Chapter 1

AN OVERVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

Before 1947, there were only a few books and articles on the history of the Sikhs from 1849 to 1919. Writing a general history of the Sikhs in the 1960s, Khushwant Singh could list no more than a dozen. By now, however, there is a wide range of historical literature on this period. It would be useful to turn to this ‘received wisdom’ before launching on a study of social transformation among the Sikhs from 1849 to 1919.

The first section of this chapter relates to N.G. Barrier’s *The Sikhs and Their Literature* as the most appropriate starting point. The next four sections relates each to one or another aspect of social transformation. The last section is a brief comment on this literature and the present study.

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*The Sikhs and Their Literature*, published in 1970 as a guide to tracts, books and periodicals from 1849 to 1919 provides the most useful information on source materials. Barrier has listed various kinds of sources which can be used for a study of the Sikhs during this period. The first section provides information on Sikh publications, listing 724 books. This section includes works written by some of the important writers of the period like Ditt Singh, Mohan Singh Vaid and Kahn Singh. The second section lists anonymous publications. The third section has Sikh institutional publications – books published by the Chief Khalsa Diwan, the Educational Conference and the like. The fourth section lists Sikh periodicals published in the Punjab and the annual reports on the Punjab press compiled by the special branch of the Punjab Police Department. Barrier has added a detailed note on the proscribed literature.

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Apart from providing a comprehensive bibliography, Barrier comments on the state of the Sikhs in this period. According to him the Sikhs faced a crisis of identity in the 1860’s when their population had begun to dwindle. Sikh intellectual activity in the nineteenth century focused on understanding what constituted tradition and orthodoxy. It was during this period that Trumpp published his translation of the *Adi Granth* in 1873, expressing the opinion that it contained nothing new and that the Sikhs were a sect of the Hindus. His book evoked strong reactions from the Sikhs. They responded with *Ham Hindu Nahin*, a polemic by Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha. Support came also from M.A. Macauliffe’s work on the Sikh religion. The Sikhs were at this time exhibiting fresh interest in their past and in their historical literature in general. By the end of the century at least two societies sponsored historical research.

The Nirankaris and the Namdharis were the earliest protagonists of reform in Sikhism. Barrier underlines that a new chapter in the evolution of the Sikhism opened with the founding of the Amritsar Singh Sabha in 1873 and the Lahore Singh Sabha in 1879. These two Sabhas adopted similar programmes. The Amritsar Singh Sabha, led by the likes of Baba Khem Singh Bedi, belonged to the conservative element, while the Lahore Singh Sabha was more radical. Among its leaders were Bhai Ditt Singh, Professor Gurmukh Singh, Bhai Takht Singh and Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid. Even a more radical sabha was founded by Babu Teja Singh Overseer called the Bhasaur Singh Sabha. These Sikhs, and others like them, provided motivation and continuity for the Sabhas and served as links in an informal communication chain binding the dispersed organizations.

The inability of the Amritsar and Lahore Singh Sabha to see eye to eye with each other and the need for a central organization led to the formation of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902. It was headed by a new generation of reformers, like Sunder Singh Majithia, who prepared
its draft constitution. The Diwan provided a meeting place and a centre of communication for educated Sikhs, collected funds, administered central institutions such as the Amritsar Khalsa Orphanage and Khalsa Tract Society. The Chief Khalsa Diwan also took positions on theological and social issues and mobilized Sikh opinion in support of issues like the Anand Marriage Bill.

A variety of Sikh institutions specialized in the publication and distribution of tract material in the form of proclamations and requests (ain or benati) and in the form of polemics, short pieces attacking enemies or defending a cause. Barrier looks upon Kahn Singh's *Ham Hindu Nahin* as a form of popular polemic. The growth of Sikh journalism, thus, offered an important means of communication. Sikh newspapers and periodical were started, like the *Vidya Pracharak* and the *Gurmukhi Akhbar*. The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed a great upsurge of Sikh journalism.

Ideological movements in the late nineteenth century furnished much of the impetus for the development of Sikh political consciousness. The relationship between Hinduism and Sikhism became an absorbing issue for Sikh leaders. A decade after the introduction of the Arya Samaj in the Punjab in 1877, Sikh cooperation turned to hostility as the Aryas insisted that the Sikhs were Hindu. Equally important was the issue of Hindi versus Panjabi, which greatly agitated the Hindus and the Sikhs. Sikh relations with the Muslims also worsened in the 1890s. The Sikh fascination with martyrdom obviously showed the Muslims as the culprits. The Morley-Minto reforms, that would transfer power in the hands of a Muslim majority, made things worse.

Many of these developments were influenced by the introduction of British rule. The work of Christian missionaries, techniques of organization, journalism, and Western concepts accentuated divisions and spread communal consciousness. The institutions of bureaucracy
and municipal committees became arenas of power and competition in which Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims vied for dominance.

British policies and tactics reflected 'a basic British ambiguity towards the Sikhs' like the maintenance of Sikh aristocracy and gurdwaras for indirect control over the Sikhs, and continuation of dharmarth grants and Sikh baptismal rites for Sikh army recruits, and at the same time not really trusting the Sikhs. 'Loyalty' typified the tone of Sikh politics until 1919 when a renewed sense of separate political identity based on religion eventually brought the Sikhs into conflict with the British. Initial signs of unrest involved a central Sikh institution, the Khalsa College at Amritsar, where a revised constitution was forced on the Managing committee in 1908. The College was brought entirely under official supervision. Other issues of contention were the Anand Marriage Bill which saw the largest Sikh political mobilization prior to 1919, the principle of communal representation in Morley-Minto reforms due to which the Sikhs made greater efforts to safeguard themselves, and the Rakabganj affair when Sikh militancy reached new heights. All these issues sorely tested British-Sikh relations.

Though unable to sort out the various elements, the British realized that the neo-Sikh movements posed a threat to the loyalty of the Sikhs. A C.I.D. note on the Sikh politics states among other things: 'There need be no hesitation in predicting that those Sikhs who affect the new faith will inevitably tend to degenerate as regards their loyalty to the Crown'.
the uprising of 1857-58. She has used the records of the Government of India from 1849 to 1859, the secret mutiny papers in Urdu, the mutiny files at the Patiala State Archives, publications of Punjab Government like the Gazetteers, Revenue Reports, Reports of Revised Settlements and the like. Besides the unconventional sources like the Annals of the Indian Rebellion, containing narratives of the outbreak and eventful occurrences, and stories of personal adventures during the uprising of 1857-58, Domin has used the Khalsa Darbar records and private correspondences. With the help of these sources, she has studied in detail the background of the annexation, the administrative set up, property relations in agriculture, utilization of landed property, British policy towards ‘feudal’ forces and the disbandment of the Khalsa army.

According to Domin the passive attitude of the Sikh peasantry, and in fact the rural masses of the Punjab, played a decisive role in enabling the British to keep their hold on North India. One of the major reasons was the British readiness to sanction the existing status of ownership in agriculture by law and to reassess a relatively moderate land tax due to the peoples ‘clamorous’ protests. Consequently, the Punjab peasantry was in a better condition than in the older provinces in 1857. The Sikh community had the highest number of agriculturalists and among them the percentage of proprietors was again the highest, as was probably of those who had a large share in occupancy tenant rights.

The Sikhs had fought two wars with the British and lost. They had no leader in 1857. Those who were in British service were greatly influenced by the Punjab authorities who used their power to stir up ill-feeling and to fan hatred for the ‘Purbiahs’ and the Mughal Emperor alike. Thus, Domin explored an important area virtually untouched by Barrier.
In a later article entitled 'Sikh Politics in British Punjab Prior to the Gurdwara Reform Movement', Barrier has explored Sikh politics further in terms of British policies and institutions which had a bearing on the way in which the Sikhs saw themselves, and individuals and groups assessed political alternatives. He has also examined how the Sikhs reacted to the potential dangers associated with the West and British rule. He has paid special attention to the Chief Khalsa Diwan and the politics of resolving conflict within the community in order to present a united Sikh response to changes within the political system.

According to Barrier, a new political system was evolved by the British by borrowing ideas and structures from the earlier regime and transferring new doctrines and institutions which gave Punjab politics a particular cast; a balance was struck between personal rule of the officers involved in local affairs and a separate judiciary. Support groups, in the shape of those associated with the former rule, were developed within the Punjab. Their numbers slowly increased. By 1900, education and training gained importance. Some key assumptions were part and parcel of colonial rule. Among these were, warlike trait, concern with image, being seen as judicious and fair, official regard for custom and existing institutions, allocation of resources depending on whose help was thought to be valuable, notion of a content 'yeomanry', the 'natural leaders', the nomination of local magnates to new committees and a 'contamination' view of politics. The British took the Sikhs very seriously and yet tried to avoid their being seen as either favoured or distrusted. Three categories of Sikhs were of importance to the British; the cultivators of land, the soldiers and the aristocrats. The new rulers remained keen to keep track of those who controlled Sikh shrines which they were keen on handling themselves, the Kukas, and the supporters of Maharaja Dalip Singh.

Punjab politics reflected both the traditional and modern elements. There was a tendency among Punjabis to divide along
religious lines based on their historical experiences prior to 1849. An increasing number of activities tended to centre around the work of the relatively small range of Western-educated or middle-class groups residing primarily in urban areas. Their concerns tended to be limited and local involving matters of economic or religious significance. Factionalism and belligerence were common in Punjab public life.

Politics and religious revitalization were frequently inseparable in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The Sikhs, according to Barrier, tried to define and then promulgate a sense of identity and separate consciousness at a time when most Sikhs felt comfortable with little if any distinction between the beliefs and practices of Hindus and Sikhs. The Singh Sabhas carried on three related types of politics: first, the struggle among the Sikhs over legitimacy and doctrine; second, the defense of Sikh interests against that of other Punjabis; and third, representation on the municipal committees.

Till the end of the nineteenth century the Sikhs had continuously looked for support from the British to meet their aspirations. As a minority, they did not have the numbers to make it alone and could not relate to any other community in the Punjab, as they were competing with them for the same favours. Therefore, professions of loyalty were regularly aired. However, by this time the structure and policies of the British affected the community’s interests more directly. The issue of Dyal Singh Majithia’s will brought home to them that traditional tactics could not suffice as access to resources came to depend more on competition and elections.

The Chief Khalsa Diwan was created as a central body to co­ordinate and lead the Singh Sabhas. In time, it was accepted as a major spokesman for the Sikhs. It made three key contributions to Sikh politics. The first was institutionalizing the Singh Sabha view of Sikhism as a separate religion with distinct rituals and a tradition devoid of Hindu influence; the second was the linking together of
disparate Sikh organizations in an effective communication system; and the third was the development of a strategy for dealing with internal division and survival as a minority community.

Ian J. Kerr has explored Anglo-Sikh relations from 1849 to 1919. Soon after the annexation of the Punjab the British began to seek the consent of the governed. British rule in the Punjab, ‘not based upon the broad foundation of national sympathy or prescription’, had to be made as popular as it could be. The right to govern based on power (military conquest, military garrisons and police forces), which was never abandoned, was to be made stronger by the tacit and then the active consent and collaboration of many of the governed. Collaborators were needed to mediate between the colonial regime and the population of the Punjab.

In this context the British came to appeal to the Sikhs in various ways and at different levels of interest and identity. Direct self-interest was met by giving employment, pensions in the army, land in canal colonies to the Sikhs and dharmarth grants to religious men. Religious identity was fostered by way of baptismal requirements for army recruits and support of Sikh shrines; the interest and identity of the notables was kept up by involving them in the process of government by deputing them as honorary magistrates, zail and extra-assistant commissioners. Symbolic honouring like that of the time of Ranjit Singh was also carried out. The Sikhs were respected and feared and there remained an ever present ambivalence of the British towards the Sikhs and the fear of the other sources of authority who could challenge the legitimacy of the British rule in the Punjab.

Based on a detailed study of the Ghadar Movement, H.K. Puri has made a brief and lucid statement rather recently.
Already before 1947, Ganda Singh had published *Kukian Di Vithiya*, containing 52 letters of Baba Ram Singh written from the jail in Rangoon after 1872, with a short history of the Namdharis. The author regrets that great disservice was done by the Baba’s followers by adding prophecies to the *Sau Sakhis* and showing Baba Ram Singh as the eleventh Guru of the Sikhs. He denies this claim in his letters. According to Ganda Singh, such claims jeopardized the contribution made by Baba Ram Singh to the Sikh reform movement.

The Namdhar movement was started by Baba Balak Singh before 1849 in the upper Sindh Sagar Doab. His followers were known as ‘jagiasu’ or ‘abhiasi’. He advocated a return to the simple religious message of the Gurus. Baba Balak Singh was succeeded by Baba Ram Singh who established his headquarters at Bhaini in Ludhiana district where the movement gained wide popularity. He advocated abolition of all caste distinctions among the Sikhs. The *Guru Granth* for him was the *Adi Granth*. He was opposed to the worship of pirs, tombs, Gugga and Sultan. Ganda Singh was of the view that the Kuka Movement was ‘a purely religious movement’ and that ‘at no stage had the great Kuka leader said or done anything to encourage or connive at any crime. He had no political aims and preached no rebellion ideas’. As a complement to the letters of Baba Ram Singh, Nahar Singh published documents as *Gooroo Ram Singh and the Kuka Sikhs*. The officials records relating to the Namdhari Movement from 1863 to 1880 were published as *Rebels Against The British Rule*, edited by Nahar Singh and Kirpal Singh. This volume also contains extracts from four English newspapers from April to November 1872. Altogether, it provides ample material for reconstructing an important phase of the movement and an important phase in the life of Baba Ram Singh.

In 1965, M.M. Ahluwalia had used a considerable volume of
official records, besides the existing Namdhari literature and interviews with ‘Guru Jagjit Singh ji Maharaja’, for his *Kukas: The Freedom Fighters of the Panjab.* It is largely a biography of Baba Ram Singh. At the same time, Fauja Singh Bajwa published his *Kuka Movement: An Important Phase in Punjab’s Role in India’s Struggle for Freedom*, bringing out the political significance of the activities of Baba Ram Singh and his followers as a people’s struggle for freedom, distinguishing it from the uprising of 1857-58. In Bajwa’s view, the Kukas made a significant contribution not only in the political sphere but also in the social and religious spheres. The Kuka Movement represented ‘a progressive force’ which might rightly be said to have paved the way for the Singh Sabha Movement which simply carried forward the work begun by the Namdharis, giving in this process a new interpretation to the Sikh doctrines in the light of Western influences. The author looked upon his work as a dispassionate and objective study of the Kuka Movement. Both these books were written with the background of the centenary celebration of the Great Uprising of 1857-58.

Making use of all the published materials, W.H. McLeod wrote an article *Kukas as a millenarian sect.* He refers to theories which have been advanced on the Kuka outbreak of 1871 leading to the collapse of the movement. The early British theory had treated the outbreak as an isolated, insignificant, and somewhat sordid failure, but the modern interpretation regards it as a setback on the road to ultimate triumph. McLeod interprets the Kuka movement as a distinctively Indian example of the millenarian pattern.

According to McLeod all the four stages of a millenarian movement, suggested by Norman Cohn, were more or less present in the Kuka movement. The ‘disturbed social environment’ in which it developed was present in the Punjab. An increasing population pressure could be seen in middle and later nineteenth century. The
year 1858 saw failure in harvests and the year 1860-1 a famine, which presumably led to discontent among the Jats, particularly because army recruitment was not yet open to them. The second stage was that of the appearance of a holy man, Baba Ram Singh of Bhaini, who according to McLeod was the only holy man around. The third phase was the junction of the leader and the group, with a social myth adapted to their needs. This myth was met by the so-called 'Sakhi of Guru Govind Singh' acquired by the police in 1863 which names Ram Singh, the carpenter, as a reincarnation of the Guru. The fourth stage involved 'a frantic urge to smite the ungodly' which was carried out by the Kukas by first attacking Muslim butchers in Amritsar and Raikot. The Muslims, according to McLeod, were the traditional enemies of Sikhs. The British represented the second enemy. The Kuka sect was best understood as a distinctively Sikh version of a common millenarian pattern. Seeing the Kukas as rebels or nationalists, pursuing deliberate and coherent political objectives, does not make any historical sense for McLeod.

The Nirankaris have received less attention from the historians. John C.B. Webster is the only writer to have applied modern critical methods to the study of Nirankari history, paying more attention to the 'cult' than to the leaders, and paying more attention to the nineteenth-century developments than to the later history of the movement. For the nineteenth century his sources are largely non-Nirankari. He has given due importance to the Nirankari Hukamnama issued before 1870. The traditions that the Nirankaris began to collect and record in the late 1920s and 1930s are used by Webster for their self-image and not as sources for the early history of the Nirankaris.

Webster is of the view that the Nirankaris have been a small, non-aggressive, basically a religious body which was not oriented towards political or even social change. Unlike the Namdharis they never got into trouble with the government and unlike the Singh
Sabhas they developed neither an active publication programme nor institutions. In addition, they seem not to have become numerous enough or 'heretical' enough to have caused alarm or stimulated much controversy within the Sikh community. Webster is not in agreement with the label movement for the Nirankaris as it did not involve collective effort, nor were the Nirankaris assertive or aggressive enough to bring about change. They did not have any impact or even influence on any part of the social order. He prefers the label 'cult' for the Nirankaris.

The beginning of the Nirankaris can be placed between 1843 and 1845. Baba Dayal, the founder, did not seem to have departed from the teachings of Guru Nanak, and the Adi Granth played a central role in Nirankari ritual and teaching. Opposition to the Nirankaris came not from the Sikhs but from the Hindus due to the denial of the gods of the Hindu pantheon. Therefore, the Nirankaris appear to have stood firmly within Sikh tradition from the outset. However, in the eyes of his contemporaries Baba Dayal was an innovator in the area of religious ceremonies. For Webster, Baba Dayal was a radical, if not an innovator, and his aim seems to have been to bring Sikh ritual into conformity with the teaching found in the Adi Granth. The(rahit) promulgated by Baba Dayal was made obligatory through a Hukamnama issued by Baba Darbara (1855-1870. According to the Hukamnama, the Sikhs were straying from the path laid down by the Sikh Gurus by following Brahmanical rites. Webster is of the view that since no rite of initiation was followed, Baba Darbara Singh did not see his followers as a separate group or sect from the Sikhs or Hindus but a collection of people who had decided to reorder their ceremonial life along the lines laid down by Guru Nanak and Baba Dayal. The Hukamnama is addressed to all Sikhs as coming from both Guru Nanak and Baba Dayal.
The Anand Marriage Bill was supported by the Nirankaris who wrote two letters to the government in its favour. Though the Nirankari marriage ceremony bore a strong resemblance to the Anand marriage ceremony, it is difficult to say that the Nirankari's were its originators. It is important to note, however, that the leaders of the Tat Khalsa cited the example of the Nirankaris in support of their view that the Anand marriage was prevalent even among the Sahajdhari Sikhs.

The Nirankaris contributed to the religious ferment within Sikhism in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, however, they were on the fringes of the Sikh religious reform. Influenced by the Singh Sabha Movement, they began to record their tradition and to define their position. The theological position taken earlier was somewhat elaborated and an attempt was made to distinguish the Nirankaris from the other theological positions among the Sikhs which they had to contend with. They continued to claim to be Sikhs and saw themselves as a reform group within Sikhism rather than a sect or religion.

The Nirankaris disagreed with the Singh Sabha and Akali Sikhs on three points. A living Guru was for them of utmost importance. The invocation of God as 'Bhagauti' was rejected by the Nirankaris. They made no distinction between Keshdhari and Sahajdhari Sikhs. The message of Guru Nanak according to them was universal and all those who followed it were Sikhs.

Dr Man Singh Nirankari, the present head of the movement, has written extensively on Sikhism and the Nirankaris from the Nirankari viewpoint. He has also encouraged Sikh and non-Sikh scholars to write about the Nirankari heritage. Two collections of articles have been published on the basis papers presented at seminars, one edited by J.S. Grewal and the other by Navtej Singh. Attempt has been made by a number of contributors to study the movement in some depth and to make an advance over John Webster's The Nirankari.
Sikhs. As pointed out by J.S. Grewal, the Nirankari studies are still in their infancy. An important reason for this unsatisfactory state is the dearth of source materials, which makes it all the more necessary to study the movement in close relation to the precolonial, the colonial and the contemporary contexts, rather than in terms of personalities. The most important aspect of the Nirankari Movement appears to be its relationship with the earlier Sikh tradition. Remaining faithful to Guru Granth Sahib, paradoxically, the movement ignores the Khalsa tradition together.

IV

Much more attention has been given to the Singh Sabha Movement than to the Nirankari and Namdhari movements put together. After the publication of N.G. Barrier’s The Sikhs and Their Literature, G.S. Dhillon wrote a doctoral thesis on the Singh Sabha Movement. It remains unpublished but Dhillon has published articles on the colonial period with a direct bearing on the Sikhs. According to him the Singh Sabhas were founded for an all round Panthic development, with the objective of taking up social, religious and educational programmes. The leaders of the Amritsar Singh Sabha were drawn from the rich, the upper, the privileged classes and the British supported strata of Sikh society. They approved of anti-Sikh practices like discrimination on the basis of caste, idol worship and worship of personal gurus.

The Lahore Singh Sabha developed a broad and comprehensive outlook, making no distinction between the high and low caste Sikhs and extending their work to both the urban and rural masses of the Punjab. The religious revival under the Singh Sabha was a protest against forms and ceremonies and class distinctions based on birth and was the work of the people, of the masses and not of the classes. The author is of the opinion that the Lahore Singh Sabha’s appeal to the masses lay in the Sikh doctrines and not in any material factor in the colonial environment.
The British were extraordinarily cautious in dealing with the Sikhs. An observation of Sir Richard Temple about Sikhism made two things clear; one, that Sikhism was not an amorphous, ambiguous or confused entity and two, that the British objective was to see that its enormous potential was not exploited against them. Therefore, the British were placating the Sikhs on minor issues, but they would not tolerate any sufferance of their political interests.

According to Dhillon the last quarter of the nineteenth century was primarily devoted to reviving the strength of the community by educating them in their religion and tradition and, having slowly reconstructed these aspects of Sikh society, political work was taken up by the Singh Sabha leaders. With the formation of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902, they began 'to safeguard the rights of the Sikhs'. The Sikh Educational Conference was founded in 1908 and was seen by the government as politically motivated. It was declared to be non-political by the Sikhs. However, it did provide the Singh Sabha leaders with a forum to express their views on day-to-day affairs whether religious, social, educational and even political.

Sikh political activity was the result of their response to the problem of the management of the Khalsa College, the political agitation in connection with the Colonisation Bill of 1907, the Minto-Morley reforms of 1909, and the restriction on the carrying of kirpan. The colonisation bill was withdrawn but in the case of the Khalsa College, the government handed over its management to a nominated body with the commissioner as chairman. On June 10, 1908, a new constitution was forced upon the governing body. The Sikhs did not get any special concessions under the Minto-Morley Reforms. After a prolonged agitation the Sikhs were exempted from the Arms Act of 1878 and were allowed to carry kirpan. These developments clearly showed that the British did not promote political identity to add to the
strength of the Sikhs. A lack of in-depth analysis was the reason for the conclusion drawn by some Western historians that the British were interested in promoting Sikh ideological identity.

Dhillon suggests that ‘religious consciousness, socio-political consciousness and consequent responsibility and reaction go hand in hand’ in Sikh ideology. The Sikh religious and socio-political consciousness reached a distinctly higher level of commitment and activity than among the people in other parts of the country by 1919. The preachers of the Chief Khalsa Diwan consciously mingled politics with religion in their speeches. Dhillon goes on to add that Sikh militancy assumed alarming proportions after the Rakabganj Gurdawara affair in 1913. The Ghadar party was virtually a Sikh organization which operated in the rural Punjab. Nothing of this kind happened anywhere else in India. The Ghadar party got support of the Singh Sabhas in the Punjab but not from the Indian National Congress.

In his *Lions of the Punjab*, Richard Fox has analysed the objective conditions created by British rule in the Punjab, including its linkage with the capitalist world economy, to explain cultural changes in the Sikh community. He is of the view that ‘a single religious community, in the sense of a shared set of traditions, cultural meanings, and social practices, was absent among those who called themselves Sikh in late nineteenth century’. In the late nineteenth century there were several populations that called themselves ‘Sikh’ and had separate images of what religious identity meant and who was included in it. All Keshdharis, according to him, were not baptized and the Sahajdhari did not consider themselves as less devout Sikhs. Another reason for the non-existence of a uniform body of ‘Sikhs’ was that Mazhabis and other Untouchables were provided ‘inferior access’ to Sikh shrines and that too in the community of the Khalsa Singhs which was supposed to be based on egalitarian principles. Another
important caste division, according to Fox, was the one between the Jats and the Khatris and Aroras, both of whom held the other as uncouth and devious. Fox has cited figures from the Census of 1891 to argue that over a third of the people who referred to themselves as Sikhs claimed to belong to the Hindu religion as a sect. However, two-thirds of the Sikhs believed they constituted a separate religion and among these were not only the Singhs but also 40 per cent of the Sahajdharis.

The Singh identity according to Fox was the creation of the British and grew out of their racial beliefs that the Sikhs had been biologically provided with superior martial skills, while the requirement of the British was to have loyal brave soldiers to fight for them. The symbols of Guru Gobind Singh’s Sikhism were appropriated by them to field a large but inexpensive indigenous army. The proportion of the Sikh troops in the army was over three times larger than the proportion of Sikhs in the Punjab’s population. Though the Sikh reformers came to oppose the British, they imposed the same definition on the Sikh religious community that the colonial authorities espoused: the only true Sikh was a Singh.

The evidence of the contemporary British writers underlines that the ‘Singh’ identity was by far the most important identity of the Sikhs during the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. Fox has ignored even this easily available evidence. He rightly underlines the relevance of the changes brought about by the British but an explanation entirely in terms of ‘Western impact and Sikh response’ is bound to remain inadequate. This framework can provide only a partial answer to the study of social change under British rule.

The collapse of Sikh political power, in Fox’s view, had resulted in decrease in the number of Sikhs. In the first Census of the Punjab their number was remarkably low. The new administration of the Punjab brought peace and security, and British appreciation for the
Sikh support in 1857 resulted in Sikh recruitment to the army. Since the British defined Sikh as Keshdhari for purposes of recruitment to the Army, the Census of 1868 showed an increase in the numbers of the Sikhs (in five districts) amounting to almost three times the figures for 1855. However, the army could provide jobs to only a small number of Sikhs. As a result, in 1881 the figures for the Sikhs again showed a decrease of four per cent on the previous figure.

Criticism of the prevailing Sikh social and religious practices by the Christian missionaries had begun before the advent of the British rule in the Punjab and further problems had been created by missionary activity. The Nirankari influence was mainly confined to the urban population and the Namdharis too had limited impact. The Singh Sabha was set up at Amritsar in 1873 at the instigation of the prominent members of Sikh gentry. The adoption of Christianity by families of note came as a great shock to the aristocracy and Sikh gentry, whose world was defined by their religious identity.

In his *Sikh Separatism*, Rajiv A. Kapur is concerned with the social, political and economic developments which led to the process of reformulation of Sikh identity and the emergence of Sikh consciousness and communal separatism. He also examines the process of politicization among the Sikhs, the establishment of Sikh political organization and the emergence of an essentially communal, Khalsa nationalism.

Kapur’s understanding of the Singh Sabha Movement and the evolution of Sikh identity has been detailed in the Introduction to the book and its first chapter. The rest of the book relates mainly to the period after 1919. The writer is of the view that for four hundred years, Sikh and Hindu identities had remained interlinked and overlapping. The nineteenth century saw the emergence of a number of social and religious reform movements in Indian society. Among the Sikhs, the reform movement was led by a group of militant Tat (true) Khalsa
reformers, who reformulated Sikh identity and drew communal boundaries between the Sikhs and the Hindus. The Tat Khalsa reformers were also enormously successful in building a spirit of internal solidarity and consciousness.

Impetus to the Singh Sabha movement was provided by the publication of Trumpp’s translation of the Guru Granth Sahib in 1877. The question of separate Sikh identity came to the fore in 1898 on the issue whether Dyal Singh Majithia was a Sikh or a Hindu. The decision of the court, that Dyal Singh Majithia was a Hindu started a debate in the newspapers, journals and series of pamphlets and responses. Two pamphlets, Sikh Hindu Hai and Ham Hindu Nahin, were widely circulated. This activity received a push with the emergence of a militant Hindu ideology in the Punjab, represented by the Arya Samaj. This led to an upsurge in Sikh journalistic activity as the Singh Sabha reformers realized the potential of the press to spread their message of a separate Sikh identity.

With the impact of the Sikh propaganda hundreds of Sahajdhari Hindus and Sikhs took baptism and, encouraged by the return to the original egalitarian Sikhism, low caste and outcaste Hindus also took baptism. Khalsa Sikhs increased due to the rise in the number of Sikhs in the British army. In 1909, the monumental work of M.A. Macauliffe gave further impetus to the reform movement. In 1911, the Sikhs were recorded in the Census according to what they said they were. The increase between 1901 and 1921, was due to considerable conversion of Hindus and not the change in the British definition alone. The motivation was jobs in the army, and the agrarian policies of the British which favoured the Sikh agriculturist. Therefore by 1921, being a Sikh was regarded as being a member of the Khalsa. A movement away from the sects among the Sikhs led to the development of one common Sikh identity.

W.H. McLeod put forth the view that Singh identity was the
dominant Sikh identity before 1849. In the late nineteenth century of the Singh Sabha reformers perceived that every thing was not right with the Sikhs and their beliefs and practices. Hinduized ritual was being practised in contemporary Gurdwaras. The presence of Hindu idols disfigured the Golden Temple. Caste was being observed. There was discrimination against the untouchables. Many Sikhs smoked and cut their hair. In the villages it was often impossible to distinguish between a Hindu and a Sikh. The solution of the Singh reformers was to purge the Panth of false beliefs and superstitions, whether Hindu or Muslim. ‘Sikhs must be summoned to a genuine reaffirmation of their Khalsa loyalty’.

The Amritsar Sabha was an elite organization concerned with issues affecting the Sikh Panth, while the Lahore Sabha attracted intellectuals who were much more aggressive than the elites of the Amritsar Sabha. They insisted on Khalsa exclusivenss which was eventually accepted as orthodox. The Khalsa tradition came to be regarded as the ‘standard’ and Sahajdharis were accepted as ‘slow adopters’. The reformist section of the Singh Sabha movement came to be known as Tat Khalsa (True or Pure).

McLeod points out that the debate on Sikh identity was conducted in terms of whether or not the Khalsa were Hindu, leaving out the possibility of Sahajdhari identity being treated as ‘Sikh’. On both sides historical past was manipulated to defend contemporary perceptions. McLeod is of the view that differences of degree were looked upon as differences of kind when it came to the Khalsa Sikh and the Sahajdhari Sikh. A critical and historical analysis must recognize ‘the continuity which extends from the earliest days of the Nanak-Panth to the end of the nineteenth century and beyond’. However, this in itself would be insufficient and ‘the force of intervening circumstances must also be recognized’.

McLeod does not agree with Fox’s contention that ‘Singh identity’
was selected by the British and then appropriated by a particular caste for its own class purposes. McLeod sees the military and economic policy of the British as having a bearing on Sikh identity from 1875 to 1925, as also sees the role of a new pattern of administration, a new technology, a fresh approach to education, and entry of Christian missionaries. All these elements meshed together to produce a great impact.

The emergence of the Singh Sabha was an example of the meshing together of such elements and imparting 'new cultural dimension and magnitude to the movement'. McLeod is of the view that 'It was Sikh tradition, and specifically a Khalsa tradition, which they developed and glossed. To suggest that they developed a new tradition is false. Equally it is false to claim that their treatment of it can be described as a simple purging of alien excrescence or the restoration of a corrupted original. The Khalsa of the Singh Sabha reformers was both old and new'.

Writing on the contribution of the Singh Sabha Movement to the interpretation of Sikh history and religion, McLeod underlines that the Singh Sabha provided the dominant interpretation which has remained 'orthodox' for almost a century. All other interpretations were seen as wayward, sectarian, or heretical. McLeod examines the influence of three Singh Sabha scholars on our understanding of Sikhism: Bhai Vir Singh, the most influential biographer of the Sikh Gurus, Bhai Kahn Singh and M.A. Macauliffe. McLeod points out that Ratan Singh Bhangu's *Prachin Panth Parkash*, which was edited by Bhai Vir Singh, was altered by him to convey an acceptable version according to the understanding developed in the Singh Sabha movement.

In a more recent work, McLeod has expressed the view that there were several varieties of Sikhs in the middle of the nineteenth century. There were the Khalsa Sikhs who were the most prominent but the Sahajdharis too adopted a range of different identities. There
were the Udasis, and the Nirmalas, among other. All this changed due to a fundamental cleavage within the Singh Sabha Movement. The original founders of the movement were 'Sanatan' or 'traditional' Sikhs and the much more radical opinion was centered at Lahore in the form of 'Tat Khalsa'. The Tat Khalsa consisted of those who were able to benefit from the Western system of education. Its primary membership consisted of intellectuals like Bhai Kahn Singh and Bhai Vir Singh. A third variety of Singh Sabha was that of Teja Singh Overseer. He considered even the Tat Khalsa rather conservative. He led the Bhasaur Singh Sabha and the Panch Khalsa Diwan for several years as an advocate of radical reform. Eventually in 1929 he was formally banished from the Panth and the controversies he had raised died down.

The main exponent of the Sanatan Sikhs was Avtar Singh Vahiria. According to McLeod, the Sikhism preached by people such as Avtar Singh Vahiria and Khem Singh Bedi is difficult to envisage today - so comprehensive has been their defeat by the Tat Khalsa. Nevertheless, problems had arisen for the Tat Khalsa because there was no agreement on the Sikh method of conducting religious ceremonies. After heated debates with the Sanatan Sikhs and with the support of the Sikh public, the Anand Marriage Act was passed in 1909. Images had been removed from the precincts of the Harmandir Sahib in 1905. An issue that was particularly acute was the Tat Khalsa belief that the only proper identity for a loyal Sikh to adopt was that of the Khalsa. Others who called themselves Sikhs could be accepted as members of the Panth only on the understanding that they were working towards being full members of the Khalsa. By contrast, the Sanatan Sikhs accepted a variety of identities.

Some of the observations made by W.H. McLeod reflect his reading of Harjot Oberoi's *Construction of Religious Boundaries* in which the author discusses among other things the question of 'Sikh'
identity during the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries. According to Oberoi, the early Sikh tradition did not show much concern for establishing distinct religious boundaries. The rise of the Khalsa in the eighteenth century brought about this ‘dramatic change’. Nevertheless, ‘most of the Sikhs moved in and out of multiple identities grounded in local, regional, religious and secular loyalties’. Oberoi focuses on the heterogeneity in religious beliefs, rituals and lifestyles of the Sikhs to suggest that religious identities were highly blurred and several competing definitions of who constituted a Sikh were possible. In his understanding Sikhism was not in a ‘state of decline’ after the British annexation of the Punjab. The decline that was referred to was actually the prevalence of Sanatan Sikhism. The numbers of the Sikhs did not decline either; all this was a myth created by the British and perpetuated by the Tat Khalsa.

According to Oberoi, the British wanted to bring about reform but, as they did not want to be seen as interfering in the indigenous affairs, they encouraged the Punjabis themselves to undertake reform. This led to the formation of the Anjuman-i Punjab in 1865 which had a great impact on Sikh society. In this general atmosphere of reform, the Singh Sabha at Amritsar was founded on the declared intention of a few Sikh students to convert to Christianity. Oberoi looks upon the leaders of the Singh Sabha established at Amritsar as representatives of the Sanatan Sikh tradition.

‘Sanatan’ Sikhism according to him was primarily a ‘priestly’ religion and although Sikh tradition did not give primacy to ‘religious specialists’ but the religious establishment made up of guru lineages came into existence since a formal initiation was required and the role of guru was important. The Sanatanists ‘recognized the existence of several traditions within the Sikh Panth and accepted multiple sources of authority’. All this was brought to an end by the Singh Sabha founded at Lahore in 1879. With this Singh Sabha emerged a new kind
of leadership, referred to by Oberoi as the new elites. These elites were new not in their social origin but in their functions and in using new instruments of transmission. They exercised domination through anglo-vernacular education and print culture. The Tat Khalsa saw ample signs of ‘decline’ in the ‘carnivalesque Sanatan Tradition’ which for Oberoi was an example of the strength and richness as well as the actual state of the nineteenth century Sikh religious tradition. In the Tat Khalsa view precedence was given the *Granth Sahib* as the rightful heir to the ten Gurus, replacing all other sacred texts – ‘the Vedas, the Gita, the Puranas and even the Dasam Granth’. In the 1880s the Tat Khalsa began to ‘reconstitute sacred space’ by three measures: campaigns against the seasonal fairs held in the precincts of Sikh shrines; the removal of non-Sikh icons from the Sikh sacred centres; and a strident call for the reform of temple management. The Tat Khalsa also changed the equilibrium between Khalsa and non-Khalsa appearance by rigidly enforcing external symbols and codifying life-cycle rituals, consolidating the Rahitnama tradition. Oberoi argues that the Tat Khalsa created a rupture with the earlier ‘Sanatan’ tradition to ‘recast Sikh tradition and purge it of diversity’.

The ‘sudden and striking’ growth in the number of Singh Sabhas in the 1880’s happened due to the ‘revolution in communications, the commercialization of the rural economy, the rise of new market towns and trading networks, the decline of traditional cultural mediators, the rise of new elites, the creation of print culture, and a radically changed system of education’. The Sabhas initially gave expression to the cultural aspirations of the evolving class. The ‘Tat Khalsa’ succeeded in ‘formulating new doctrines’ of what Sikhism ought to represent because they were aided both by fundamental changes in Punjabi society under colonial rule and by their own initiative, organization and appropriation of resources.
Oberoi's work is impressive but not free from limitations, both conceptual and methodological. He ignores the historical development of Sikhism and the relevance of the Sikh past for their self-identification under the British. He also ignores the bearing of the political and cultural context of British rule on the Sikhs.

The early decades of the twentieth century are covered by Joginder Singh in *The Sikh Resurgence* in terms of the demography and socio-cultural and political responses of the Sikhs to the framework of the British government and nationalist politics. He gives figures which support a phenomenal increase in the number of the Sikhs. In 1911 the Sikhs were given the opportunity to record their identity as they desired, resulting in an increase of 37 per cent against a general decrease of 2.3 per cent in the total population. Further details are given on the occupations of the Sikhs with the agriculturists forming a large part of the Sikh population. Joginder Singh concludes that the social history of the Sikhs under colonial rule was marked by the emergence of the middle class with a well marked cultural identity which was accompanied by a new ideology, and this ideology increasingly became the basis of political orientation.

The foundation of a distinct Sikh entity was laid down by the Singh Sabhas, Diwans and Central Diwans. The formation of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902 marked the second phase in the development of a communitarian consciousness among the Sikhs. For carrying forward the movement, the Chief Khalsa Diwan depended largely on the writings of Bhai Kahn Singh, Khazan Singh, Bhagat Lakshman Singh, Bhai Jodh Singh and Bhai Vir Singh. In the early twentieth century the Tat Khalsa efforts to build a 'cohesive community' were based on their claim to have their distinct religion, history and language, historical shrines and a large number of educational institutions and the press. Further steps to establish their independent political existence were taken by the Sikh intellectuals. This stage was
likely to arise due to the colonial official’s policy of institutionalizing communal politics by encouraging and patronizing the communal deputations, memorials and petitions.

Joginder Singh has identified and examined the social background of nearly three hundred prominent Sikh leaders and activists in his *Sikh Leadership*.25 A study of the background and socio-political perceptions of the leader suggests no single paradigm for their joining either the Singh Sabha, the Diwans or the Akali movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The biographies of the prominent founders of the Singh Sabhas throw some light on the movement. Sardar Thakur Singh Sandhanwalia, Baba Khem Singh Bedi, Gyani Gyan Singh and Bhai Gurmukh Singh were the original leaders of the Amritsar Singh Sabha. However, within a decade of its inception, the functioning of the Singh Sabha was arrested by the divergent views of its representatives. Two groups came up. One of these was that of the landed aristocrats, *mahants* and *pujaris*, represented by Kanwar Bikram Singh of Kapurthala. They were interested in maintaining their position and possession of the Sikh shrines intact. The other comprised those Sikhs who were ‘enlightened’ by Western education and belonged to the middle class. Prominent among them were Bhai Gurmukh Singh and Bhai Jawahar Singh. They were keen to introduce reforms according to the teachings of the Gurus. They brought into existence the Lahore Singh Sabha in 1879.

These two organizations continued to clash with each other over the existing socio-religious practices. They clashed on the rights of the untouchables to worship in the *gurdwaras*. The leaders of the Amritsar Sabha sided with the priests of the Golden Temple who allowed the untouchables to enter only at specific hours while the Lahore Sabha was opposed to this. The leaders of the Lahore Singh Sabha were
excommunicated for their radical views. Despite the efforts made by the leaders of the two Singh Sabhas to resolve their differences, especially in view of Arya hostility, nothing concrete was achieved due to their fundamental differences.

By the turn of the twentieth century a new leadership came into existence: Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia, Bhai Arjun Singh Bagrian, Sodhi Sujan Singh, Sardar Dharam Singh, Bhai Jodh Singh and Sardar Tirlochan Singh. They felt that no results could be achieved due to the divisions among the Sikhs and the Chief Khalsa Diwan came into existence in 1902. The importance of Western education was realized and the help of the colonial officials was sought. In 1908 the Sikh Educational Conference was formed, and held its session every year. The Chief Khalsa Diwan encouraged the founding of educational institutions, orphanages and boarding houses. To espouse communitarian and nationalist concerns, a large number of newspapers and periodicals were started. The Chief Khalsa Diwan remained the major representative body of the Sikhs till 1919.

Social transformation among the Sikhs was not on the agenda of N.G. Barrier. It was taken up by Tom G. Kessinger in his *Vilyatpur 1848-1968*, for studying social and economic change in a North Indian Sikh village.26 He was one of the first few scholars to study the Sikhs under colonial rule. He approached the study from the point of view of a social scientist, with his focus on the ordinary people of a village in Jalandhar. He made use of source materials like diaries, revenue records and personal papers to reconstruct change among the people of ‘Vilayatpur’. His work has insights for social change in the rural Punjab, especially the Sikhs.

Ethne K. Marenco published a monograph on transformation of Sikh society in 1976, treating castes and classes as her key concepts.27 She has studied the emergence of classes among the
Sikhs through occupational change. It is important to point out that some of her basic assumptions appear to reduce the value of her study. She looks upon the Sikhs as ‘a sect of Hinduism’ and assumes that castes were normatively a part of the Sikh social order. This is a gross oversimplification. The caste background among the Sikhs was relevant for their social attitudes but there was no caste ‘system’. Marenco’s understanding of the corporate caste mobility among the Ramgarhias is faulty due to her erroneous understanding of the rise of the Sikh Misls during the late eighteenth century. In fact, depending mostly on the census data, Marenco has paid little attention to the evidence available in Punjabi and Persian sources for the Sikh social order during the early nineteenth century.

Marenco sees a tendency among the Sikhs in the period between 1891 and 1901 to abandon the sects and join religious associations. The Singh Sabha and the Khalsa Sodhi-Bans are seen by her as two important associations. The Singh Sabha taught the Sikh faith along with the idea that the Sikhs must be a separate religious and political group. The Khalsa Sodhi-Bans was a reforming society which had a special appeal for the lower castes of Hinduism, since it permitted converts to leave their previous caste and join the Sodhi (Khatri) family of Guru Gobind Singh. She also mentions the Kukas as a movement for religious revival. According to Marenco, this was a familiar caste mechanism by which the lower Hindu castes (the Sikhs are included in the Hindus for her purpose here) elevated themselves in the hierarchy.

Marenco states that ‘the various Sikh religious movements were often directed at changing the lot of the Sikh untouchables’. Cited as example are the ‘Tat Khalsa or Khalsa Sodhi-Bans’ who tried to disregard the restrictions of caste and interdining, and aimed at establishing brotherhood amongst the Sikhs. The title used by them was that of the ‘Khalsa’ and in the Census of 1911, many Sikhs were
listed ‘as though they belonged to the Khalsa caste’. This according to Marenco was a way of adopting a new caste and, by inference, a higher status in society.

According to Marenco, the Keshdhari Sikhs had become hypergamous. They would marry the daughter of a Sahajdhari of the same original caste but would not give him their daughters in marriage. Among these new converts were the Khatri and Arora traders, the Mahtam and Saini agriculturists, the Chhimba artisans, and the Jhiwar and Labana menials. These Sikh castes, after becoming Keshdhari Sikhs, considered themselves above their Hindu caste brothers.

Marenco’s work does not address the developments that were taking place in the period of our study as her focus is entirely on the social stratification among the Sikhs with special reference to the coexistence of caste and class. She is of the opinion that the major reason for conversion to Sikhism, which she holds responsible for the increase in the numbers of the Sikhs in the late nineteenth century, was the aim of the converts to move higher in the caste hierarchy and to get jobs in the British army and the various branches of government service for which the Sikhs were preferred.

*The Sikhs of the Punjab* by J.S. Grewal published as a volume of the *New Cambridge History of India* contains a statement on social transformation within the Sikh community which, though brief, is quite comprehensive in terms of its scope. In the chapter entitled ‘Recession and Resurgence 1849-1919’, he refers to the changing numbers and composition of the Sikhs, with implications for horizontal stratification through occupational mobility and vertical differentiation due to the rise of new movements as well as the legacy of the Sikh past.

From the viewpoint of Sikh resurgence, this period saw a tremendous increase in the number of the Sikhs from less than 2
million in 1881 to over 4 million in 1931, raising the percentage in the total population of the province from about 8 to over 13. This increase was also visible in the proportion of Keshdhari Sikhs in the Sikh population, while a fall was witnessed in the Sahajdhari population. The rise in the number of the Sikhs during this period could not be attributed to conversions, preference in Government Departments and the propagation of reform alone. Many more were affected by the growing consciousness of a distinct identity.

To make the point clear, Grewal move on to religious ferment already in evidence at the time of the annexation of the Punjab by the British. The work of the Nirankaris and the Namdharis, broadly outlined in the chapter, was carried forward by the Singh Sabha movement. 'A new consciousness of common identity was imparted by common concerns and a kindred outlook on the world in spite of rivalries due to differences in the social background of the leaders, their image of the past or their vision of the future.' This socio-religious ferment became the basis of politics.

J.S. Grewal talks of socio-cultural change for an adequate understanding of politics in an article entitled 'Cultural Reorientation in Modern India.' The contact with modern Europe brought about a change not only in politics and economy but also in the sphere of social structure and intellectual and emotional culture. Grewal seeks to illustrate this with reference to literature and religion, generally looked upon as the most important indices of socio-cultural change.

The Nirankari and Namdhari movements, both of which had a close bearing on Sikh identity, originated before the advent of the British in the Punjab but acquired a new importance and significance in the context of colonial rule. The Nirankaris represented the Sahajdhari position at its best. Emphasis was laid on the *Adi Granth* as the source of religious and social life of the Sikhs. Peculiarly Sikh ceremonies for birth, marriage and death were adopted, and
Brahmans were made dispensable. They began to regard the Nirankari founder and his successors as gurus, which made it 'unorthodox' from the Khalsa point of view.

The Namdhari movement under Baba Ram Singh began to give importance to Singh identity though it had begun as a Sahajdhari reform movement. When he took up the cause of cow protection, the movement acquired an anti-British character due to the action of his followers against the butchers. The Baba expected the expulsion of the British and the establishment of Sikh rule as a millenarian hope. With the belief of his followers that he was the successor of Guru Gobind Singh and the narrowing down of his following to a particular caste group, their position became that of a sect within Sikhism.

These movements were overshadowed by the Singh Sabha movement. The leaders of the Singh Sabhas were the ideological successors of the Singhs of the eighteenth century but they accepted Western science, technology and secular knowledge that the West had to offer. At the same time they were not ready to discard their cultural heritage, especially their religion in the face of secular values. Their consciousness of a distinct identity was also sharpened by the emergence of socio-religious reform among Hindus and Muslims of the Punjab. The debate whether or not the Sikhs were Hindu was a phenomenon of the colonial period when 'Hinduism' came to have a new connotation. The middle class that had come into existence due to the policies and institutions of the British aspired for jobs, wealth and power with its growing importance. The British thought in terms of religious communities and professed to be impartial towards all. This encouraged these communities to think in communitarian terms. At the same time the presence and success of Christian missionaries provoked a strong reaction which expressed itself, among other things, in movements for socio-religious reform within these religious communities, imparting a new dimension to communitarian
consciousness and an almost new cultural orientation.

J.S. Grewal has analysed the views of four scholars – Daljeet Singh, W.H. McLeod, Harjot Oberoi and Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon – on the question of Sikh identity.\(^3^0\) He points out that the issue is complex and requires taking into account objective realities and subjective self-image in relation to the ‘others’ in a given historical situation. As a product of these variables identity cannot be static or ‘fixed’ nor can there be ‘homogeneity’ among all members of the community sharing a consciousness of distinction from others. The debate about Sikh identity is a part of the larger debate in Sikh studies which has been discussed by the author in another volume.\(^3^1\)

More recently, J.S. Grewal has written on the themes of martyrdom, caste and gender in the early Sikh tradition.\(^3^2\) Louis Fenech has published a book entitled Martyrdom In The Sikh Tradition: Playing the ‘Game of Love’, exploring the theme of martyrdom and the role of martyrs in Sikh religious and political history from the earliest times till 1925.\(^3^3\) For our purpose, his analysis of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Sikh literature is more relevant as also of the tracts and newspapers produced under the auspices of the late nineteenth-century Singh Sabha ‘reform’ movement in order to understand the reasons why the themes of sacrifice and martyrdom came to dominate Sikh imagination in the early twentieth century and how they continue to play such a vital role in the Sikh community today. According to Fenech, martyrdom became an integral feature of the Tat Khalsa interpretation of Sikh tradition because this theme emphasized those elements which the Singh Sabha admired most in the Khalsa Sikhs of the past. The Singh Sabha succeeded in generating a rhetoric of martyrdom.

Anshu Malhotra has paid some attention to the gender relations among the middle class composed of high caste Hindus and Sikhs in the colonial context of the 1870s to the 1920s in the Punjab.\(^3^4\) She
tries to show how the ‘high castes’ themselves regrouped as a caste and a class, and how such social processes translated themselves into women’s lives. An analysis of the writings of the Singh Sabha on the desired reforms for women, and on the roles they were expected to fulfil, shows how control over women’s sexuality and reproductivity was central to maintaining social privilege. Like the Arya Samaj, the Singh Sabhas echoed the ideal of a *pativrata* wife for women. This is illustrated with reference to the three early novels of Bhai Vir Singh, namely *Sundari*, *Bijai Singh* and *Satwant Kaur*.

Doris R. Jakobsh has examined gender construction in two phases of Sikh history which were ‘important moments in terms of Sikh identity formation, both political and religious’. The first is the Guru period and the second extends from the annexation of the Punjab to the time of the Singh Sabha movement. This study is based on the gender constructs developed in the Victorian era in Britain, which informed and moulded the British administration in the Punjab. Also taken into account is the process of active gender construction through Singh Sabha educational and religious initiatives that were shaped by Victorian gender ideals, as well as the ‘purified’ adaptation of Sikh ideology.

Looking at the women who were most active during the time of the Singh Sabha reform movement, Jakobsh asks why these women vigorously promoted the male ideology which in actual fact constrained them and even diminished many choices which could otherwise have been viewed as normative. Jakobsh comes to the conclusion that they did so in order to be accepted within the existing system which professed women’s reform as its objective. With the reforms initiated by their male counterparts, and due to attempts to displace un-Sikh elements during ritual or other ceremonial occasions, highly significant and novel roles came the way of Sikh women. They could undergo the rite of initiation and the Sikh educational conference provided them with an opportunity to be a part of the Sikh social and political arena.
VI

The foregoing review of existing literature indicates its wide range and the aspects of Sikh history it covers. This review is generally descriptive so that the main content is made clear. Comments have been offered only where it appeared to be necessary. The major aspects covered by this literature are the movements for socio-religious reform, political activities of the Sikhs from 1849 to 1919, social change that came about among the Sikhs during this period, the issues of caste and gender and the tradition of martyrdom. All these aspects relate in one way or another to the subject of social transformation among the Sikhs. However, no single volume deals with all these aspects. The most comprehensive statement is found in *The Sikhs of the Punjab*. But even in this volume there is no discussion of politics, caste, gender and martyrdom. Thus, there is no article or monograph with a focus on the subject of the present thesis.

The present work covers all the aspects of transformation among the Sikhs. The census reports up to 1901 are thoroughly analysed for a general picture of Sikh community during the late nineteenth century. The reports of 1911, 1921 and 1931 are analysed to focus on demographic change in the early decades of the twentieth century. The beliefs and practices of the Sikhs during the period are discussed in relation to their position in the early nineteenth century. The issue of Sikh identity and the reasons for its sudden prominence in the colonial period, as also the changes in the Sikh society of the period due to the work of the Singh Sabha movement and the resulting social and communitarian awareness in the Sikh community, are discussed in detail in a separate chapter. The political articulation of the Sikhs is also the subject of a whole chapter. On the whole, thus, social transformation among the Sikhs from 1849 to 1919 has been presented in a most comprehensive manner in this thesis.
NOTES


10. Bhai Nahar Singh and Kirpal Singh (eds.), *Rebels Against the*


