CHAPTER III

PEOPLE AND SOCIETY DURING BRITISH RULE

The British government took over the administration of Ludhiana from the Political Agency in 1846. They realised, soon after, that there were no agency records of the social structure of the population. To be able to govern-effectively government considered such information to be of primary importance. Accordingly, the first settlement report (1850) included a few details pertaining to the structure of the society.

In 1865 the first District Census was carried out. Subsequent censuses followed in 1868 and 1881. The main features of these are detailed in the Appendix III.

Table I on the following page gives a resume of those findings. These facts are also illustrated graphically.

In addition, the appendix also includes a brief description of the people in each category of trade. This gives an essential background to the study of the changes resulting with the arrival of the British and their impact on society.

Though the populace had diverse religious affiliations, they were still a homogenous lot of people.
The Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims all dwelled together.
With a few exceptions, their way of life was essentially the
same. Similar forces governed their environment and their
lives. Their conventions, and traditions were very akin to
one another's.

### TABLE I

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<tr>
<th>POPULATION</th>
<th>GROWTH</th>
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<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>527.722</td>
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<td>1888</td>
<td>585.547</td>
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<td>1891</td>
<td>618.635</td>
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<th>TRADE-WISE</th>
<th>TRADE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Priestly &amp; Religious</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traders &amp; Shopkeepers</td>
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<td>Menials and Artisans</td>
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<td>Balance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<th>RELIGIOUS</th>
<th>RELIGION</th>
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<td>Muslim</td>
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<td>Sikh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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SUPERSTITIONS

The single most dominant feature that characterized the lives of the people was their reliance on superstitions. Particularly, the Hindus were among the most superstitious people in the world.¹ "They had made themselves wretched slaves to thousands of imaginary evil spirits and influences and do not know what liberty of mind is." Whenever any important decision had to be taken, it was necessary to consult the Brahmin priests to ascertain whether the time and occasion were auspicious or not.

BELIEF IN EVIL SPIRITS

The 'Evil Eye' was firmly believed in. The Bhoot, Bhutni, Dayan, and Jinn² were all referred to colloquially, and were greatly feared. These were supposed to inhabit deserted wells and old 'pipal' trees, and both these were considered haunted. The result was that after dark it was rare to find anybody going near these places. These ghosts be in their personal appearance were supposed to very ugly, with their legs turned back, teeth protruding, and hair loose and flying on end.


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Many spirits were supposed to be green in colour, like the green English fairies. ¹ Could this perhaps be the British influence permeating into this realm of thought and tradition?

As a remedy against spirits, certain precious stones were worn, as it was common belief that the spirits feared gems. ² Navratna or nine gems were worn by women; pearl ash as also coal ash were used to scare away spirits. Fragments of mirror were worked into women's clothing and flashes of these, in the light warded off the evil influences. ³ This could be taken to be the origin of what is known as mirror-work, later the Ludhiana district as also the whole of the Punjab were to export such goods. ⁴

Astrology charts also helped avoid the Evil Eye. These charts were made and kept either on the door of the house or in one of the rooms. This was prevalent not only among the Hindus, but Muslims also.

² Ibid., p. 103.
³ Ibid., cit.
SUPERSTITIONS ON CHILD BIRTH.

Besides this, the most deeply ingrained superstition prevalent among the population was the necessity of having a son. This was considered the surest means of salvation and there was no subject more universal "than that of the miraculously and fortunately born hero-son and his doings."

A branch of the pipal tree (being a sacred tree) and an iron ring were tied over the door to notify the birth of a son and to prevent the entry of evil spirits. In case of a girl, no such custom was prevalent.

J.M. Douie writes about a very curious manner to avert the evil dangers. "One favourite device for averting jealousy of the godlings is to give a child a name which conveys a contemptuous meaning such as ghasita i.e. stone or rubbish." The chief means of averting the evil influence was to belittle the object of love, affection and admiration. Both Hindu and Muslim mothers marked their children's faces with smudges of lamp black to cheat the Evil Eye. Sometimes a son, after the death of a previous one was dressed as a girl. Such

2. Loc. Cit.
5. Loc. Cit.
children had their noses pierced, for a pierced nose was a symbol of womanhood, and a typical female mark par excellence. This also arose from a desire to spoil the perfection of the child. Unblemished and beautiful children were supposed to be the special delight of the spirits, who were supposed to carry them away.

Where evil influences were considered to be especially powerful as an extreme measure, the new born child was given to a sweeper woman (mehtarani) to suckle. Surprisingly this practice was prevalent among all classes of people, including high-caste Hindus. Sometimes the latter also employed a Gujar or a Muslim woman.

The basic cause of all these superstitions was the people's inability to apply reason or rationale. The advent of the British brought about spread in education and a general increase in literacy - particularly in the urban areas. To that marginal extent therefore, the succeeding generations were not as superstitious.

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS.

Stemming from the practice of infanticide, (which is discussed at length in a later chapter), there were always

1. Loc. Cit.
3. Ibid., p. 533.
fewer women than men in the population. Men who could marry were therefore considered more fortunate. With the arrival of the British and the simultaneous growth of trade and commerce, the people generally became more prosperous.

It was about this time that the practice of giving a "consideration" or a fixed amount of money in return for a bride developed. Gradually it became a common usage and in many areas, the price of brides was exorbitant. Only the upper classed families abstained from this practice.

Girls were generally betrothed between the ages of ten and twelve, for the longer a girl was kept at home, the higher price she fetched. Boys remained unmarried till the age of twenty to twenty-two as the parents had to accumulate enough wealth to pay for their daughters-in-law.

The marriage ceremony usually followed soon after the betrothal.

Most families amongst Hindus performed their marriages according to Vedic rites, the Sikhs according to their religion enjoined in the Granth Sahib and the Muslims had the "Nikah" as enjoined by the Koran.

2. Loc. Cit.
Except among the Rajputs and the richer classes, not much expenditure was incurred on marriages. But where the families of the brides were affluent there was a large marriage party which was entertained at the bride's house. \(^1\) Large sums of money were spent on dancing girls, fireworks and other entertainment.

Around 1870, a custom also started among the rich families to give the daughter a dowry of cash, jewellery and clothes called "dahej". \(^2\) This practice gradually spread as it became a sign of social status to be able to give a dowry instead of taking a "consideration".

This was an indirect impact of the British. Their policies had generally resulted in increased trade and commerce, as a result of which many a family had prospered. The practice of 'dowry' originated essentially among these affluent people.

Generally every man could marry as many wives as he pleased, as there was no curtailment either by law or by social custom. \(^3\) Jat customs however were different. If a Jat was well to do, he would procure a wife for each of his sons.

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but if he was unable to afford the expense of many marriages, he married the eldest son and his bride was expected to and as a rule did, accept her brothers-in-law as co-husbands. 1

Also prevalent was the practice of "Karewa" 2 or widow - marriage according to which the younger brother married the widow of an elder brother. This custom prevailed especially among the Jats, Gujars, Chamar, Ahirs and Araiens. But the elder brother, could under no circumstances, marry the widow of a younger brother. 3

The ceremonies associated with a karewa marriage were very simple. The neighbours were called; the Brahman said a few mantras (Prayers). The man then put a sheet over the woman's head and the marriage was solemnized. 4

A peculiar custom was prevalent when a man lost two or three wives in succession. Such an individual was made to marry a bird with all the ritual that went with marriage before another family would give their daughter to him in marriage. 5 In the case of a Brahman, who wanted to marry a third wife it was customary to marry a banana tree, and then only could he marry the woman who was to be his third wife.

This was to ward off the evil from the third wife, who, after the performance of such a ceremony, would be known as the fourth wife. ¹

Amongst the Kshatriya families and the Vaishyas, Aorras, and Mahajans, a man could marry up to four wives successively only if (and under no other circumstance) each of the previous spouses did not give birth to a son. This was also on the condition that the barren woman died. However, if a wife died leaving children then the man was forbidden to remarry. ² But it seemed apparent that the fetters of this usage were broken as there were many families in which the sons re-married on the death of their wives, whether they had children or not. ³

DEATH CEREMONIES.

Other important ceremonies most commonly observed were those connected with death. Among the Hindus the body was cremated as is prevalent even today and the ashes were collected and sent to the Ganges. The relatives of the deceased went about their work after a period of three days; but the son whose duty it was to perform the obsequies was shaved and

¹ Loc. Cit.
² Census Report 1891, p. 12.
maintained the 'patak' of purification period for eleven
days. After seventeen days the mourning period was formally
over and a feast was given to the Brahmans - "Hungawah".
Every year in memory of the deceased, food was again distrib-
uted to the Brahmans - "Sarat". 1

Among the Muslims such ceremonies were comparatively
simple. The body was buried according to the dictates of the
Koran. On the third day as also on the fortieth, the chief
mourner distributed alms (Khariat) and prayers were offered
for the soul of the deceased. 2

These death ceremonies more or less, continued
unchanged and unaffected.

DRESS AND CLOTHING OF THE PEOPLE.

The British had a considerable impact in this sphere.
In due course, it became prestigious to wear that was worn
by the Englishmen.

In the early days, the men of higher families wore
'trousers tight fitting around the calf of the legs, and
a kurta with a scarf around the waist. Some wear a choga.
Mostly they wore a double turban'. 3 The material of these

1. Loc. Cit.
2. Loc. Cit. and in Ibbetson, Sir D. Extracts from the Punjab
garments was generally of very superior quality - silk and fine cotton.

For the Jats and the agricultural population, clothing consisted of three articles - a turban of coarse cloth, a waist cloth-lungi or a dhoti, and a chadar worn over the shoulders. These, with a pair of shoes made by the village chamars, constituted the simple and inexpensive clothing of nine-tenths of the agricultural population for the greater part of the year.  

Baniyas and shopkeepers all wore a pagri or turban, a closely bound material round the head. They also wore chogas.  

Women of higher class families wore a kurta of silk or fine muslin and trousers which were tight fitting. Sometimes, a lenga or a long flared skirt was worn over this and on top was a long scarf or dupatta.  

The Jat women wore pajamas called "uthan", made of "Susi" a coloured cotton material, and a chadar over the head and shoulders, either coloured or uncoloured, made of 'gara' or 'dhotar', thick or thin cotton cloth, according to the season. The upper garment when coloured

2. Loc. Cit.  
3. Loc. Cit.  
4. Loc. Cit.  
5. Loc. Cit.
could be dyed cloth or 'phulkari', i.e. worked with silk flowers of 'silari', another form of embroidered silk work. Most women also wore a kurta or a waist coat like the men. On occasions they wore a 'ghaghra' or 'lenga' with a small blouse or choli of the same material.  

Among the Muslims, the Gujar and Arain men wore a waist-cloth called 'tahmat' of uncoloured or coloured cloth, or a lungi (check pattern of tartan). The pagri was generally white. In the cold weather a 'khes' or 'chautahi' was worn as a wrap. Women did not wear trousers, but a ghagra (long dress) of blue cloth, a kurta (shirt) and a shawl, also of blue cloth. Muslim Rajputs dressed in much the same way as did the Jats. Their women wore pajamas, kurta and a chadar of white cloth. The well-to-do Muslim Rajputs dressed exactly in the same manner as the Hindu Jats of the same class.

British rule had little impact on the dress of the rural population. For that matter the Indian village has remained traditionally unchanged down the ages. Ladies dressed in urban centres too, hardly changed. What was affected was men's clothing in towns, more often those who were employed by the British to work in agency offices. These

1. Loc. Cit.
2. Loc. Cit.
3. Loc. Cit.
changes were more apparent among the younger people - consequent upon the spread of education.

LEISURE AND ENTERTAINMENT HABITS.

The life of the people was one of hard work with few diversions. In the towns, they were extremely busy with their work and in the villages the cultivators hardly had any time from their toil of the soil. The race for prosperity ushered in by the British made the population more engrossed in work. Each was striving for better living conditions and for an improvement of their lot. This they could only achieve through more produce, more labour. Diversion came solely through a marriage or a fair. Comparatively, since the western parts of the district were more prosperous, the people living in those areas had less of hard work and consequently more amusements.¹

A popular entertainment amongst these was listening to songs sung by 'marasies' a class of Muslims who taught girls to sing and dance.² These women not only sung and danced, but were also occasionally employed as jesters in the households of the well-to-do classes. In villages, they

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danced and sang in the village square while crowds gathered to hear them. They generally sung romantic tales and folklore. ¹

These were to the accompaniment of a sarangi or a tambourine (dhad or dhuma). Besides these, a body of Bazigars of conjurers would occasionally go from village to village, much to the amusement of the young and the old. ²

These amusements continued during British rule too. Government by and large did not interfere in the way of life of the people. They had complete liberty to enjoy and amuse themselves as long as it did not border on sedition or disobedience to law.

Among the better classes, the main source of amusement were dancing girls. All the travellers who had been through the Punjab, Maj. Sir W. Lloyd, Capt. A. Gerard, Motilala, Sir Henry Lawrence and Honighberger, referred to "this celebrated class of women whose origin dates from ancient times".³ It is interesting that in one reference⁴, it is mentioned that these women were prostitutes and their profession was only continued by Kashmiri and Kangra hill girls. The fact that

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these women were beautiful was noted alike by travellers 
and the British officers.

Another source mentions that the tribe of "Turis"
and no other tribe offered their daughters for prostitution.¹
This implies that all dancing girls were not essentially 
prostitutes.

As a rule, dancing was abhorred by the better 
classed women². "It was eschewed by every decent and honourable 
woman and a woman would instantly lose her character were 
she once to indulge in it."³ This feeling continued to 
dominate the women even after the permeation of British 
society and it was difficult for them to comprehend the 
propriety of British ladies amusing themselves at parties 
through dancing.

When the agency was first established, British 
officials were invited by the chiefs of families to witness 
these performances and it is held that they enjoyed these 
thoroughly. Not only did they enjoy listening to songs but 
they were also very interested in Persian and Hindi poetry. 
Like the Mughal Emperors they were prone to listening to poems

¹ I.e., Vol. XXXVI, p. 277.
³ Loc. Cit.
in their own praise. Moulvi Rajab Ali was a poet and used to recite poetry to the political agent at Ludhiana. Not only this, these agents used to learn Persian and took regular lessons in the language. In fact all the officers at Ludhiana were able to read Persian.

Gambling was also a past time of the rich and the lower classes of the populace. A common game for gambling was chess and the higher classed families would spend hours playing one game. Among the agricultural classes due to lack of time, not much gambling was indulged in.

The Jats, especially Hindus had a reputation for using opium and opium. They were found of smoking opium and ganja, and also of chewing, smoking, and drinking an infusion of bhang. Sikhs were enjoined by their religion to abstain from smoking. In fact smoking by a Hindu in the presence of Sikhs was not to be condoned with and was considered improper.

FOOD HABITS.

There were two categories of food 'kacha' and 'pakka Khana'. The distinction between the two was of

1. Loc. Cit.
2. Loc. Cit.
3. Loc. Cit.
insanely important in the social life of the Hindus. The Kacha Khana consisted of cooked food such as rice, dal and coarse thick flat baked cake called roti. Before partaking of the food all must wash their hands and feet. No two castes could partake of this food together.

The pakka Khana included sweet meats and all kinds of food cooked in ghee. This food was eaten together indiscriminately.

It is an interesting fact that under the reign of Ranjit Singh, slaughter of cows was prohibited. As his reign declined, the Muslims in very small measure surreptitiously started eating beef. But if discovered by the neighbouring Hindus, were subject to a great deal of persecution. However when the Punjab was annexed the British issued a proclamation on this:

"The British government will allow to all the people whether Mussalman, Hindu or Sikh, the free exercising of their religions; but it will not permit any man to interfere with others, in the observance of such forms and customs as their respective religions may either enjoin or permit."

3. Ibid., p. 310.
In spite of the fact that the Hindus strongly objected to the slaughter of kine in their vicinity, and Hindus were scattered all over, the government issued orders to all the civil officers that they must regulate the slaughter of kine in their districts, so as to render it as little offensive as possible to the prejudices of the Hindu population. The civil officers should themselves appoint a spot for butcher shops.¹

Custom ridden Hindu society thus underwent another change, as the British influence permeated into it. It was through education that the greatest impact was felt, especially in behaviour with other caste individuals. The uneducated, of course, continued to be dominated by inhibitions of long standing usage, but as the younger generation grew and procrastinated on the ridiculous taboos imposed by religion and custom, a definite change was apparent in their attitudes.²

SOCIAL INTERCOURSE.

There were a few customs regarding visiting which deserve to be mentioned. While visiting, the visitor was received in the entrance room. Once the salutations were over

¹ Letter from H.R. Edwards to Governor General, F.P.C. No.19-20, 26th May, 1849.

² Indhiana Mission Correspondence microfilm No.10-F.761, Vol.42. (1886-1890) (to be mentioned hereafter as I.M.C.M.).
he was asked to sit down and was treated to smoke a hookah. If the visit was a formal one and both the parties belonged to a higher caste and were educated, then the visitor would be treated to some snacks or a cold drink.\textsuperscript{1} He would also be offered a 'pan' or betel leaf. But the privilege of chewing betel-nut and 'pan' using sandalwood paste were reserved for married men only. A bachelor was forbidden to do any such thing. But however, if a man could not procure a wife and get married, a strange and amusing custom was prevalent to ensure that he had the use of these coveted privileges. By going through the marriage ceremony with a banana tree, the man was considered to have been married.\textsuperscript{2}

Some of the inhabitants residing in the towns, who had contact with the British, especially in the beginning would, while conversing with them, keep on spitting secretly. It was commonly believed that personal contact with the British would bring the wrath of the spirits upon the individual and as a corollary to that this form of spirit searing.

**FAIRS AND FESTIVALS.**

The people, were on the whole, very fond of fairs and festivals. Almost the whole population, religious or

\textsuperscript{1} Das, Ishwari, *Domestic manners and customs of Hindus of Northern India* (Benares, 1860), p. 122-132.

\textsuperscript{2} J.A., (Bombay - 1877), Vol. IV., p. 5.
irreligious, moral or amoral, participated in the annual fairs. Most of these fairs were religious in character or had been so associated since times immemorial. The individuals, whether or not they believed in the basis of the fairs, involved themselves in them. Entertainment being almost nil, they found these to be a means through which they found enjoyment.  

Whether the fair be a Hindu or Muslim or Sikh it was attended by all irrespective of the religion to which they belonged. This could also be a confirmation of the fact that there was a synthesis between the two cultures - Hindu and Muslim.  

The Chet Chaudas fair was held at four places Ludhiana, Nakhiwarah, Badoval, and Sidhwan. All four were close to the river and a ritual of the fair was a bath in the river. The fair was a big event and thousands left their villages to participate in it. Besides having the aspect of a pilgrimage, there were amusements, commodities to buy, and on the whole, grown-ups as well as children had an enjoyable time.  

Also in T.W., p. 76.  

2 Loc. Cit.  

3 Loc. Cit.
A Roshani fair was held at the shrine of a saint Pir Abdul Qadir Jalani (Pir Sahib) which was in Ludhiana itself, between the fort and the city.\(^1\) This was essentially a Muslim fair; but the Hindus of the city also participated in it. There was a peculiar custom of taking cattle and keeping them tied up at the shrine all night for good luck, this being called 'chowki' i.e., the cow or buffalo watches at the shrine. The name 'Roshani' was apparently derived from the tomb being illuminated at night during the fair.\(^2\)

The Bhaiewala fair was held on a piece of waste land of Dad, a village close to Ludhiana.\(^3\) It took place in the month of Magh (approximately January) and was in the honour of a disciple of Guru Nanak called Bala. There was a Samadhi or shrine and also a tank and the Sikhs primarily and the Hindus secondarily, made offerings of money, grain etc. which were taken by the 'massands' or guardians (Khatri Sikhs of Kudhani Patiala territory).\(^4\)

Another important Hindu fair on the southern boundary of the district was held in the month of Bhadon (September)

\(^1\) T.K. p. 77.
\(^2\) Loc. Cit.
\(^3\) Loc. Cit.
\(^4\) Guardians - Khatri Sikhs of Kudhani, Patiala territory.
in honour of 'Guga'. There was a large shrine in his honour. The convention commonly believed about Guga was that he was a snake and changed his form to that of a man in order to marry a princess. Afterwards he returned to his original shape, but had already acquired prestige, power, renown and a great kingdom.

Serpent worship was confined to women of all Hindu classes and creeds. Perhaps from custom, this was supposed to confer fertility on barren women.

The only other fair of importance was that of Bare Shah or 'Makhipan' held at Jangpur (Jagraon Tehsil) in September when the maize was ripening. It was a Muslim fair but Hindu Jats in large numbers also participated. The fair was held at night, the people lit lamps and made offerings which were distributed among the faqirs.

There were also a few main festivals in which the people participated with gusto, Muharrum, in the heart of winter (early January) was very popular. A huge bonfire was lit and people danced and sang around it. Basant or the spring

5. Loc. Cit.
festival fell usually in early February, when it was celebrated with great pomp and gaiety. Holi, celebrated in early March, Baisakhi, or the New Year, Dasahra, and Diwali were the major festivals celebrated by one and all.

All these fairs and festivals continued, in fact, with greater gusto even after the advent of the British.

LANGUAGE.

The language of the district was Punjabi in a very pure form. There were no peculiarities of grammar. But the names of many things were, as was customary everywhere, peculiar to that part of the country. As regards the shop keepers and their accounts, they used the 'Landa' script which it was said was illegible except to the writer. The Devnagri script was used by the Brahmins for religious purposes. In the towns, the improved 'Landa' known as Ashrafe was used by the trading classes. For the purpose of business the Persian script was not in use. This was only in government records or used by the few intellectuals.

The foregoing narration explained in brief the people and society during the British rule. The following three chapters describe the major area where the British impact was most momentous.

2. Loc. Cit.