By the second half of the nineteenth century, many perversions had crept into the religious beliefs and practices in the Punjab. The religious places—temples, mosques and Gurdwaras—were almost being used by the priests as if they were their family estates. Whether they were Hindus, Sikhs or Muslims, the Punjabis had forgotten the code of conduct prescribed by their earlier saints to attain salvation.

Under the circumstances many revivalist movements sprung up among the three major communities of the Punjab and some religious revivalist movements that had sprung up in the nineteenth century in other parts of India also entered the Land of the Five Rivers. The prominent movements of the latter category were the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj and the Radha Soami. All of them had attempted to simplify the religious beliefs and sought to bring about a spiritual renaissance. They were, however, not attended with the same degree of success in their primary and widely acclaimed purpose of reforming the evil practices in the religious life of the Punjabis as a whole.

The Brahmo Samaj, founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1828, was the first to enter the Punjab with a bold and courageous declaration that religion was above the
distinction of caste and creed, but did not become a Punjabi movement. Influenced by the Western social behaviour the Brahmos did not become very popular in the Punjab and their number did not increase to more than a few thousand. And even these few thousand were Bengali professionals and government servants who eventually left Punjab after a stay ranging from two to three decades to settle down in the province of their birth and origin. Unlike the Brahmos, the number of Radha Soamis grew manifold after the first Punjabis took to it. Their number in the Punjab, Haryana, Delhi now runs into many lakhs. One important reason why this have been so is that Radha Soamis emphasised the Indian roots of its beliefs and retained the innate values of Indian philosophy and culture.

The Arya Samaj spread like wild fire in the Punjab ever since Swami Dayanand came to the Punjab and established the first Arya Samaj in the Punjab but it finally became a sectarian movement which succeeded in becoming the mouthpiece of the Hindus of the Land of the Five Rivers but more than reforming religious practices, it divided the Punjabis into somewhat hostile communities.

Radha Soami Movement in the Punjab apparently did not spread to the same extent as the Arya Samaj but it produced greater impact on the Punjabis as Punjabis. That was because the Radha Soamis, unlike the Arya Samajists, did not believe in the infallibility of the Vedas and the observance of the
Vedic rituals on the ground that the limit of the Vedas was only up to Brahm or Trikuti which was the second higher plane in the human body above the eyes, while God could be found in Sach-khand which was far beyond the Brahm. Moreover, the Radha Soami Faith did not lay any financial imposition on its members. One could become a member of the Arya Samaj only on agreeing to pay one per cent of one’s total income to the Arya Samaj.¹ But this kind of payment was not compulsory for becoming a Radha Soami. Arya Samajists rejected the idea of having a Guru, whereas Radha Soamis believed that salvation could be attained only through the guidance of a living master by practising Surat Shabd Yoga. In philanthropic and educational fields, the Arya Samaj was far ahead of the Radha Soami Movement. The Arya Samaj took keen interest in establishing homes for the widows and orphans, and organised medical relief during the time of natural calamities. They also established many schools and colleges. The Radha Soamis on the other hand, had no such educational institutions, though they provide medical facilities at Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, Beas. Arya Samaj was against caste system and even introduced Shuddhi to bring into its fold non-Hindus. The Radha Soamis condemned caste system but primarily amongst their own followers. By raising

the slogan of 'Back to the Vedas', the Arya Samaj fostered the feeling of Hindu nationalism and kindled the fire of communal consciousness in the country. The Radha Soami Movement, however, remained non-political. It limited its activities primarily to the religious fields. All the same, it did not split up the Punjabis and that was chiefly because it did not copy the Arya Samaj in magnifying the evils that had crept in the different religious establishments in the course of their long march through history.

The Radha Soami Movement in the Punjab had an edge even over the socio-religious reform movements which were exclusively Punjabi in their origin and character. That was particularly true of the movements that arose among the Hindus and the Sikhs before the emergence of the Radha Soami Movement in the Punjab such as Dev Samaj movement among the Hindus and Nirankari and Namdhari movements among the Sikhs. The Dev Samaj believed that the universe consisted of indestructible matter and force and there was no such thing as transmigration of soul. While becoming a member one was expected to pay rupees five as membership fee and thereafter paid rupees one as annual subscription for promoting activities of the Samaj. The Dev Samaj like the Arya Samaj also opened some schools and colleges for imparting modern education together with religious

instructions. But like the Brahmo Samaj and unlike the Radha Soami Movement, Dev Samaj became too secular and ignored the spiritual need of the wider Punjabi society in which it operated. The Radha Soami on the other hand, being a mystic Faith, laid the much needed emphasis on spiritualism. From that point of view, it needs to be noticed that it never had educational institutions of its own.

The Namdharis resembled the Radha Soamis in observing a social ethics which was similar to that of the Radha Soamis but lacking the catholicity of the latter. They observed total abstinence from alcoholic drinks and were vegetarians. They believed in the living Guru, advocated simple social ceremonies and opposed idol worship. However, unlike the Radha Soamis, the Namdharis believed in Guru Gobind Singh's Granth alone. Moreover, they were of the view that baptism, as enjoined more than two centuries ago, had to be passed through to become Khalsa. They, however, insisted on strict observance of some new external marks including wearing a dress to distinguish them from other Sikhs. They tied their turban in Sidha manner and that truly did distinguish them not only from other Sikhs but all others also. The Namdhari movement became a political movement and incurred the wrath of the British Indian Government. The Radha Soami Movement has remained
non-political all through its history and has mainly laid emphasis on spiritualism.

The Radha Soami Movement did not shy away from similarities and did not create any artificial singularities while emphasising the special message that it had for the society. It is worth noting that in the Punjab the Radha Soami Movement bore remarkable similarities to Sikhism. The Radha Soami Gurus believed in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and while writing their books, profusely drew from the Adi Granth. In their Satsangs also they recite Shabdas of the Sikh Gurus and other Bhakti Saints as given in the Granth Sahib. However, the Radha Soamis refuse to identify themselves completely with the Sikhs. Unlike the latter, neither the Radha Soami Gurus nor their followers wear swords on their persons. They also do not believe in having other marks of distinction emphasised by the Khalsa brotherhood. Sikhism, for example, totally prohibits smoking but that is not insisted on to the same degree by the Radha Soamis. The latter maintain that the teachings of the saints were in existence before Guru Nanak and while delivering spiritual discourses, the Radha Soami Gurus use religious language and modes of thought that are dependent upon, or related to, many other religious traditions. Apart from Adi Granth, they also quote from the Vedas, the Upanishadas, the Bible, the Quran and the holy books of
other religions. Further, they do not accept the Sikh emphasis upon the *Adi Granth* as the *Guru*. They on the other hand, believe in a living *Guru*, who is the *knower* of the right path and without whom no spiritual progress could be made. Sikhism does not recognize the existence of any living *Guru* after their Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh.

It is difficult to determine with precision the relative extent of the success of the Radha Soami Movement as compared to the other contemporary socio-religious movements. We just do not have enough data based on authentic records on the number of Arya Samajists, Namdharis or followers of any movement other than the Radha Soami Movement in the Punjab. It is also not possible for us to determine as to how many among the Sikhs are the Nirankaris, the Namdharis and the Radha Soamis. We can, however, safely conclude on the basis of the present study that the Radha Soami Movement attracted followers from both the Hindus and the Sikhs of the Punjab in large numbers but who do not go about saying that they have ceased to be members of the religious communities in which they were born. That is because of the successful way in which the Radha Soami *Gurus* of the Beas *Dera* ran the Movement throughout the period covered by this study.

The Radha Soami Movement marched from one important milestone to another under their *Gurus* at the Beas *Dera*. 
It began on a modest scale with Baba Jaimal Singh setting on the western bank of river Beas near a small village named Baraich. To begin with, his Dera was just a shoddy cabin on a waste land. After a few years, it grew into a mud-hut colony in the ravines and bed of the river. But in the 1970's Dera Baba Jaimal Singh has not only several magnificent multi-storeyed buildings but also about a thousand Pucca quarters fitted with a number of modern amenities. Sardar Sawan Singh, the second Guru (1903-1948), systematized the Movement and was mainly responsible for the rapid development of the Dera. Despite opposition from the people of the surrounding areas, he persisted in his earnest efforts to preach the tenets of Radha Soami Mat. By writing many books in different languages especially in Punjabi, he added a new dimension to spiritual leadership by bringing the esoteric teachings within the comprehension of the common people both in the urban and rural areas of the Punjab. Though Sardar Sawan Singh's successor, Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh could guide the spiritual destinies of the Radha Soami Faith in the Punjab for hardly three years, he did not fail to continue the even tenor of the development and growth of the Movement. The present Guru, Maharaj Charan Singh, tried and tried with success to spread and consolidate

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NO-V. GRAPH SHOWING THE ACCUMULATIVE FIGURES ABOUT THE GROWTH OF RADHA SOAMI'S FOLLOWERS OF RADHA SOAMI SATSANG BEAS, DERA BABA JAIMAL SINGH, DISTRICT AMRITSAR PUNJAB, INDIA, FROM 1884-1974.

Note: One square represents 2000 persons. (By: O.P. OAL.)
the Movement. After becoming Guru in 1951, he has regularly visited some of the Satsang Centres at Delhi, Bombay, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Madras, Poona, Nagpur, Bangalore, Chandigarh, Amritsar, Dehra Dun, Bhopal and other places to deliver discourses. In addition, he has undertaken long and frequent foreign tours to spread the message of Sant Mat. Thousands of people attend the Satsangs, scores of them discuss spiritual problems with him afterward and hundreds receive initiation. The Movement has many preaching centres in India where holding of weekly Satsangs has become a regular feature. Almost all the Indian States have many followers of this Faith, although their main concentration is in the Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. Even many foreigners have evinced keen interest in it. The number of initiates till 1974, as the Beas Initiation Record reveals, was 4,10,314.4

The Movement drew strength from its emphasis on honest and righteous living. That was one of the cardinal points of the Movement as amply revealed by Charan Singh, the present Master, depending exclusively on his modest farming at Sirsa (Haryana) for the maintenance of his family. He never accepts any offerings or gifts from any one. The voluntary offerings given by the Satsangis and

4. See Beas Initiation Record from 1884 to 1974. For the accumulative figures about the growth of Radha Soami's followers of Radha Soami Satsang Beas from 1884-1974, see Graph No. V facing page 294.
non-Satsanois are all spent on langar and for providing medical and allied facilities to the visitors at the Satsang Centre at Beas. In the social sphere, this Movement has tried to mitigate the evils of caste-system, Purdah system, living on begging and drinking. The present Master, after abolishing untouchability has created equality among his followers who mix freely with one another irrespective of their caste, colour, race, status, education and wealth, when they stay at Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, Beas. However, it may be observed that this kind of egalitarianism is not extended to make the Radha Soamis as an endogamous society. True, they dine together and easily mix with one another when they come to attend the Satsangs at Dera Beas. But, there is no such thing as marriages confined to the Radha Soamis inspite of the fact that the detractors of the Movement insist that this is because the leaders of the Movement do not have the strength to insist on Shudras (Harijans) and higher classes (Brahmins and Khatris) intermarrying despite joining the Radha Soami Movement.

The Radha Soami Movement had not been a timid Movement in the advocacy of genuine social reforms. It has attacked the prevailing malpractices in the religious sphere like human and animal sacrifice, idol worship, insistence in pilgrimages for search of God, fasts, mechanical recitation of holy books, etc. It has fearlessly laid stress
on the devotee connecting his soul current with the Celestial Sound Current through Simran and Dhyān and insisting that this can only be done under the guidance of a living Guru. According to Radha Soami Faith, it is the living Guru alone who leads the soul of the disciple caught up in the physical maelstrom back to the Supreme Lord.

A unique feature of the Radha Soami Movement in the Punjab between 1903 and 1974 was that it has been essentially a spiritual Movement and free from external ritualism. That point was clearly borne out by the Radha Soami's insistence that one need not change one's religion by birth to become the Radha Soami and that the Radha Soami brotherhood was open to all without any distinction of caste, creed or nationality. Individuals following almost all religions - Hindus, Sikhs, Mohammedans and Christians - have become the Radha Soami's followers of the Masters at Beas. Every year many foreigners visit Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, Beas in large number and some of them even get initiated in the Radha Soami Fold. During the Bhandara Satṣaṅgas, for example, when there is a large cross-section of humanity, the Dera becomes a meeting ground of many cultures where the devotees listen to their Guru and commit themselves to the common ideal of love for him. The common devotion to the same Guru gives
them inner strength and discipline of mind that sustain them. That there should have been occasional splits in the Movement were as much because of the 'personal Guru' in which the Radha Soamis placed their Faith as because of the dynamism attained by the Movement soon after its foundation in the Punjab. That these splits should not have weakened the Movement as a whole underlined the inherent strength guaranteed by the catholicity of its teaching and the refusal by the Beas headquarter to assume sectarian postures that most other socio-religious contemporary reform movements had tended to assume in the Punjab.