if we find out their political participation in the formal political system. The participation has been worked out for the present study with reference to the percentage who actually exercised their franchise during the last election. It was encouraging to note that a majority of Namdhari respondents (95.54 per cent) had voted in the last election. This percentage was very high in comparison to national level. It proved that Namdhari were quite aware of their voting right and played active role in choosing their leaders.

We would be interested to know whether they had made independent rational decision of their own or their voting
behaviour pattern was influenced by the decision of their family, or Guru Maharaj. As far as decision to cast a vote was concerned, approximately 43 per cent made an independent decision and approximately 55 per cent voted according to the decision of the Guru Maharaj only. One respondent exercised his franchise according to family decision. The tabulation of the data revealed that respondents who voted according to Guru Maharaj's decision, a higher percentage of them belonged to lower caste and class background.

Broadly there are two main considerations while casting vote - Individual and Party. The Namdhari respondents were asked to indicate what was their main consideration while casting vote. It was noted that for approximately 62 per cent Namdhari respondents, party (mainly Congress party) had been the main consideration while casting vote whereas for approximately 22 per cent, individual (personal attributes) had been the main consideration while casting vote. The rest 16 per cent respondents had given due weightage to both the party and the individual. The respondents who had been giving due weightage to party while casting the vote mostly belonged to lower caste and class background.

It is important to highlight here that as per the dictates of their Gurus, a majority of the Namdharis in the past had been casting their votes in the favour of Congress.
party. However, during the recently concluded elections, Guru did not interfere and remained silent on the issue, resulting in a high percentage of Namdharis exercising their franchise in the favour of Bhartiya Janta Party.

The Namdhar Gurus and its followers had close links with Congress party since the days of national freedom struggle. As per the dictates of their Guru, Namdharis had always voted in favour of Congress party. The followers of Namdhar religion were the "Vote Bank" of Congress party since the independence of the country. However in the recently concluded elections a majority of Namdharis voted in favour of Bhartiya Janta Party which may be attributed either to their desire for change or as a backlash against Congress under whose regime 1984 riots took place. In addition, the Guru might have expected political change this time and covertly instructed his followers to go with the winning candidate, so that they are not isolated but are in the main stream. As Bhartiya Janta Party was emerging a major political force in Himachal, therefore, an overwhelming majority of Namdharis voted in the favour of Bhartiya Janta Party candidate this time expecting some benefits for their community.

Each political system looks after the interests of its members and gives them protection from within the group or
from outside. To find out the empirical reality it was enquired from the Namdhari respondents whether their interests were well represented in Mandi. Approximately 45 per cent replied in negative and maintained that inspite of their repeated requests, Punjabi language and particular dress for the Namdhari children had not been introduced in the local schools. Further, administrative social and political discrimination and prejudices were also practised against them. A higher percentage of such respondents belonged to lower caste and class background.

India is a vast country marked by different religions, languages, customs and traditions. The unity in such diversity can be seen at the political and cultural levels. When India became independent in 1947, the national leaders were aware of the fact that there were several isolated groups which were far behind the national stream and were completely ignorant about the new social, cultural and political developments. To remove their backwardness and to bring them in the national stream, the framers of the Indian Constitution made some provisions in the shape of protective discrimination for certain minorities e.g. reservation etc.

The Namdharis were asked to indicate if they were in favour of reserved seat for Namdharis in Municipal Committee of Mandi Town. Approximately 75 per cent replied in
affirmative. This might be attributed to their desire for maintaining their ethnic solidarity. Such respondents were found to be mostly older in age and of higher income group, engaged in the occupations of higher prestige and with less educational qualification. At caste level in comparison to higher caste Namdhari, the higher percentage of lower caste Namdhari were in the favour of reserved seat. Further, a majority of such respondents was concentrated in the localities numerically dominated by Namdhari.

To countercheck, local respondents were also asked whether they would like Namdhari as their elected representatives. Approximately 61 per cent replied in affirmative. The tabulation of the data revealed that the respondents who would like Namdhari as their elected representatives were mostly younger in age, engaged in the occupations of higher prestige, and had higher educational qualifications. At caste level no clear cut pattern emerged.

The above analysis helped us to conclude that Namdhari were quite aware of their voting rights and majority of them had been exercising their franchise in different elections. However, Namdhari still recognized 'Guru' (hereditary chief), 'Subaji'. (territorial head) and 'Caste Panchayat' (Council of elders). These informal religious institutions played an important role in the life of Namdhari. Further,
the informal institutions had much more impact on the respondents of lower class and caste background in comparison to those respondents who had higher class and caste background. The large number of Namdharis not only adhere to their informal religious institutions but for maintaining ethnic solidarity and representation of their interests, a majority of such respondents was in the favour of reserved seat for Namdharis in Municipal Committee of Mandi Town.